

# Reconciliation Guidelines

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## GUIDELINES FOR FIRST PENANCE / RECONCILIATION

### INTRODUCTION

**It is important to recognize the difference between *religious education*, whether it is presented in a Catholic school, parish religious education program or home schooling, and *sacramental preparation*, which is parish based. These guidelines assume that in addition to attending a Catholic school, parish religious education or home schooling, the child receives sacramental preparation and celebrates the sacrament in the parish of current membership. These guidelines also presume the parental right, assumed at the Baptism of their child, to educate their child in the Catholic faith tradition and requests parents to engage in the sacramental preparation of their child before their child enters the Catholic school or parish program. It is the obligation of the parish to educate, support and encourage parents in assuming their rightful responsibility to educate their children in the Catholic faith tradition.**

Since Canon Law requires the bishop to implement it's mandates and adapt it to diocesan need, Bishop Joseph has issued a directive titled: "Catechetical and Liturgical Directives for the Celebration of Baptism of Infants, First Eucharist, Confirmation and First Reconciliation" (May, 1998). The Education Office, in consultation with appropriate diocesan offices, proposes guidelines to assist parishes with implementation of the Directives. These guidelines provide parishes with material to assist parents in their own faith formation and that of their children.

Advent and Lent are the seasons for celebrating the Christian understanding of the Incarnation and the Paschal mystery (passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) which involves a call to conversion. This call to conversion is an important aspect of both Penance / Reconciliation and Eucharist. The first reception of Penance / Reconciliation should occur during Advent of second grade and Eucharist during the Easter season. Celebrating first Penance / Reconciliation in the season of Advent ensures a more equitable time for catechesis for both sacraments.

1. Penance / Reconciliation preparation teams are encouraged for all parishes. The team may consist of Pastor, director of religious education , catechists, Catholic school teachers and parents who are knowledgeable in catechetics. It is the responsibility of the team to prepare parents to teach their child, provide communal formation and support for the family and to instruct on the Rite of Penance / Reconciliation.

2. The responsibilities of the pastor are the following:

-By virtue of his office, the pastor is bound to provide for catechetical formation of adults, young people and children, to which end he is to employ the services of the clerics attached to the parish, members of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, with due regard for the character of each institute, and lay members of the Christian faithful, above all catechists; all of these are not to refuse to furnish their services willingly unless they are legitimately impeded. The pastor is to promote and foster the role of parents in the family catechesis mentioned in **Canon 774 #2 (Canon 776)**

In accord with the norms established by the diocesan bishop, the pastor is to make particular provision:

-that suitable catechesis is given for the celebration of the sacraments;  
-that children are properly prepared for the first reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Most Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Confirmation by means of a catechetical formation given over an appropriate period of time. (**Canon 777 #1 and 2**)

-”According to their respective offices in the Church, both the pastors of souls and all other members of Christ’s faithful have a duty to ensure that those who ask for the sacraments are prepared for their reception. This should be done through proper evangelization and catechetical instruction, in accordance with the norms laid down by the competent authority.” **(Canon 843 #1)**

- become a member of and ensure adequate training for Penance / Reconciliation team.

-”those who ask for the sacraments are prepared for their reception **(Canon 843 #2)** This obligation may be fulfilled by the pastor and/or parish staff interviewing the parents and/or the child.

3. Sacramental preparation and celebration of the Sacrament of Penance / Reconciliation is to be parish based and family inclusive. It is presumed that candidates and their parents participate weekly at Sunday Mass at their parish. **Parish based sacramental preparation is in addition to education in either the Catholic School, parish religious education program or home schooling.** Sacramental Catechesis and celebration is modeled on the Order of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.
4. Penance / Reconciliation preparation is to involve candidates, family members and godparents. (if possible).
5. Retreats are as follows: 1st grade– **Gathering for the Journey: Family Sacramentality**  
2nd grade– **Forgiveness for the Journey: Penance / Reconciliation**
6. As part of the faith formation, it is presumed that candidates are already actively involved in service which is required in Catholic schools, parish religious education programs and for those home schooling. Families of the children are invited to participate in parish based Christian service which is integral to living and proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ into which children were baptized.
7. It is recommended that the first reception of this Sacrament is included as part of the parish Advent Penance service. If a parish penance service is not possible, the Sacrament should be celebrated at another communal celebration such as one with children and parents. It is also encouraged that the child celebrate the Sacrament at least one more time before first Eucharist, preferably at the parish Lenten penance service. An appropriate time for confession in the tradition of the Church would be other than Sunday, the day of joy and resurrection.
8. In all faith communities the Sacrament of Penance / Reconciliation is made available every week and at any time upon request to answer the needs of conscience and for spiritual growth. The Rite of Penance / Reconciliation allows the option to confess anonymously or face-to-face. Through the grace of this Sacrament the relationship between the individual, community and God is intensified.
9. The form of the act of contrition reflects Catholic tradition and parish practice. Various suggestions are to be found in the Appendix, page B-21. The Catholic school and parish religious education curriculums encourage that the catechesis of the sacramental form, the concept of sin and the occasion sin, conversion and the act of contrition be an integral part of religious formation in the 5th, 7th, 9th and 11th grades.
10. The Rites are as follows:

**Rite of the Blessing of Candidates for Penance / Reconciliation**-after the **Gathering for the Journey Family Sacramentality** Retreat

**Rite of Choosing Penance / Reconciliation**-after parental preparation is complete, for example:at Sunday Mass after the **Forgiveness for the Journey: Penance / Reconciliation Retreat.**

**The Rite of Penance / Reconciliation**– during Advent of the candidates 2nd grade year.

**ONGOING FAITH FORMATION PROCESS**  
**PREPARATION FOR THE SACRAMENT OF FIRST PENANCE / RECONCILIATION**

**First Phase: Call from God**

**Time:** Ongoing from Baptism

**Aim:** Assist in deepening and appreciation of the baptismal call to forgiveness and reconciliation.

**Content:** The faith formation in the family, Catholic school, parish religious education program, or home schooling continues and includes Word, Worship, Teaching Community and Service. Parents, children, godparents and family attend the **Gathering for the Journey: Family Sacramentality** retreat, which provides preparation for First Penance / Reconciliation and First Eucharist. This retreat is to be conducted in the spring of the first grade.

**CELEBRATION OF THE RITE OF BLESSING OF  
THE CANDIDATES FOR PENANCE / RECONCILIATION**

**Second Phase: Formation of the Individual and Family**

**Time:** Following the **Rite of Blessing of the Candidates**, normally the beginning of second grade.

**Aim:** To understand the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation using scripture stories from Catholic tradition and family experience.

**Content:** The faith formation process in the family, Catholic school, parish religious education program, or home schooling continues support and formation. Parents, children, godparents and family members participate in the **Forgiveness for the Journey: Family Penance / Reconciliation** retreat in October of the second grade. Parents and candidates attend two preparation sessions.

**CELEBRATION OF THE RITE OF CHOOSING  
THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE / RECONCILIATION**

**Third Phase: Preparation and Reflection**

**Time:** Following the **Rite of Choosing Penance / Reconciliation** and prior to the **Rite of Penance / Reconciliation**, normally November of the second grade.

**Aim:** Prepare for the **Rite of Penance / Reconciliation**

**Content:** The faith formation in the family, Catholic school, parish religious education program, or home schooling continues. The parents, children and godparents review the **Rite of Penance / Reconciliation** prior to the parish communal Advent Penance Service in second grade.

**CELEBRATION OF THE RITE OF PENANCE / RECONCILIATION**

**Fourth Phase: Continuing Growth in Faith**

**Time:** **Following the Sacrament of Penance / Reconciliation**

**Aim:** Deepen awareness of God's forgiveness and mercy and an awareness of our own sinfulness.

**Content:** The faith formation is to continue primarily in the family, and is supported by formal participation in Catholic school, parish religious education, or home schooling and includes Word, Worship, Teaching, Community, Service. Ongoing reception of the Sacrament is encouraged, especially at parish penance services during Advent and Lent, or individual confession throughout the year.



# FIRST PHASE: CALL FROM GOD

**TIME:** Ongoing from Baptism through first grade

**AIM:** Assist in deepening an appreciation of the baptismal call to forgiveness and reconciliation.

**CONTENT:** Affirmation and support of family life which helps to ground faith formation in the mercy and forgiveness of God.

The parish provides and nourishes communal faith development.

It is assumed that children the preparation process for first Penance / Reconciliation have faithful attendance in Catholic School, parish religious education programs or are faithfully home schooled from the beginning of first grade.

The liturgical life of the parish should encourage and support the faith journey of families. Regular participation at Sunday Mass is integral to the life of the baptized. The community gathers around word and sacrament to praise God.

Service is integral to living and proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ into which children were baptized. Parents and godparents are encouraged to live a life of service.

Parents, children, and godparents and family members attend the **Gathering for the Journey: Family Sacramentality** Retreat, the preparation for first Penance / Reconciliation and First Eucharist.



## RITE OF BLESSING

### Explanatory Notes:

- (1) *The Rite is celebrated with candidates for First Penance / Reconciliation along with their families. This Rite can take place anytime after the Gathering for the Journey: Family Sacramentality Retreat and the beginning of second grade.*
- (2) *This Rite may be prayed at Sunday Mass which would follow the homily and include the Prayer of Blessing and Litany. This Rite may be also prayed with the group of candidates and their families at any appropriate time.*
- (3) *A priest, deacon or lay minister may lead this Rite.*

+ **In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen**

Brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus welcomes you. He came to call sinners, not the just. Have confidence in the Lord. (Luke 5:32) Blessed be God forever.

