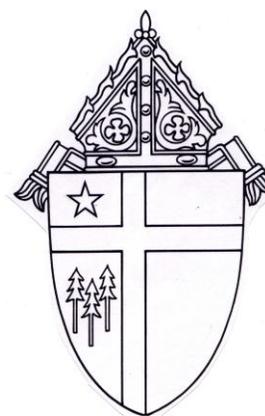


Formation of Baptized Catholics
Celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation
Handbook for
CANDIDATES / HOUSEHOLDS OF FAITH



The Home of Simon the Pharisee by Phippe de Champaigne,
1602-1674



Formación para Católicos Bautizados
Celebrando la Reconciliación
Manual Para
Candidates / Households of Faith



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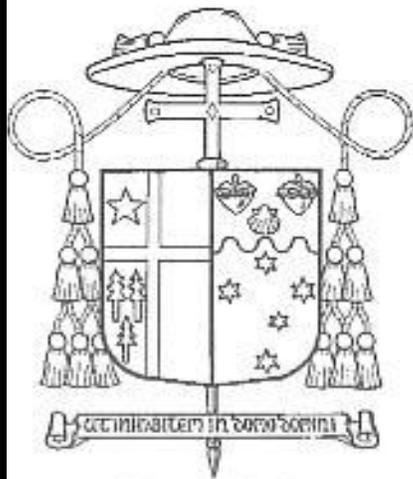
CT - *Catechesis Tradendae*

CCC - *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

CIC - *Code of Canon Law*

RCIA - *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*

RC - *Rite of Confession*



Office of the Bishop

April 19, 2013

Dear Faithful,

The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify us, to build up the body of Christ and to give worship to God (#59, Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy).

Those baptized as Catholics as infants need the help of all of us: bishop, priests, permanent deacons, religious, lay leaders and indeed every Catholic to introduce them into the full sacramental life of the Church in accordance with the tradition and with benefit of appropriate catechesis. The frequent celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is an *essential* part of growth in living the Christian life and leads to the celebration of the Eucharist. Our practice of celebrating Confirmation before First Communion helps to enrich the Sacramental life of our communities and of each household.

Each of us has a responsibility to continue to grow in our understanding and love of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our parishes and missions offer various programs and processes for children, adults and households that help them to grow in their understanding of their Catholic faith and in their relationship with Jesus Christ. The LIFE program, along with other adult faith formation opportunities is essential to the continued development of our diocese. For young children, parents and guardians are entrusted with this formation of the children in their care. Parishes and missions offer catechetical processes which help the parents meet this responsibility. The 16 Goals of the Diocese of Tyler provides for the importance of systematic catechesis grounded in our encounter with the Blessed Trinity. The Curriculum Guide provides for specific objectives for each goal at developing age appropriate levels.

Proximate formation of baptized Catholics for the completion of the Sacraments of Initiation requires some particular formation, in addition to the ongoing age appropriate formation provided by the catechetical programs and processes of our faith formation or Catholic School's programs. This formation should involve the entire household of faith. A child celebrating the Sacraments is a great blessing to a family and often brings a deepening of faith to other members of the household. I pray that this resource helps enrich this encounter with Almighty God.

This resource is provided to each parish and mission to better support parents and guardians in their role as primary educators of their children. As Bishop, I am particularly responsible for all catechesis in the diocese, and so I entrust to the clergy of the diocese, as well as to the endorsed catechists, this resource as a foundation for sacramental formation programs and processes throughout the Diocese of Tyler.

Sincerely in Christ's Name,

Most Reverend Joseph E. Strickland
Bishop of Tyler

Most Reverend Joseph E. Strickland, Bishop of Tyler

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Acknowledgment

It is with grateful appreciation we acknowledge those individuals who have assisted in the dialogue, study, preparation, and presentation of this document.

Diocesan Christian Initiation Team

Diocesan Liturgical Commission

Diocese of Tyler Presbyteral Council

Diocese of Tyler Diaconal Council

Special recognition is also given to the **Diocese of Fargo**, especially the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization whose resources, advice, and support have been integral to the development of our materials.