**Response: Blessed be God forever.**

**Scripture:** Romans 5: 8-9 / Christ died for us sinners.  
(Outside Mass, someone other than the lay leader can proclaim the reading) or  
Matthew 6: 14-15 / Forgive others and you will be forgiven  
John 1: 6, 7, 9 / Acknowledging our sins helps us walk in light

### PRAYER

God of mercy and love, you invite us to seek your forgiveness. Bless these children and their families as they seek to celebrate your reconciliation in our midst. They are beginning their preparation to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance. Help them grow in the knowledge of your forgiving love. Your mercy is everlasting. We gather in the presence of your generous love. For you are Lord, forever and ever. **Response: Amen.**

### LITANY:

**Response: Lord, have mercy.**

Christ, forgiving Lord, your death on the cross offers us forgiveness of sins, so we pray.....**R.**

Christ, forgiving Lord, our selfishness holds us back from your love, so we pray.....**R.**

Christ, forgiving Lord, allow forgiveness to be evident in our families, so we pray.....**R.**

Christ, forgiving Lord, your mercy is everlasting, so we pray.....**R.**

Christ, forgiving Lord, strengthen us to love God and neighbor, so we pray.....**R.**

**OUR FATHER:** Our Father, who art in heaven....

## **PRAYER OF BLESSING**

(The presider imposes hands outstretched or touching those preparing for First Penance / Reconciliation. Those adults present are to impose their hands over the candidates to be blessed.)

The imposition of hands is a liturgical gesture found in the Old Testament, continued in the New Testament and still used in the church today. It expresses identity and solidarity between those imposing hands and the ones receiving the blessing)

Lord, forgiving God, be merciful to these young Christians who begin their formal preparation for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Seek them out when they walk away from the path of goodness. You always invite us into a loving relationship with you and our families. We ask your blessing through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, now and forever.

Response:        Amen

+ **In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Possible Songs:

Amazing Grace  
Grant to us, O Lord  
Hosea

My Soul is Longing  
Where Charity and Love Prevail

## SECOND PHASE: FORMATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY

**TIME:** Following the Rite of Blessing of the Candidates, normally the beginning of second grade

**AIM:** To understand the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation using scripture stories from Catholic tradition and family experience.

**CONTENT:** Affirmation and support of family life which helps to ground faith formation in the mercy and forgiveness of God.

The parish provides and nourishes communal faith development.

It is assumed that children entering the preparation process for first Penance / Reconciliation have faithful attendance in a Catholic School, parish religious education program or are faithfully home schooled from the beginning of first grade.

The liturgical life of the parish should encourage and support the faith journey of families. Regular participation at Sunday Mass is integral to the life of the baptized. The community gathers around word and sacrament to praise God..

Service is integral to living and proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ into which children were baptized. Parents and godparents are encouraged to a life of service.

Parents and candidates attend two preparation sessions that will give them the necessary information and material to enable them to prepare their child for First Penance / Reconciliation. See Appendix, page B-34

Parents, children, godparents and family members participate in the **Forgiveness For the Journey: Penance / Reconciliation** Retreat.

In accordance with Canon 843 #2, the pastor or his delegate must ascertain whether adequate catechetical formation has been attained.

Non-sacramental penance services, in addition to sacramental confession, are encouraged. It is desirable to arrange these services for these purposes:

- to foster the spirit of penance within the Christian community;
- to help the faithful to prepare for confession which can be made later at a convenient time;
- to help children gradually form their conscience about sin in human life and about freedom from sin through Christ;
- to help catechumens during their conversion. *The Rites #37*

*See appendix pg. B-31 for suggestions*



## RITE OF CHOOSING PENANCE / RECONCILIATION

### Explanatory Notes:

- (1) *The Rite is celebrated after the second phase (Formation of the Individual and Family) and before the third phase (Preparation and Reflection). This Rite is prayed with the candidates for first Penance / Reconciliation and their families.*
- (2) *This Rite may be prayed at Sunday Mass which would follow the homily and include the prayer. The Rite may also be prayed with the group of candidates and their families at any appropriate time.*
- (3) *A priest, deacon, or lay person may lead this Rite.*

### + In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

We have gathered with the desire to celebrate the sacrament of God's forgiveness. God's mercy is everlasting. Our sinfulness causes us to turn away from God and one another. Nevertheless, we wish to turn to God for mercy and reconciliation. Each one of us who has been baptized call ourselves sons and daughters of God. God loves us as a father and asks us to love him with all our hearts. God also wants us to be good to each other, so that we live happily together. We listen to God speak to us about his mercy in Scripture.

Scripture: Luke 15: 1-7 / Heaven celebrates when one sinner turns back to God.

(Outside Mass  
someone other

than the lay leader  
can proclaim

or

the reading)

Matthew 12: 44-46 / The reign of God is like a discovered buried treasure or  
the pearl of great price.

Scripture proclaims that God's mercy is a gift. And so I ask the candidates for First Reconciliation:

### TO CHILDREN:

Do you believe that God loves you very much?.....**R: I do**

Do you want to love God, your family and friends more deeply?.....**R: I do**

Do you wish to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation this Advent?.....**R: I do**

### TO PARENTS:

Do you also wish to seek God's forgiveness and love?..... **R: I do**

Will you make every effort to practice forgiveness and reconciliation in your home?.....

**R: I will**

## **PRAYER OF BLESSING**

(The leader of prayer imposes hands over the families preparing to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.)

The imposition of hands is a liturgical gesture found in the Old Testament, continued in the New Testament, and still used in the church today. It expresses identity and solidarity between the one imposing hands and those receiving the blessing.)

God of mercy, bless these people who choose to celebrate the church's sacrament of Reconciliation. May these young candidates know that God will always forgive any wrong they have done. Guide them to place their trust in your forgiving love. Bless these parents and family members who model God's love and forgiveness for their children. May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.

Response:       Amen.

**+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen**

Possible Songs:

Be Not Afraid  
Be With Me, Lord  
Lift High the Cross

On Eagles Wings  
Shepherd Me, O God  
Yes, I Shall Arise

## THIRD PHASE: PREPARATION AND REFLECTION

**TIME:** Following the **Rite of Choosing Penance / Reconciliation** and prior to the **Rite of Penance / Reconciliation**

**AIM:** Prepare for the **Rite of Penance / Reconciliation**

**CONTENT:** Affirmation and support of family life which helps to ground faith formation in the mercy and forgiveness of God.

The parish provides and nourishes communal development.

It is assumed that children entering the preparation process for Penance / Reconciliation have faithful attendance in Catholic School, parish religious education programs or are faithfully homes schooled from the beginning of first grade.

The liturgical life of the parish should encourage and support the faith journey of families. Regular participation at Sunday Mass is integral to the life of the baptized. The community gathers around word and sacrament to praise God.

Service is integral to living and proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ into which children were baptized. Parents and godparents are encouraged to a life of service.

Parents, children and godparents review the **Rite of Penance / Reconciliation**.

Practice for the celebration of the **Rite of Penance / Reconciliation** should be simple and direct. It is important that during the practice of confession the form of the rite be reviewed. Care must be taken that the child does not confess her / his sins during the practice because "Only a priest is the minister of the sacrament of penance." (Canon 965)

First Penance / Reconciliation should be celebrated at the parish penitential service in Advent of the child's second grade year. The communal nature of sin and its effects are better recognized at the parish penance service.



## THE RITE OF PENANCE/ RECONCILIATION

### **Explanatory Notes:**

- (1) *The celebration of first Penance / Reconciliation is best prayed at a Communal Penance Service. Sacraments are the formal, public celebration of God's presence in our lives. Ideally, Reconciliation is celebrated in a communal setting. In the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, the season of Advent is an appropriate time to celebrate a Communal Penance Service. Secondly, candidates and their families may celebrate the Sacrament as a community at the time regularly scheduled for confession in the parish.*
- (2) *At a Communal Penance Service, the proclamation of Scripture and prayers for the penitent are normally prayed by all the assembly. However, if this is the child's First Reconciliation, perhaps the prayer of the penitent (Act of Contrition) could be prayed individually after the confession of sin.*

**PREPARATION:** Before going to Confession, the penitent compares his life with the example and commandments of Christ and, then, prays for God's forgiveness. This is traditionally known as the examination of conscience.

**GOING TO CONFESSION:** The priest welcomes the penitent and, then, both make the Sign of the Cross.

**READING THE WORD OF GOD:** The priest or penitent may read a passage from the Bible.

**CONFESSION OF SINS AND THE ACT OF PENANCE:** The penitent confesses his / her sins. The priest may offer advice on sins confessed. Then the priest gives an act of penance or satisfaction. This gives an expression of the penitent's generous desire for forgiveness and his / her resolve to do better.

**PRAYER OF THE PENITENT (ACT OF CONTRITION):** The penitent prays a prayer expressing his / her sorrow for sins and the resolve not to sin again.

**ABSOLUTION BY THE PRIEST:** The priest extends his hands over the head of the penitent and prays the words of absolution. As he says the final words, he makes the sign of the cross over the head of the penitent. The penitent receives the absolution by blessing himself / herself.

**PROCLAMATION OF PRAISE:** The penitent praises God's mercy.

**DISMISSAL OF THE PENITENT:** The priest tells the penitent to go in peace. The penitent is sent forth to continue the conversion celebrated in the Sacrament of Penance / Reconciliation.



# FOURTH PHASE: CONTINUING GROWTH IN THE FAITH

**TIME:** Following the Sacrament of Penance / Reconciliation

**AIM:** Deepen awareness of God's forgiveness and mercy and an awareness of our sinfulness.

**CONTENT:** Affirmation and support of family life which helps to ground faith formation in the mercy and forgiveness of God.

The parish provides and nourishes communal faith development.

After having received First Penance / Reconciliation, it is assumed that children will continue to have faithful attendance in Catholic School, parish religious education programs or are faithfully home schooled from the beginning of first grade.

The liturgical life of the parish should encourage and support the faith journey of families. Regular participation at Sunday Mass is integral to the life of the baptized. The community gathers around word and sacrament to praise God.

Service is integral to living and proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ into which children were baptized. Parents and godparents are encouraged to a life of service.

Parents, children, godparents and family attend the parish Lenten Penance Service. Parents are encouraged to frequently attend parish penance services and individual confession as an example to their child and to further a sense of reconciliation within the family. Through the grace of this sacrament and the relationship between God, the individual and community is intensified.



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## ACTS OF CONTRITION

An Act of Contrition must contain an admission of sinfulness, a sense of sorrow for the sin and an intention not to sin again. Most second grade series recommend the Act of Contrition from the ***Revised Rite of Penance***, number 1 listed below. It is important that children memorize an Act of Contrition. They may also pray, however, an act of contrition in their own words. Whichever form is used must be reviewed and updated, in the Catholic School, religious education program or home schooling at least every other year. As penitents progress in their spiritual journey, it is important that they feel free to express sorrow in their own words. This helps internalize the act of sorrow.

Some examples of an Act of Contrition are as follows:

1. I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy. ***Revised Rite Of Penance.***
2. Lord, Jesus Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. (This form is appropriate for those who cannot learn a longer form)
3. O my God, I am very sorry for all my sins, because they displease you, who are all good and deserving of all my love. With your help, I will sin no more.
4. O my God, I am sorry for my sins. In choosing to sin, and failing to do good, I have sinned against you and your Church. I firmly intend, with the help of your Son, to make up for my sins and to love as I should. Amen.
5. O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you and I detest all my sins because of your just punishment, but most of all because they offend you my God, who are all good and deserving of all of my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen.



**BULLETIN INSERTS EXPLAINING THE  
PENANCE / RECONCILIATION PREPARATION PROCESS**

**Penance / Reconciliation Preparation Process**

Sacramental preparation in the Altoona-Johnstown Diocese is parish based and family centered. In addition to faith-centered education in our Catholic schools, religious education programs and home schooling, each parish establishes sacramental preparation teams to insure proper catechesis for the reception of each sacrament. Parents and family are the primary teachers of their children in the Catholic faith. It is the obligation of the parish to educate, support, and encourage parents in assuming their rightful responsibility to educate their children in the Catholic faith tradition. The Diocese offers to sacramental teams the necessary help to prepare candidates and families for the celebration of the Sacraments.

**Penance / Reconciliation Preparation Process**

Preparation for the Sacrament of Penance / Reconciliation is parish based and family centered. Like Baptism and Confirmation, Penance is a process with four phases. The first phase is the **Call From God** which is the deepening of the baptismal call to forgiveness and reconciliation. The second phase is **Formation of the Individual and Family**. Here candidates and families use scripture stories from Catholic tradition and family experience to understand the importance of forgiveness. The third phase is **Preparation and Reflection on the Sacrament of Penance / Reconciliation**. A review of the **Rite of Penance** prior to the Communal Advent Penance Service helps candidates and parents celebrate God's forgiveness and mercy. The fourth phase is **Continuing Growth in the Faith**. Ongoing reception of the Sacrament of Penance / Reconciliation is encouraged.

**Penance / Reconciliation Preparation Process**

The Sacrament of Penance / Reconciliation celebrates the healing, loving forgiveness of God. Proper celebration of the Sacrament of first Penance / Reconciliation demands parish based preparation. Candidates, parents and family members are invited into the preparatory process. Scripture, service and prayer accompany this preparation. So that Penance can be properly catechized prior to first Eucharist, parishes are asked to schedule first Penance at the Communal Advent Penance Service. Parishes are also encouraged to schedule Communal Penance Services throughout the year, especially at Advent and Lent. The availability of confession should be weekly. The Rite of Penance invites the use of Reconciliation Rooms that provide an atmosphere of comfort, hospitality, insure confidentiality, allow for anonymity or face-to-face confession, and are handicapped accessible.



## CANONS

**CANON 226 §2** - Because they have given life to their children, parents have a most serious obligation and enjoy the right to educate them; therefore Christian parents are especially to care for the Christian education of their children according to the teaching handed on by the Church.

**CANON 774 §1** - Under the supervision of legitimate ecclesiastical authority this concern for catechesis pertains to all the members of the Church in proportion to each one's role.

**§2** Parents above others are obliged to form their children in the faith and practice of the Christian life by word and example; godparents and those who take the place of parents are bound by an equivalent obligation.

**CANON 776** - In virtue of his office, the pastor is bound to provide for catechetical formation of adults, young people and children, to which end he is to employ the services of the clerics attached to the parish, members of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, with due regard for the character of each institute, and lay members of the Christian faithful, above all catechists; all of these are not to refuse to furnish their services willingly unless they are legitimately impeded. The pastor is to promote and foster the role of parents in the family catechesis mentioned in **Canon 774, §2**.

**CANON 777** - In accord with the norms established by the diocesan bishop, the pastor is to make particular provision:

1° that suitable catechesis is given for the celebration of the sacraments;

2° that children are properly prepared for the first reception of the sacraments of penance and Most Holy Eucharist and the sacrament of confirmation by means of a catechetical formation given over an appropriate period of time;

3° that children are more fruitfully and deeply instructed through catechetical formation after the reception of First Communion;

4° that catechetical formation also be given to those handicapped in body or mind insofar as their condition permits;

5° that the faith of young people and adults be fortified, enlightened and developed through various means and endeavors.

**CANON 842 - §1** A person who has not received baptism cannot validly be admitted to the other sacraments.

**§2** The sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the blessed Eucharist so complement one another that all three are required for full Christian Initiation.

**CANON 843— §1.** Sacred ministers cannot refuse the sacraments to those who ask for them at appropriate times, properly disposed and are not prohibited by law from receiving them.

**§2.** Pastors of souls and the rest of the Christian faithful, according to their ecclesial function, have the duty to see that those who seek the sacraments are prepared to receive them by the necessary evangelization and catechetical formation, taking into account the norms published by the competent authority.

**CANON 846 - §1.** The liturgical books approved by the competent authority are to be faithfully observed in the celebration of the sacraments; therefore no one on personal authority may add, remove or change anything in them.

**§2.** The ministers are to celebrate the sacraments according to their own rite.

**CANON 981** - The confessor is to enjoin salutary and suitable penances in keeping with the quality and number of sins but with attention to the condition of the penitent; the penitent is obliged to perform the penances personally.

**CANON 983 - §1.** The sacramental seal is inviolable; therefore, it is a crime for a confessor in any way to betray a penitent by word or in any other manner or for any reason.

**§2.** An interpreter, if there is one present, is also obliged to preserve the secret, and also all others to whom knowledge of sins from confession shall come in any way.

**CANON 987** - In order to receive the salvific remedy of the sacrament of penance, the Christian faithful ought to be so disposed that, having repudiated the sins committed and having a purpose of amendment, they are converted to God.

**CANON 988 - §1.** A member of the Christian faithful is obliged to confess in kind and in number all serious sins committed after baptism and not yet directly remitted through the keys of the Church nor acknowledged in individual confession, of which one is conscious after diligent examination of conscience.

**§2** It is to be recommended to the Christian faithful that venial sins also be confessed.

**CANON 989** - After having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year.

**CANON 990** - No one is prohibited from confessing through an interpreter, avoiding abuses and scandals; the prescription of Canon 983 §2 is to be observed.

**CANON 991** -The Christian faithful are free to confess to a legitimately approved confessor of their choice, even one of another rite.

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

**Absolution**—the forgiveness of God, which is given sacramentally to us through the imposition of hands, the sign of the cross and the words of the priest.

**Beatitudes**—the classic example from the gospel of Matthew giving us the teachings of Jesus and how to follow in his footsteps and strive to live the moral life.

**Confessor**—the priest who hears the confession of the penitent and offers sacramental absolution of the triune God and the Church.

**Contrition**—the expression of genuine sorrow for the sins committed against God through the hurting of others and the misuse of creation. In communal celebrations the contrition is prayed with the gathering assembly. In individual confession the penitent's contrition is expressed audibly and clearly. The form may vary, page B-21.

**Examination of Conscience**—reflection on our daily life and the choices we make in light of the commandments, the Gospel teachings of Christ and the laws of the Church. When receiving the Sacraments, the examination of conscience should occur before the celebration of the Sacrament.

**Forgiveness**—to grant pardon for a sin that was committed. This forgiveness comes from God through the priest and community.

**Holiness**—the state of God's unconditional love for us celebrated and given at Baptism. This state may be destroyed or jeopardized through sin, however it is ordinarily regained through the Sacrament of Penance / Reconciliation.