Procedure for Baptized Catholics to Complete Sacramental Initiation

(or to begin Celebrating Sacraments of Reconciliation, Confirmation and/or Eucharist)

Revised January 3, 2006

Sacramental initiation begins with Baptism and is completed with Confirmation and First Eucharist. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is an important part of preparing for Confirmation and First Eucharist for any baptized person who has the use of reason. With the movement to celebrate Confirmation prior to First Eucharist, the parishes and missions in the Diocese of Tyler will need to adopt some new practices. This procedure is put forth to offer a consistent and orderly manner of helping candidates seeking formation for Confirmation and First Eucharist. Generally a baptized Catholics should begin formation for these Sacraments at the age of reason (7 years old). NB: A similar procedure should be followed for those baptized Catholics that already have celebrated Confirmation or First Eucharist and are seeking to complete their sacramental initiation.

I. Petition to begin formation for celebration of the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Confirmation and First Eucharist

- A. A candidate seeking formation to celebrate Confirmation and First Eucharist begins with a petition submitted to the parish priest to begin formation for Reconciliation, leading to Confirmation and First Eucharist. For a child who begins to have the use of reason, about 7 years of age, the parents or guardian should submit the petition.
- B. A copy of the Baptismal record of the candidate should be included with the petition. This both emphasizes that Baptism is the foundation sacrament, and it is necessary so that when Confirmation and First Eucharist are celebrated the appropriate notice can be readily sent to the church of Baptism
- C. All those in the household who desire sacraments should be helped to work together in readying themselves for celebration of the Sacraments together.
- D. The parish priest in accepting the petition should list the child's name so they might be included in prayer by the parish community.
- E. The names should be listed in a book along with the names of those parents preparing for baptism of an infant and those in the process of Christian Initiation.

II. Initial Formation

- A. The candidate takes an active role in his/her formation. For minors, this is properly facilitated by parents as the primary educators of their children. The parish community should offer help to candidates, and households of faith.
- B. The candidate should have at least an initial catechesis on the 15 Goals

- C. The candidate should have an understanding why they need Confession as part of living the Christian life. The level of understanding has to be age appropriate.
- D. The Curriculum Guide for the Diocese of Tyler provides some objectives based on the 15 Goals for each age group. This can be helpful in determining appropriate understanding of the Goals as a basic formation in the faith
- E. Parish sessions to help parents form their children for the Sacraments should not be part of the regular faith formation program in the parish/mission/school. It should be intergenerational. Indeed these sessions should be open to the whole community.
- F. Each parish should be aware of individuals with special needs. With some adaptation and individual attention many people with special needs can be presented as candidates for the Sacraments.

III. Presentation for First Reconciliation

- A. Candidates for First Reconciliation should be helped to identify sin in their lives. Parents should be helped to identify when their child is ready to celebrate First Reconciliation. This could be aided by written guidelines.
- B. There should be an opportunity for an objective evaluation of their preparedness; this might be done by either individual discussion or by a group discussion with several children seeking to approach the Sacraments.
- C. Once ready, candidates are free to choose to whom and when they will celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation. Parents can choose to bring the child with them at one of the regular Confession times, or to a parish Reconciliation Service, or to make an appointment for a special time. Ideally, the parents and others in the household of faith will celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with the child. This helps to affirm that the Sacrament is a part of the Christian life.

IV. Ongoing celebration of Reconciliation

After First Reconciliation a person should celebrate the Sacrament monthly, in preparation for Confirmation and First Eucharist. Again, it would be hoped that others in the household of faith would be joining them in frequenting this Sacrament.

V. Formation for Confirmation and First Eucharist

- A. Formation for the Sacrament of Confirmation and First Eucharist should begin shortly after First Reconciliation.
- B. This should include a systematic presentation of the 15 Goals, in accord with the Curriculum Guide.
- C. There should also be a particular focus on the Sacraments of Initiation
- D. Each candidate should be helped to live a good life as a child of God in response to the Call to Holiness given them at Baptism.
- E. The curriculum guide for the Diocese presents for various age levels the appropriate understanding of these 15 goals.
- F. Parish sessions to help parents form their children for the Sacraments should not be part of the regular faith formation program in the parish/mission/school. It should be intergenerational. Indeed these sessions should be open to the whole community. They may deal with everyone together or include time for breaking them out according to age or interest.