**Mercy**—the forgiveness and love given to us by God.

**Penance**—the Sacrament of the Catholic Church, which extends forgiveness for our sins. It is also the prayer or action the priest asks the penitent to complete as a sign of sorrow and reconciliation.  
(**Canon 981**)

### **Penance celebrations:**

**Communal**—when the community gathers to confess their sins, receive individual absolution and be reconciled with God, which leads to a reconciliation with the Church. Ordinarily celebrated during Advent and Lent, on days other than Sunday.

**Individual**—when the penitent approaches the sacrament to confess his / her sin, receive absolution and be reconciled with God, which leads to a reconciliation with the Church. Ordinarily offered weekly, other than Sunday.

**Non-sacramental**—when believers gather for prayer to celebrate the mercy of God. Sacramental absolution is not received.

**Penitent**—the believer, who having recognized his /her sinfulness and desiring to be reconciled with God, approaches the priest individually for sacramental absolution.

**Reconciliation**—Another term for the Sacrament of Penance, which celebrates forgiveness, celebrates healing, harmony and restoration with God and the Church.

**Reconciliation Room**—the place where the Sacrament of Penance is normally celebrated. The reconciliation room should be constructed as to allow the penitent the choice to confess either face-to-face or anonymously. This room should provide an atmosphere of comfort, hospitality, and ensure confidentiality, be handicapped accessible and aid the hearing impaired. Many times the reconciliation room is referred to as a reconciliation chapel.

**Sacraments of Initiation**—Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, which enable us to fully participate in the ministry of Jesus Christ and the Church.

**Seal of Confession**—the sacramental seal of confession is inviolable. The confessor is never to betray a penitent by word or in any other manner or for any reason (**Canon 983 §1**)

**Service**—to live with compassion and care for others as Jesus taught. (Matthew 25)

**Sign of the Cross**—the ritual action and prayer that reminds us of the Trinity and the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

**Sin**—a freely committed offense against God. This abuse of freedom destroys our relationship with God and the Church

**Personal**—an individual abuse of freedom

1. **Mortal**—any choice, entered into freely, that destroys our relationship / covenant with God. Three conditions must be met: it must be grave matter, committed with full knowledge and have full consent of the will. (*CCC # 1857*)
2. **Original**
  - a. Adam's personal sin
  - b. state into which we are born and in which we are deprived of original justice and holiness (*CCC # 416-418*)
3. **Venial** - any choice, entered into freely, that harms our relationship / covenant with God or any grave matter in which full knowledge or full consent of the will is absent. (*CCC # 1862*)

**Spiritual Direction**—in the tradition of the Catholic Church there is a custom of the believer offering his / her spiritual life for review and guidance to one who is recognized by the Church as a person of wisdom and holiness. Spiritual direction is distinct from the Sacrament of Penance / Reconciliation.

**Commandments**—the minimal demand of the Spirit to love and serve God, others and ourselves.

1. Old Testament –the Ten Commandments as listed in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy
2. New Testament– Jesus' teaching to follow the two great commandments of love of God and Neighbor. (Mark 12: 29-31)

**Unconditional Love** - the love God has for each of us and the love we are asked to have for one another. (John 15: 12)

## GODPARENTS

**Canon 774 §2.** Parents above others are obliged to form their children in the faith and practice of the Christian life by word and example; godparents and those who take the place of parents are bound by an equivalent obligation.

At Baptism godparents were encouraged to model Christian living by a faith-filled life. It was asked in the diocesan baptismal curriculum that godparents attend other sacraments for the child whom they sponsored. They should be invited, therefore, to attend preparation sessions and Rites whenever possible and be included in the formation of the child for the Sacrament of Penance / Reconciliation. Parishes and families should encourage their active participation as a means of helping them to fulfill the baptismal promise made for the child at Baptism.

For godparents who do not live geographically close, suggestions for ongoing Christian modeling are:

- send celebration cards, inspiring books that are age appropriate on the anniversary of the Baptism;
- give spiritually formational gifts during the significant seasons of the church year; such as Advent / Christmas, Lent / Easter (videos, scripture stories, saints books, etc. ) ;
- when able to visit, make a point of attending Mass with godchild;
- pray continually for godchild, parents, and family.

## **HISTORY OF PENANCE / RECONCILIATION**

During his public life Jesus forgave sin and called people to conversion through his proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Since he is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, 'The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins' and exercise this divine power: Your sins are forgiven. Further, by virtue of his divine authority he gives this power to men to exercise in his name. (CCC # 1441)

Christ has willed that in her prayer and life and action, his whole Church should be the sign and instrument of the forgiveness and reconciliation he acquired for us at the price of his blood. But He entrusted the exercise of the power of absolution to the apostolic ministry, which he charged with the ministry of reconciliation. The apostle is sent out on behalf of Christ with God making His appeal through him and pleading: Be reconciled to God. (CCC #1442)

During the time of the apostles, Baptism was the means by which sin was forgiven. In Acts 2:38 Peter says to those assembled "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins". Peter intended a one time baptismal conversion to God. But people continued to sin after Baptism and the premier sacrament of forgiveness, the Eucharist, was believed to forgive all sins.

It was not long, however, before the early Christian communities had to deal with serious public sins such as apostasy, murder and adultery. The communities realized that some decision had to be made for their good and excommunication, the casting out of the person from the community onto the "mercy of God," became the norm. Later, when these people tried to reconcile with the community, years of public penance and a sponsor, similar to Baptism, was required by the bishop. During the seventh century a new model of penance and reconciliation emerged in Ireland. Bishops were not always available and Irish monks, who were spiritual directors, but not necessarily clergy, began to hear individual confessions. To enable directors to prescribe a suitable penance, lists were drawn up naming specific sins with the corresponding penances. Confession of the sin became secondary to the penitential effort that led to reconciliation with the community. (CCC #1447)

By the time of the 12th century, the penitent was absolved from sin immediately after confession. The penitent could seek absolution as often as a sin was committed and the penance was performed after the absolution. The focus was now on the confessing of sin rather than on penance and reconciliation with the community. The Council of Trent in the 16th century further decreed that an enumeration of the number, kind and type of sins was required. The nature of privately confessing sin led to the understanding of sin as individualistic, a matter between the penitent and God. Trent also decreed it necessary to have a declaration form of absolution, which represented the judicial nature of the Sacrament. It is also stated that only a priest could administer the Sacrament.

Vatican II called for a renewed attitude toward the Sacrament. Jesus Christ forgives sins and calls the faithful to be reconciled with God, self and the Church. The present Rite of Penance, promulgated in 1973, attempts to diffuse the judicial focus of the priest alone and return to a communal understanding through suggested rites and settings. The term commonly used in this Rite is reconciliation to remind the faithful of the positive nature of the Sacrament.

## NON-SACRAMENTAL PENANCE SERVICE

For use with children in Catholic Schools or parish religious education programs  
in preparation for parish Sacramental Penance Services

### **OPENING SONG**

Presider may be a priest, deacon, or a lay person (suggest a catechist)

Possible selections:	For Advent:	“O Come, O Come Emmanuel” “Sing Out Earth and Skies” “Proclaim the Joyful Message” “The King of Glory”
	For Lent	“Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days” “Jerusalem, My Destiny” “Ashes” “Hosea”

**Presider:** In the name of + the Father, and + of the Son and of + the Holy Spirit.  
**All:** Amen.

**Presider:** Grace, mercy and peace be with you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.  
**All:** And also with you.

**Presider:** Let us pray for the grace to turn from sin and seek God’s forgiveness. (Silence)  
Lord, our God, you call us out of darkness into light, out of self-deception into truth,  
out of death into life. Send us your Holy Spirit to open our ears to your call.  
Fill our hearts with courage to be true followers of your Son.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
**All:** Amen.

### **LITURGY OF THE WORD**

<b>First Reading:</b>	Advent:	Malachi 3: 1-7a
	Lent:	Isaiah 53: 1-7, 10-12

<b>Psalm Response:</b>	For Advent:	To You, O Lord, Let Us See Your Kindness The Lord is My Light and My Salvation
	For Lent:	Be With Me, Lord Create Me Again Song of Forgiveness

### **Gospel Acclamation:**

<b>Gospel Reading:</b>	Advent:	Matthew 3: 1-12 or Luke 3: 3-17
	Lent:	Luke 15: 4-7 or Luke 15: 11-32

**EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE** (kneel)

**Response:** Advent: Come, Lord Jesus (may be sung)  
Lent: Lord, Have Mercy

**LITANY OF REPENTANCE**

**Presider:** God, our Father,

-Sometimes we have not behaved as your children should.  
(Brief silence, then response)

-We have given trouble to our parents and teachers.  
(silence, response)

-We have quarreled and called each other names.  
(silence, response)

-We have been lazy at home and in school, and have not been helpful to our  
parents, brothers, sisters, and friends.  
(silence, response)

-We have thought too much of ourselves and have told lies.  
(silence, response)

-We have not done good to others when we had the chance.  
(silence, response)

**Presider:** Now let us turn to God our Father, whom we ask to free us from evil and  
prepare us for the coming of his kingdom:

Our Father.....

**Optional:** At this time the children may come forward to place a resolution, which they  
have previously prepared on paper, on a table or in a basket.

**CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING**

**Presider:** Lord, God creator and ruler of your kingdom of light, in your great love of  
this world you gave up your only Son for our salvation.  
His cross has redeemed us, his death has given us life, his resurrection has  
raised us to glory.  
Through him we ask you to be always present among your family.  
Teach us to be reverent in the presence of your glory; fill our hearts with  
faith, our days with good works, our lives with love; may your truth be on  
our lips and your wisdom in all our actions, that we may receive the  
reward of everlasting life.

**All:** Amen.

**CLOSING SONG OF THANKSGIVING** ( See opening hymns for Advent and Lent)

## PARENT RESPONSIBILITY

**CANON 226 §2** Because they have given life to their children, parents have a most serious obligation and enjoy the right to educate them; the teaching handed on by the Church.

By choosing to have their child baptized as a Catholic Christian, parents stated their intention to raise the child Catholic and to provide for ongoing faith formation. Sacramental preparation and celebration is central to the spiritual life of a Catholic. Because parents are the primary educators of their child they should prepare them, whenever possible, for the reception of the Sacraments.

The following guidelines will assist parents:

1. Provide a consistent nurturing Christian presence in the home and be role models.
2. Pray for and with their child.
3. Be full and active members of a parish community.
4. Participate in the following retreats:
  - 1st grade- **Gathering for the Journey: Family Sacramentality Retreat**
  - 2nd grade- **Forgiveness for the Journey: Family Reconciliation Retreat**
5. Attend the **Rite of Blessing of the Candidates**, the **Rite of Choosing Penance / Reconciliation** and the **Rite of Penance / Reconciliation** with their child.
6. Attend the two required sessions that provide the material necessary to prepare their child for Penance / Reconciliation.
7. Participate in Christian service, whenever possible.
8. Attend parish penance services and take their child with them.

## **PARENT SESSIONS**

The goal of the two parents sessions is to present the necessary information for parents to teach their child about the Sacrament of Penance / Reconciliation from the selected text. This information should help parents attain the necessary skills and self-confidence in their ability.

Texts present the following information, which should be included in the first session:

- Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation.
- The importance of membership in the Catholic community.
- Free will, choice and sin (original, personal and social).
- The Ten Commandments, Jesus' great commandment to love and Eight Beatitudes.
- Scripture stories in which Jesus taught forgiveness and reconciliation, emphasizing the importance of God's word.

The second session has the same objective as the first session, reviews completed text material and answers any questions that have arisen.

Texts present the following information, which should be included in the second session:

- Forgiveness in our daily lives.
- Scripture stories in which Jesus taught forgiveness and reconciliation, emphasizing the importance of God's word.
- Communal Penance celebrations.
- Individual confession—includes the form for confession and a tour of the Reconciliation Room.

## PERSONS WITH DISABILITY

**Canon 777 §4** Catechetical instruction may also be given to those handicapped in body or mind insofar as their condition permits.

**Canon 990-** No one is prohibited from confessing through an interpreter, avoiding abuses and scandals; the prescription of **Canon 983 §2**.

After having attained the age of discretion, the baptized are required to confess serious sins once a year. Once a person with mental disability has reached the development level of a seven year old, he or she should be adequately catechized for the sacrament. "As long as the individual is capable of having a sense of contrition for having committed sin, even if he or she cannot describe the sin in precise words, the person may receive sacramental absolution." #23 *Guidelines for Celebration of the Sacrament With Persons With Disabilities*. Persons with mental disabilities are rarely, if ever, capable of serious sin.

Preparation of a developmentally disabled person for the Sacrament of Penance / Reconciliation before that of Eucharist is also extremely difficult (Adapted from *Opening Doors*– Section M. Available from the Education and Family Life Offices.) It will be at the discretion of the parents, pastor and catechist as to whether a child with mental disability will be catechized for the Sacrament of Penance / Reconciliation and at what point catechesis will occur. The reception of the Sacrament should bring comfort to the person.

Catholics who are deaf should have the opportunity to confess to a priest able to communicate with them in sign language if sign language is their primary form of communication. They may also confess through an approved sign language interpreter of their choice. The interpreter is strictly to respect the seal of confession.

Reconciliation rooms in all faith communities should be handicapped accessible. This would include the accessibility of wheelchairs for both anonymous and face-to-face confessions; telephones provided for the hearing impaired for both anonymous and face-to-face confessions.

## **RESOURCES FOR PENANCE/RECONCILIATION AND SECOND GRADE TEXTBOOKS**

### **Textbooks**

Benziger Publishing Company—*Come Follow Me*, 6 chapters (8-13) on Penance / Reconciliation and *Share the Joy*, (6-10) on Penance / Reconciliation

Harcourt Religion Publishers— *Walking by Faith*, 3 chapters (17-19) on Penance / Reconciliation.

Loyola Press— *Christ Our Life*, 6 chapters (9-14) on Penance / Reconciliation.

Wm. H. Sadlier, Inc.— *Coming to Faith*, 5 chapters (8-12) on Penance / Reconciliation.

Silver Burdett Ginn— *This is Our Faith*, 4 chapters (5-8) on Penance / Reconciliation.

### **Penance/ Reconciliation Materials**

Benziger Publishing Company— *Pardon and Peace*— 8 chapters with separate family book

Harcourt Religion Publishers—*Celebrating Our Faith*— contains 6 chapters— parents need the Teacher's Guide

Pflaum— *Together in Jesus*, 6 lessons in leaflet or book form. Contains a "Family Focus" poster that could be a core for family sharing or a catechist / parent edition. Also contains information for persons with mental challenges.

Our Sunday Visitor— *In the Lord's Peace*, 7 lessons—parents would need the Teacher Guide.

Wm. H. Sadlier— *We Believe and Celebrate First Penance*, 6 chapters can be used by parents as is.

Silver Burdett Ginn— *The Gift of Reconciliation*, 5 chapters. Separate family guide.

## **SESSION AND RETREAT INFORMATION FOR THE PENANCE / RECONCILIATION PROCESS**

Information Included in this Section:

General Instruction for Retreats

**Gathering for the Journey** - Family Sacramentality Retreat

**Forgiveness for the Journey** - Penance / Reconciliation Retreat



## GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR RETREATS

1. Each retreat follows the same format.

**We. . . .our experiences**

**. . . .listen. . . .** scripture gives us a deeper understanding of the significance of our life experiences. Scripture stories are the lens we use to reflect on our stories of daily living.

**. . . .with faith. . . .** share the wisdom and teaching of the church

**. . . . for the journey . . . .** what we have learned as a result of this process.

2. The retreats may be used as written, parts of a retreat may be used in existing retreats, or the “necessary catechetical components” may be incorporated into your own retreat.

**Note: All sessions and retreats must be incorporated into the Penance / Reconciliation process. The “necessary catechetical components” for each retreat are to be used. These “catechetical components” are listed on the back of the cover page for each retreat.**

3. Adult facilitators for retreats can be assisted by youth and young adults. The witness and role modeling of youth and young adults is very important to the faith formation.
4. Two to three facilitators are recommended for each retreat. Facilitators are not necessarily the persons who share their Christian stories. If separate storytellers are present, the facilitators should share their stories briefly.
5. All summaries and the “Review of the Process” are presented by an adult facilitator.
6. Flip charts, large sheets of paper, or a large blackboard are to be used for each retreat. Participants should be able to see all the written material.
7. Appropriate Christian and contemporary music should be used throughout all retreats. Some examples of where music may be purchased are: the Franciscan Store, Loretto; or The Lamb’s Way, Altoona.
8. The prayer table, placed where it can be seen by all, must be used and should be covered with an appropriate colored cloth and contain a bible, candle and cross. You may want to “set the table” during the opening song of the opening prayer service.
9. Participants will be asked to bring pictures and /or objects necessary to each retreat. Participants should given specific directions for the use of the pictures and objects prior to the retreat.
10. Small groups may be prearranged.



**GATHERING FOR THE JOURNEY:  
FAMILY SACRAMENTALITY  
1st Grade**

**Objective:** To connect everyday family life experiences of gatherings with communal parish times of gathering.

5:00-5:10 PM	Welcome and Ice Breaker
5:10-5:25 PM	Gathering
5:25-6:00 PM	Opening Prayer Service
6:00-6:15 PM	Snack Break
6:15-6:30 PM	1st section <b>We.....</b>
6:30- 6:45 PM	2nd section... <b>listen....</b>
6:45-7:15 PM	3rd section... <b>with faith...</b>
7:15- 7:30 PM	4th section... <b>for the journey.</b>
7:30-8:00 PM	Closing Prayer

Materials for the retreat:

Each family is to bring a picture of a family gathering.

Each participant is to bring an object, given to them by a family member, that has some significance.

**Note:** Children may be separated from parents during part of the retreat:

- After the Opening Prayer the children may be taken to a separate room and work with a similar exercise that their parents / family are working on.

- The children should return to their family tables right before the exercise on family vestments in the Third Section.

## **NECESSARY CATECHETICAL COMPONENTS**

### **1ST SECTION -We....**

Sensitivity to various types of families

Family spirituality is the presence of God in the experiences of ordinary family life

Importance of family gatherings to the understanding of the importance of Christian gatherings

### **2ND SECTION -.....listen...**

The Old Testament experience of community is foundational to Jesus' understanding of community

Scripture stories can help us understand our communal and family stories.

### **3RD SECTION -.....with faith....**

The family as the Domestic Church

Connect important family clothing to the vestments worn at Mass

### **4TH SECTION-.....for the journey.....**

The importance of family saints for the faith journey of the family

Each family has saints, those who have modeled and/or taught us to live Christ-centered lives.