VI. Establishing readiness

- A. It is presumed that individuals seeking to celebrate sacraments have regularly attended a diocesan sponsored faith formation program which includes a suitable catechesis, age appropriate, on the 15 Goals. If this is not the case then an evaluation should be done to determine if this has been accomplished in the initial formation as previously stated. These objectives for the goals are located in the Curriculum Guide Section 3 pages 5-8 / 9 of the Family Resource Manual.
- B. Each candidate should submit a written reflection sheet when they are ready to be considered for celebration of the Sacraments.
- C. There should be either individual or preferably group assessment of the readiness for celebration of the Sacraments of Confirmation and First Eucharist.
 - 1. An assessment for Reconciliation should be included for those who have not been in regular faith formation programs sponsored by the diocese. It is optional for those who have been in regular faith formation programs.
 - 2. This assessment should not resemble an examination, but provide a chance for the pastor or some designated leadership of the community

to hear from the candidate their desire and readiness for celebrating the sacrament.

3. It could take the form of the priest, master catechists, or other trained persons from the community asking the candidates why the sacraments are important and how they will help them live a better life as part of the church family

VII. Registration for a particular date for celebrating the sacrament

- A. The parish will announce scheduled date(s) for the Bishop to visit and celebrate Confirmation and First Eucharist. (Each parish will schedule dates for Confirmation with the Bishop's Office as has been the practice.)
- B. Households with people that will be ready for the celebration of the sacrament should in a timely fashion register for the date they desire to celebrate the sacrament. (Some parishes/missions may have more than one date each year when Confirmation and First Eucharist will be celebrated in their community.) The bishop has indicated that he can confirm about 80 – 100 candidates at a single ceremony.

Petition for a Baptized Catholic to enter into Formation for completing the Sacraments of Initiation

Recognizing that as a Baptized Catholic I am called to holiness and to full, conscious and active participation in the Eucharist, I need formation to celebrate First Reconciliation, Confirmation, and/or First Eucharist. I ask to be received into the period of formation for the Sacraments and for the parish to include me in prayer of those in formation. I promise to

- ❖ to pray each day
- ❖ with the help of God's grace, to be a good person, like Jesus Christ.
- ❖ to encourage my family and friends to continue to grow in holiness and to join me as I prepare to celebrate the sacraments.
- ❖ to participate in sessions to help me better understand the Sacraments and my faith through study of the 15 Goals
- ❖ to ask for help when I need

Date: _____

(Candidate's signature)

IF the Candidate is a MINOR: Recognizing that my involvement as a parent/guardian is of special importance in helping to prepare my child to complete the Sacraments of Initiation, I promise...

- ❖ to see that my child attends Mass on Sundays and holy days and to encourage our household to attend as well.
- ❖ to witness to the importance of Reconciliation, by regularly receiving the sacrament myself.
- ❖ to see to the ongoing formation of my child.
- ❖ to continue my personal faith formation through study, prayer, and the celebration of the Sacraments
- ❖ to support and encourage our household to participate in this time of grace by encouraging each member to respond to their own Call to Holiness and to participate in celebration of the Sacraments.
- ❖ to help my child learn the basic prayers and responses for Mass and for the celebration of the sacrament
- ❖ to daily prayer for and with my child
- ❖ to continue sharing the gift of myself and the gift of faith with my child, with our family and with the parish community even after my child celebrates Confirmation and First Eucharist.

Parents or Guardians:

Date: _____

Date: _____

Accepted by the Church community: _____ date: _____

Nov. 12, 2005

Candidate Information Sheet

(Please print)

Name: _____

Parish/Mission: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

email: _____

Age: _____ If a minor, parent/guardians name(s): _____

Parents email address: _____

Is it ok to email the minor candidate directly?

Candidate's Baptism:

Date of Baptism:

Place of Baptism: _____

God Parents: _____

Has the Candidate celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation? _____

Has the Candidate celebrated First Eucharist? _____ When? _____

Where: _____

Has the Candidate celebrated Confirmation: _____ When? _____

Where: _____

Are there any other members of the household of faith that need formation for a Sacrament? ____

If so, please list names:

November 12, 2005

Seeking formation for which Sacraments?

Reconciliation

Confirmation

First Eucharist

Celebration of First Reconciliation

Candidates for the Sacraments are of various ages, some just having reached the age of reason and some maybe adults who did not celebrate the Sacraments as a child. We welcome all ages to the fullness of sacramental initiation. Generally Baptized Catholics are still minors when they celebrate Confirmation and First Eucharist, and so depend in no small measure upon the help of their parent or guardian. The Church offers assistance to candidates, parents, who are the primary educators of their children, and indeed to all the members of the candidates household whose lives will be touched at this time of grace. Whatever the age of the candidate is, the important thing is that they have an adequate catechesis and appropriate understanding of the Sacrament for their age and stage of development.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is an important preparation for celebrating Confirmation and First Eucharist. Indeed, the regular celebration of Confession is a tremendous help in living out the Call to Holiness in a persons life. As the Sacrament of healing it helps one to avoid the tendencies to sin that remains after baptism. Preparation for First Reconciliation (or First Penance) requires an age appropriate recognition of sin in the candidate's life and the desire with the help of God's grace to turn from sin. Parents at the age of reason (about 7 years old) should begin forming their children to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Sacrament of Reconciliation should be celebrated for about one year before the celebration of Confirmation and First Eucharist. Hopefully the parents and the other members of the household of faith will set a positive example of celebrating Confession at least once a quarter.

Baptized Catholics should be formed for the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation and First Eucharist at the same time. These sacraments will be celebrated at the same Mass at which the candidate is accompanied by their household and sponsors. In the case of a minor candidate, the parents will present the candidate for the Sacraments...

Purpose of the Handbook

Formation of Baptized Catholics Celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation: Handbook for Candidates / Households of Faith

The purpose of this handbook is to assist in the formation of candidates of all ages for celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation. There is also a diocesan resource guide available with materials, sessions, and additional resources for formation of candidates for the Sacraments. These tools present the Church's teaching, diocesan policy and catechetical methodology. In order to use these tools more fully, you will need a Bible, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and the, Curriculum Guide *Handing on the Faith Family Resource Manual* for the ages of your child if that is applicable.

The handbooks are also available online at www.dioceseoftyler.org

Persons Involved in Formation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Role of All Baptized Catholics

All baptized Catholics are responsible for the evangelization and catechetical formation of the entire world. The world needs the baptized to be witnesses of Jesus Christ both in word and deed, so that all peoples may be put “not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy with Jesus Christ” (CT 5, cf. CCC 900, RCIA, General Introduction 9). The life of each one of the faithful needs to be transformed so that they learn “more and more within the Church to think like Him [Jesus], to judge like Him, to act in conformity with His commandments, and to hope as He invites us to” (CT 20). This transformation into living images of Jesus Christ will enable the faithful to be true witnesses. In regard to minor children (those who are not yet eighteen), preparing for the Sacrament of Reconciliation the adult faithful should themselves regularly, that is every two to three weeks or at least monthly, receive the sacrament. In regard to minor children (those who are not yet eighteen), preparing for the Sacraments of Confirmation and First Eucharist the adult faithful should themselves be living a sacramental life that is weekly Sunday Mass, regular reconciliation, a life of prayer and charity.

The Role of the Candidate

The candidate needs an age appropriate formation and response to the Call to Holiness. This requires an age appropriate understanding of the Sacrament and an appropriate general catechesis. The Curriculum Guide of the Diocese of Tyler provides some criteria for what an age appropriate understanding of the 15 Catechetical Goals entails. The candidate should be helped in this by their family, and by the parish community.

The Role of Parents and Siblings and other members of the household of faith

The initiation of children into the sacramental life of the Church is primarily the responsibility and concern of parents (CIC 890, RC 3). Although the child has reached the age of reason at the time of preparation for Confirmation and First Eucharist, they have not yet been fully initiated. They lack the strength to be an official witness and disciple of Jesus Christ from Confirmation and the nourishment of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. Parents must assist their child in the life of holiness.

Parents are the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith. In Baptism, parents accept the responsibility of training their children in the practice of the Faith and to make it “their constant care.” As stated in the Rite of Baptism (n. 120), parents are to see that “the divine life which God gives them [their children] is kept safe from the poison of sin, to grow always stronger in their hearts.”

Brothers and sisters of the child share in this responsibility of handing on the Faith. Siblings, especially those who have been fully initiated, assist the parents by their example. This family catechesis precedes, accompanies and enriches all other catechesis (CT 68).

The entire family is to deliver the Gospel to each other daily in word and deed, filled with love and

respect: “For this reason the family home is rightly called the domestic church, a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity” (CCC 1666). The family is nothing less than a sign and image of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Trinity, for our unbelieving world (CCC 2205). Active participation in the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist, regular Reconciliation, daily family prayer and Scripture reading enable families to live the Gospel life of Jesus Christ.