## **GATHERING TIME (10 minutes)**

**Welcome by Pastor or Facilitator (Introductions of facilitators if necessary)**

### **Introduction to the evening**

**Explain the Goals:** (list on a flip chart)

Affirm and strengthen the bonds of family life.

To help those present appreciate the specialness of the family.

To give participants practical skills for making connections between scripture, the experiences of family life and their Christian faith.

To recognize and communicate the reality of Christ in our families.

### **ICE BREAKER**

This is an exercise to see what kinds of families are here tonight.

**Directions:** Stand if....

- You are a member of a family that has a lot of children
- You are a member of a family that has one or two children
- You are a member of a family with adopted and/or foster children
- You live in a one parent house or apartment with Mom or Dad
- You live in a two parent house or apartment with Mom and Dad
- You live in a family that has two houses - one where your Dad lives and another where your Mom lives
- You live in a house that has other adults living with you such as grandparents, aunts, uncles or stepparents

**Explain:** You can see there are many different types of families. Each one is good and all its members are important to our parish faith community.

### **Table Introductions (15 minutes)**

**Directions:** Gather participants into groups of 6-8 people called neighborhoods. Invite everyone to introduce themselves to their neighborhood using the family gathering picture.

### **Opening Prayer Service (35 minutes)**

**Directions:** Introduce the prayer service and begin with an opening prayer. Prayer table should contain a bible, cross and a candle.

**Song examples:** "Song of the Body of Christ", "We Are Companions on the Journey"

Facilitator-shares the **beginning** of a story that will connect with the four part faith awareness process, a significant object and family picture. The object and picture are then placed on the prayer table.

- invites about one-third of the participants to place their family picture and objects on the prayer table.
- Return to their seats.

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-invites about one-third of the participants to place their family picture and objects on the prayer table.

Return to their seats.

After everyone has placed their pictures and objects on the prayer table a facilitator closes with the following prayer:

### **Here We Are Lord**

It's us

Members of all sorts of families coming to you in the midst of our life here on earth.

And it's evening (afternoon) Lord, and we have come here to this place

Where members of our parish families gather to be with one another for their children, and to be with you.

We're all ages and sizes, Lord, some are crying babies or squirming six and seven year olds.

And some of us have gray hair and cool haircuts, fancy clothes or T-shirts.

But we've come to see you, Lord.

Some of us have left behind the TV and the basketballs and soccer balls, our stereos,

The leaves to be cleaned up, and the laundry waiting to be done.

We've even left some worries and problems behind, Lord, all of which you know.

But we assume they will be waiting for us when we get home later this evening (today).

But, for now Lord, we're willing to leave them there and open our minds and hearts,

Our smiles and our memories to better understand this sometimes confusing experience we call "family".

### **Snack Break (meal) (15 minutes)**

### **First Section We..... (15 minutes)**

**Direction:** Distribute the booklets and ask everyone to complete the cover. In the space provided a family dream or goal should be named. Provide ample time for this activity.

It is important that everyone is sensitive to the word family, therefore express a sensitivity to those present who may not have had a good childhood. Invite those present to focus on the positive experiences of their family.

**Explain:** The word family means something different to everyone present because each of us has had different experiences. Some of us have lived with one parent, some with two, some in homes with grandparents or aunts and uncles.

Depending on the experiences that we associate or connect with the family, the word family can carry either a positive or negative feeling.

Not all of our memories are happy ones. But I invite all of us to focus on the positive feelings, memories and dreams of the family that we can recall, because it is our goal to help us build on these.

The family is the basis for all other experiences of the human community. It is where we are first loved...or not, where we first love others...or not. Family is where we first experience success or failure, where we first feel and seek to fulfill the hunger for happiness. It is within the family that parents seek to love and be loved by their children. It is where children seek the love of parents. It is within family that our strongest feelings, hopes, and dreams are first formed. Family is our first teacher. In the words of Pope John Paul II, "The future passes by way of the family." Our goal is to help everyone present to gain an awareness of God's presence in family

life, and to see how easy it can be to connect God's presence with these events. Becoming aware of God's presence in the everyday life of the family is called **Family Spirituality / Family Sacramentality**.

Facilitators continue to tell the story which includes family gathering such as holidays, vacations, anniversaries etc.

**Direction:** Ask participants to turn to page 2 in the booklet and complete the assignment. When all are finished share the answers in their neighborhood.

Ask the group to share some of these gatherings and list them on the flip chart under **We...**

**Facilitator Summarizes:** Gathering as a family is important for our growth as a family and as a community. During these times we catch up on family happenings, eat together and enjoy each other's company. During family gatherings family differences are often put aside. Those who gather focus on the positive, the time of joyful celebration and the people who have gathered. Gathering together as family is central to who we are as Christians because it is from family gatherings that we learn the importance of togetherness (community), eating together and caring for one another.

### **Second Section.....listen.....(15 minutes)**

Facilitator writes **.....listen....** on the flip chart.

**Explain:** Stories from scripture tell us what was important to our ancestors of faith. Old Testament people needed each other for survival. Hebrew people had no concept of the individual as we do today. Their experience and concern was always for the community. Many stories from scripture relate stories of Jesus gathering with family and friends.

**Facilitators:** Connect the story you told earlier with a story from scripture. Stress the connection to help participants make the connection to their own stories.

**Direction:** To help you reflect on how your stories of family gatherings relate to scripture, open your booklets to page 3 and complete the material there. When participants are finished have them share this material with their neighborhood group. When completed ask for some of the scripture stories and list them under **....listen...on** the flip chart.

**Facilitator Summarizes:** Scripture tells us many stories of Jesus gathering with family, friends and acquaintances. He celebrated important events like weddings, Jewish feasts such as Passover and prayed at the temple. Jesus knew he needed other people. Martha, Mary and Lazarus were his friends and he called 12 special people to become his apostles. After the resurrection his followers gathered as a community in his name on the first day of the week, Sunday, to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

### **Third Section....with faith.....(30 minutes)**

Facilitator writes **...with faith...** on the flip chart.

Facilitators continue to tell their story which includes a special "vestment". At this point it is important to mention "vestments" of family life such as aprons, coveralls, shawls or special "vestments" such as baptismal or wedding garments.

**Explain:** The early church referred to the family as the domestic church. Over the years the term disappeared and recently was revived by the Second Vatican Council. When the church uses this language today, it means

that the family is not just like the church but **IS** the church. As Christian families, you not only belong to the church, but your daily life is a true expression of the church. Because family is so familiar and rooted in the ordinary, we can sometimes overlook this sacred aspect.

Families have such a unique relationship of love and care, that they reveal God to one another and to the world. God is with us in ordinary family life, this is called the sacramentality of family life. It means simply that the presence of God **IS** in the family.

The facilitators continue and make the following connections between sacraments and family life;

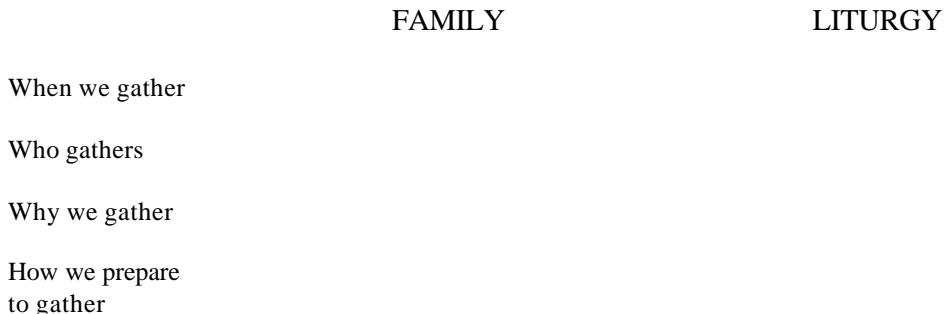
- Baptism is an example of new life or new beginnings in the family.
- Marriage is an example of ongoing commitment and responsibility.

Our church is a family of families, led by the Holy Spirit, under the guidance of our Pope, John Paul II. Just as the church has sacred vestments that are used at communal celebrations, so too, families have sacred vestments; that special article of clothing which symbolizes that a special event is about to happen. These "vestments" are an important part of family spirituality. (Refer to the articles facilitators used to continue their stories.) They evoke memories of previous happenings, positive feelings and the people involved. These memories are sacred for our families for they tell us who we are as family. To connect into these sacred memories and events is to experience the sacramentality of the family.

If the children have been separated from the adults, they should be brought back at this time.

**Priest or Facilitator:** explain the importance of sacred vestments such as baptismal garments and the church's sacred vestments. If a priest is present, he may want to robe and explain each vestment.

Facilitator on the flip chart under with faith.... draws the following diagram:



Complete the 4 sections under family and then the 4 under liturgy. Discuss the similarities.

**Facilitator Summarizes:**

There are many ways God is present to us in the ordinary life of the family. When we wear or reflect on special family "vestments" we remember special times of family togetherness. These times of family togetherness, which can involve special "vestments", help us understand the importance of families gatherings and can help us connect into the similarities with church celebrations. How we live and celebrate at home will influence how we live and celebrate as Christians at Mass.

**Review of the Process (5 minutes)**

**Explain:**

1. **We....**refers to an experience, in this case family gatherings.

2. **...listen...** refers to connecting that experience of gathering to the stories of Jesus found in scripture. Scripture can help us understand our family stories and the importance of gathering as community.
3. **....with faith...** refers to what we know about God through our Catholic tradition.
4. **.....for the journey** is the final step. What have you learned today about your family's spirituality? Reflecting on your family saints will aid your discovery.

#### **Fourth Section... For the journey (15 minutes)**

**Explain:** The ancestors of Jesus such as Abraham, Moses, David and Elizabeth were important for his faith development and practice. It was from them that he learned to live the life of a practicing Jew. For us not only the ancestors of Jesus are important but also the person and message of Jesus himself. Many in the history of the church have lived and died professing Christian belief. We have come to call these people, our ancestors of faith whose life we model, saints.

**Direction:** As we have shared stories of our families many special people have come to mind. These people are our **Family Saints**, people who have helped us experience the presence or meaning of God and have helped us live Christ-centered lives. Adults are to turn to page 4 in their booklet and list **Family Saints**. Children are to cut out the figure of a person (pattern is provided on Retreat 11). Parents are to write the list of **Family Saints** from page 4 onto the figure their child cut out. The First Penitent will place this figure on a poster during the closing prayer service. Next, each family is to select from their list of saints, one person who will be mentioned along with their relationship to that person during the closing prayer service. Example: Jane Smith, aunt of Joey Smith. This person will be mentioned while the First Penitent places the figure with the list of **Family Saints** on a poster.

Next, all families are asked to take a blank scroll and copy their list of **Family Saints** from page 4 in the booklet. These scrolls will be placed on the prayer table, as a symbol of the "Communion of Saints," during the closing prayer.

Finally, ask families to look at the dream or goal named on the front cover. Ask them to discuss this dream or goal in light of the material presented on family spirituality and the family as domestic church. They can make changes or add to this goal if necessary.

#### **Prayer Service**

**Direction:** On the table a basket has been added for the scrolls. A stand with poster board for the saint figures, has been placed close to the prayer table.

Song: such as "Table Song" can be played as the participants gather around the prayer table.

" **The Rite of the Blessing of Candidates**" may be included here.

Each family names a **Family Saint**, puts the figure on the poster board and the scroll in the basket.

When completed ask participants to join hands and recite the Our Father.

Song: Example: refrain from, " The Table Song".

## RESOURCES

Booklets, pencils, markers

Flip charts, dark markers or poster boards placed where all can see them

Prayer table covered with a cloth, bible, candles and a cross

Music

Copies of Family Scrolls and family saint figures for each family. Resource page

**FORGIVENESS FOR THE JOURNEY:  
PENANCE / RECONCILIATION  
2nd Grade**

**Objective:** To connect everyday family life experiences of forgiveness with the Sacrament of Penance / Reconciliation.

5:00-5:10 PM	Welcome and Ice Breaker
5:10-5:25 PM	Gathering
5:25-5:55 PM	Opening Prayer Service
5:55-6:15 PM	Snack Break-dinner
6:15-6:30 PM	1st section <b>We.....</b>
6:30- 6:50 PM	2nd section... <b>listen....</b>
6:50-7:20 PM	3rd section... <b>with faith...</b>
7:20- 7:40 PM	4th section... <b>for the journey.</b>
7:40-8:00 PM	Closing Prayer

Materials for the retreat:

Family picture  
Picture of the child's Baptism

## **NECESSARY CATECHETICAL COMPONENTS**

### **1ST SECTION - We.....**

Family disagreements are a normal part of family life

Present the topics of free will and choice

### **2ND SECTION -.....listen.....**

Scripture stories teach about sin, forgiveness and reconciliation

Forgiveness and reconciliation are important to the life of the family

### **3RD SECTION -.....with faith.....**

Through the Sacrament of Penance / Reconciliation God's forgiveness and reconciliation with God, others, ourselves and the church becomes a reality

Present the importance of the Our Father and stress the section "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Tour of the church and reconciliation rooms.

### **4TH SECTION -.....for the journey.**

Present the parable of the Prodigal Son as a parable which teaches about family forgiveness.

## **GATHERING TIME (10 minutes)**

### **Welcome by the Pastor or Facilitator (Introduction of the facilitators, if necessary)**

#### **Explain the Goals:** (list on a flip chart)

- To affirm and strengthen the bonds of family life
- To help those present understand the importance of forgiveness for the family
- To understand the healing and reconciliation that occurs when forgiveness is given and received
- To give participants practical skills for connecting forgiveness in the family with the sacrament of Penance / Reconciliation

## **ICE BREAKER**

All are to be given the booklets as they arrive. Ask them to fill out the front cover. Children are to draw a picture of a child committing a sin. Parents are to list sins they can commit in their role as parents, such as not praying with their children, not taking them to Mass, not spending quality time with them.

### **Table Introductions (15 minutes)**

**Directions:** Gather participants into groups of 6-8 people called neighborhoods. Invite everyone to introduce themselves to their neighborhood using the family picture. Parents are to share a baptismal picture of their child and relate one thing they remember about the Baptism.

### **Opening Prayer Service (30 minutes)**

**Directions:** Introduce the prayer service and begin with an opening prayer. Prayer table should contain a bible, cross and a candle.

Song:

Facilitator-shares their family picture and the beginning of a story where disagreement, fighting or hurt feelings occurred in their family. Place their family picture on the prayer table.  
-invites about one-third of the participants to place their family picture and objects on the prayer table. Return to their seats.

Facilitator-shares their family picture and the beginning of a story where disagreement, fighting or hurt feelings occurred in their family. Place their family picture on the prayer table  
-invites about one-third of the participants to place their family picture and objects on the prayer table. Return to their seats.

Facilitator- shares their family picture and the beginning of a story where disagreement, fighting or hurt feelings occurred in their family. Place their family picture on the prayer table  
-invites about one-third of the participants to place their family picture and objects on the prayer table. Return to their seats.

After everyone has placed their pictures and objects on the prayer table a facilitator closes with the following or similar prayer:

**Dear Lord, we are gathered here together to learn the importance of forgiveness for our families. Open our eyes and hearts to your healing power. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

**Snack Break (meal) (20 minutes)**

**First Section We..... (15 minutes)**

**Direction:** Each family is to remember a specific family situation in which disagreement, fighting or hurt feelings occurred with your 2nd grader. Adults are to describe the event on page 2 of the booklet. Children are to draw a picture of the same incident on page 2 of their booklets. Each family should discuss and compare their memory of the incident and how everyone felt. This material is not to be discussed with other families.

When families are finished with the discussion ask them to share what general incidents can occur in families which cause disagreement, fighting or hurt feelings. List these on the flip chart under **We...**

**Facilitator summarizes:** All families have times of disagreement and conflict. Because God has given us a free will we can make choices that help ourselves and others or are harmful. It is important to recognize and attend to conflicts within our families because the hurt and pain will persist long after the event, unless some type of reconciliation has occurred. But reconciling is not easy for many reasons. Maybe a person has been falsely accused, the person wronged refuses to forgive or no one wants to talk about the problem. We are not alone in the difficulty of learning how to reconcile and forgive and to ask for forgiveness. There are many stories in scripture through which Jesus teaches us by example and story.

**Second Section.....listen.....(20 minutes)**

Facilitator writes **.....listen....** on the flip chart.

**Direction:** Write the following scripture stories under **...listen..** on the flip chart:

Zacchaeus- Lk 19:1-10, The forgiving parent- Lk. 15: 11-24, Lost sheep- Lk 15:4-7, Forgiveness of the sinful woman- Lk 7: 36-40,44-50, Good Samaritan- Lk 10:30-35

**Explain:** There are many scripture stories where Jesus teaches us about sin and the importance of love and forgiveness. By understanding these stories we can learn about sin and that loving and caring for others is an important step that leads to forgiveness and reconciliation within our families.

**Direction:** Each family is to select one of the stories listed on the flip chart under **...listen....** Read the story. Ask the child to tell the story in his/her own words. Refer back to the family incident on page 2 of the booklet and use it to answer the questions on page 3 of the adult booklet.

**Facilitator Summarizes:** All people have times of disagreement and conflict and the effects on those involved. These incidents become sinful when we cause deliberate harm to ourselves or others. We sin when we choose to follow what we want without regard for the needs of others. The stories of Jesus can help us to recognize the sin and attempt to reconcile and heal those involved. All of us are called to recognize our sins and to seek forgiveness and reconciliation.

**Third Section....with faith.....(30 minutes)**

Facilitator write **...with faith...** on the flip chart. Under that write Baptism and Penance/Reconciliation

Facilitators continue to tell their story about an experience of family disagreement/conflict. If there has been a resolution it should be clearly stated. If there has not been one then the effects on the people involved should be shared.

**Explain:** When we were baptized sin was forgiven. As we grow and mature sin becomes a reality of our life. The church is aware of the difficulty in asking for forgiveness and recognizes the importance for our spiritual, psychological and social well being. In addition Jesus, through the church, continually calls us to conversion, to turn away from sin and be united with him. Through the Sacrament of Penance/Reconciliation God's forgiveness and reconciliation with God, ourselves, others and the church becomes a reality.

Jesus gave us the Our Father to help with forgiveness The Lord's Prayer is prayed at each Mass and at many other times. One reason it is important to us is because it asks the Lord to "forgive us our trespasses". It is an important part of our faith tradition to ask God for forgiveness. Another important phrase in the prayer states, "as we forgive those who trespass against us". How forgiving are we? Have we been able to forgive family members who have hurt us?

The texts you have been using as a family to deepen an awareness of sin and the call to penance and reconciliation will be explaining the sacrament in detail. To help the children with their sacramental experience we are going to take them to church and tour the building and reconciliation room. (This is an opportunity to explain church art to families as well as see the reconciliation room.)

### **Review of the Process (5 minutes)**

**Explain:**

1. **We....**refers to an experience, in this case family disagreement and conflict.
2. **...listen...** refers to connecting that experience to the stories of Jesus found in scripture. Scripture can help us understand our family stories.
3. **....with faith...** refers to what we know about God through our Catholic tradition. God knew that we would sin and offers forgiveness and reconciliation with God, the church and others through the Sacrament of Penance/Reconciliation.
4. **.....for the journey-** is the final step that will help us take what we learned and apply it to our family life.

### **Fourth Section.... For the journey (15 minutes)**

**Explain:** In the parable of the Prodigal Son the father daily looks for the return of his son. When he sees him coming he runs to greet the prodigal son who is welcomed back with open arms before he asks for forgiveness. This son is thrown a party and given a robe and ring. The oldest son, who has faithfully stayed home and worked, resents his brother coming back. During the closing prayer, which will be held in the church, we will read the Parable of the Prodigal Son and ask you to reflect on several questions.

**Direction:** One of the central symbols of Christianity is the cross. This symbol reminds us that Jesus died and was raised from the dead to save us from sin. On the slips of paper you are receiving write one of the sins from the front cover of your booklet or another sin that has come to light as a result of this process. You will fold this slip of paper in half and nail it to a cross during the prayer service as a sign of your acknowledgement of this sin and your desire to change. This prayer exercise also reminds everyone present of the salvific act of Jesus Christ.

## **Tour of the Church**

### **Prayer Service**

Opening prayer: something suitable

Scripture- The Forgiving Parent- Lk. 15: 11-24 (The parable may be read, used as a guided meditation or done as a play) The following questions are read slowly: As a parent, do you eagerly forgive your children when they have sinned? Are their brothers and sisters in your family who have not reconciled? Who in your family needs most to be forgiven and reconciled, even if they have not asked?

A suitable song is played while families gather around the prayer table. Family members are to come forward and nail the slip of paper with a sin named on it to the cross.

Family members offer each other a sign of love and peace. All join hands in The Lord's Prayer.

**Closing prayer: Lord, we as families have gathered here to hear your call to be reconciled with you, others and the church. Help us to be examples to each other of your love and forgiveness. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

**Closing hymn:** Example: "Table Song" (or another suitable hymn)

## **RESOURCES**

Booklets and pencils

Flip charts or poster board and dark markers

Prayer table covered with a cloth, candle bible and a cross

Music

Slips of paper for the closing prayer service

Simple Wooden cross, hammer and nails of various sizes – (more than one depending on the size of the group.)

\* Personal issues may need to be referred to the pastor, Catholic Charities-Altoona Office (944-9388) or the drug and alcohol services of your county.

## **REVIEW OF THE RITE OF PENANCE/RECONCILIATION**

Focus: To review the Rite, with emphasis on symbols and ritual action.

### **NECESSARY ELEMENTS**

1. Penance / Reconciliation is the Sacrament that ritualizes the response to Jesus' call to conversion. As a result the person is reconciled with God, themselves, the Church and the Christian community.
2. The place of Penance / Reconciliation within the sacramental system.
3. Review of the Rite of Individual Penitents
  - A. Preparation
  - B. Reception of the penitent
  - C. Reading of the Word of God (optional)
  - D. Confession of sins and acceptance of satisfaction
  - E. Prayer of the penitent
  - F. Absolution
  - G. Proclamation of praise of God and dismissal
  - H. Dismissal

### **Resources:**

#### The Rites

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part Two, Chapter Two, Article Four

"The Rite of Penance / Reconciliation", pg. B-15

"Symbols and Ritual Action", pg. B-40

"Theology of Penance / Reconciliation, pg. B-41

## **SYMBOLS AND RITUAL ACTION**

**When preparing children to celebrate the Sacrament, attention should be given to emphasize the symbols and ritual action of the sacrament.**

**Absolution** - the forgiveness of God which is given sacramentally to us through the imposition of hands, the sign of the cross, and the words of the priest.

**Candle** - symbolizes Christ, the light of the world. Use of the baptismal candle at the first celebration of Penance/Reconciliation connects and symbolizes the importance of Baptism in the life of a Christian. The Sacrament of Penance/Reconciliation reunites the believer with the faith community.

**Confession** - penitent communicating and expressing sinfulness in light of the moral demands of the gospel. It is an opportunity for the penitent to dialogue with the confessor about questions concerning moral issues.

**Contrition** - the expression of genuine sorrow for the sins committed against God through the hurting of others and the misuse of creation. In communal celebrations the contrition is prayed with the gathered assembly. In individual confession, the penitent's contrition is expressed audibly and clearly. The form may vary, pg. B-21.

**Cross** - preserves the fundamental belief of Christianity that Jesus died on the cross and was raised from the dead to save us from sin. It is, therefore, a sign of victory. The sign of the cross is the prayer and action that reminds us of the victory Christ won for us said in the name of the triune God.

**Examination of Conscience** - reflection on our daily life and the choices we make in light of the commandments, Gospel teachings of Christ, and laws of the Church. When receiving the Sacrament, the examination of conscience should occur before the celebration of the Sacrament.

**Imposition of the Hands** - is the ritual action of the priest that signifies the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God, self and the Church.

**Gathered Community** - symbolizes our common sinfulness and our need of reconciliation with God, self and the Church.

**Penance** - the Sacrament of the Catholic Church, which gives forgiveness for our sins. It is also the prayer or action the priest asks the penitent to say or perform as a sign of sorrow and reconciliation. (Canon 981)

**Reconciliation Room** - the place where the Sacrament of Penance is normally celebrated. The reconciliation room is to allow the penitent the choice to confess either face-to-face or anonymously.

**Scripture** - an integral part of all sacramental celebrations. Listening to the Word proclaimed, reflecting on its meaning, and renewing our acceptance of God's word as a guiding force in our lives, are central to the Christian journey begun at Baptism.

**Seal of Confession** - "the sacramental seal is inviolable. The confessor is never to betray a penitent by word or in any other manner or for any reason. (Canon 983#1)

**Sign of the Cross** - the ritual action that reminds us of the Trinity and the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

**Stole** - the symbol of the priest's authority to forgive in the name of God, and who reconciles us with God, ourselves and the Church.

## **THEOLOGY OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION**

“Those who approach the Sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God’s mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer labors for their conversion.” (Catechism) Sin is a deliberate choice to say no to a loving relationship with God. Sin ruptures the relationship of the individual with God and ruptures the relationship with sisters and brothers in faith. The Sacrament of Penance/Reconciliation heals this rupture.

The Father has shown forth his mercy by reconciling the world to himself in Jesus Christ. Throughout Scripture Jesus exhorts believers to repentance so to abandon their sins and turn wholeheartedly to the Lord. The victory of Christ over sin is first brought to light in Baptism. The sacrifice of the Mass offers Christ’s body given for us and his blood shed for the forgiveness of sins to God for the salvation of the world. Furthermore, our Savior Jesus Christ, when he gave his apostles and their successors power to forgive sins, instituted the Sacrament of Penance.

Baptism calls the Christian to ongoing conversion in Christ, renouncing sin and celebrating life in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the new life received in Christian Initiation has not abolished the fragility and weakness of human nature with our inclination to sin. With the help of the grace of Christ, the struggle of conversion continues towards holiness to which the Lord never ceases to call us.

Jesus’ call to conversion and penance does not aim first at outward works (fasting and mortification) but at the conversion of the heart, an interior conversion. True conversion is a radical reorientation of our whole life – a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one’s life.

Sin is an offense against God, a rupture of communion with him. At the same time, sin damages communion with the Church. Conversion entails both God’s forgiveness and reconciliation with the Church. This conversion is expressed and accomplished liturgically by the sacrament of Penance. Christ instituted the Sacrament of Penance for all sinful members of his Church. Above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, having lost baptismal grace have wounded ecclesial communion.

Sin is the free choice of individuals. It is a sinful choice to reject God’s love and one another’s love. Original sin is the state into which we are born and in which we are deprived of original justice and holiness (Catechism #416-418). Mortal sin is any choice that destroys our relationship with God (Catechism #1857) Venial sin is any free choice that harms our relationship with God. (Catechism #1862) The bishops have also called believers to reflect on the social dimensions of the Christian life. Issues such as nuclear disarmament, capital punishment, poverty, and the like, call Christians to discern their involvement in the injustices of the world.

The Sacrament of Penance possesses four parts. The sinner must be contrite. Contrition is heartfelt sorrow and aversion for sin. The sinner must confess sins. Confession to a priest is an essential part of the Sacrament of Penance. The sinner does acts of penance or satisfaction for the sins committed. Satisfaction takes the form of amendment of conduct and also by reparation of the injury. The sinner receives sacramental absolution. Absolution grants God’s pardon to the sinner through the Church’s minister. (Rite of Penance #6)

Reconciliation with God is the purpose and effect of this Sacrament. The Sacrament of Penance brings about a true spiritual resurrection with God. Often there is a peace and serenity of conscience with strong spiritual consolation. This sacrament also reconciles the sinner with the Church. The Sacrament of Reconciliation restores communion among the members of the Christian family. Steeped in God’s mercy, this Sacrament celebrates conversion and repentance. Reconciled with God and the Church, the believer persists in the baptismal call to follow Christ and to build up the Kingdom of God. The call to reconciliation is persistent and believers are reminded of the Sacrament’s continual availability.

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