The Role of the Parish Priest

Parish priests are to see that the sponsors are spiritually fit and meet the following qualifications (RC 5-6; cf. CIC 874, 892-893, CCC 1311, RCIA, General Introduction 10.2):

- must be sixteen years old
- may not be the natural or adoptive parents of the confirmand
- must be fully initiated into the Catholic Faith (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist)
- must be leading a life in harmony with the Faith
- must be free of any canonical impediment

“Pastors of souls and other members of the Christian faithful, according to their respective ecclesiastical function, have the duty to take care that those who seek the sacraments are prepared to receive them by proper evangelization and catechetical instruction, attentive to the norms issued by competent authority” (CIC 843 § 2).

Priests are to “devote their best efforts” to catechesis (CT 64). They have the duty of preparing the parents, sponsors and children through catechetical, liturgical and pastoral means. The pastor must be both an evangelizer and catechist, acting in accord with diocesan policy and working with the Office of Faith Formation.

The Role of Catechists

Catechists, under the guidance of the pastor, are delegated by the bishop to do the work of evangelization and catechesis. Every catechist needs diocesan endorsement status. They are co-workers of the Gospel. With regards to preparation of individuals for First Reconciliation, catechists may formally prepare children including preparation of parents, teaching of the curriculum, providing a retreat, conducting the interviews, and / or organizing the liturgy. In short, catechists are the ones who assist the parents, sponsors, priests and entire parish in carrying out their previously specified roles.

The Role of the Parish

At present, the parish is the pre-eminent place for catechesis (CT 67). Family catechesis should be extended within this broader Christian home, the community of the faithful. Before, during and after the children’s preparation for the Sacraments of Confirmation and First Eucharist every parishioner should work to create:

- a community leading a sacramental life and growing in a life of prayer

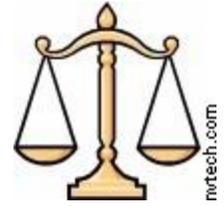
- a community demonstrating the role of disciple and witness to Christ in every situation
- a community willing to sustain one another in moments of hesitancy and anxiety
- a community that is welcoming, where the Gospel is lived with joy

The parish must establish a complete evangelization process and catechetical formation program. These should include:

- providing for the sacramental lives of the faithful
- supporting parents as the first evangelizers and catechists of their children
- training others to be evangelizers and catechists for the parish
- providing supplies, equipment and facilities for catechesis
- enabling the entire community to live out their roles

In addition, with regard to the preparation of minor children for reception of the Sacraments of Confirmation and First Eucharist, the parish should:

- provide the diocesan curriculum to parents and catechists
- provide information / training sessions for parents
- may conduct a retreat for parents and their children
- assure an interview for each child to assess their readiness and intention
- provide an opportunity for children to receive Reconciliation as close to their reception of Confirmation and First Eucharist as possible



Norms for Reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Universal norms

For an individual to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the following requirements are to be observed:

- must be baptized
- must be Catholic (except as noted in Can. 844 §2, 3 and 4) (children baptized in another church should be in the RCIA process for children)
- must be properly instructed to receive the sacrament
- must have the intention of receiving the sacrament

Can. 987 – In order that Christ's faithful may receive the saving remedy of the sacrament of penance, they must be so disposed that, repudiating the sins they have committed and having the purpose of amending their lives, they turn back to God.

Can. 988 – §1. Each of Christ's faithful are bound to confess, in kind and in number, all grave sins committed after baptism, of which after careful examination of conscience he or she is aware, which have not yet been directly pardoned by the keys of the Church, and which have not been confessed in an individual confession. §2. It is recommended that Christ's faithful confess also venial sins.

Can. 989 – All the faithful who have reached the age of discretion are bound faithfully to confess their grave sins at least once a year.

Can. 990 – No one is forbidden to confess through an interpreter, provided however that abuse and scandal are avoided, and without prejudice to the provision of can. 983§2 which reads "An interpreter, if there is one, is also obliged to observe this secret, as are all others who in any way whatever have come to a knowledge of sins from a confession."

Can. 991 – All Christ's faithful are free to confess their sins to lawfully approved confessors of their own choice, even to one of another rite.

Diocesan Norms

The Sacrament of Reconciliation should be celebrated in a proper Confessional. Every parish or mission is to have a dedicated room setup as a Confessional. It is to always have provision for anonymous confession through a grille or screen with a kneeler. Provision should be made so that if the priest is willing, the option of face to face celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation might be readily accommodated. The Confessional is a sacred space and should be well lit and clean. The space should be free of clutter or distractions. There should be a crucifix, Bible, and possibly a plant or candle. Nothing is to be stored in the confessional.

When additional spaces are required for celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, such as when several priests are gathered for confessions during Lent, appropriate spaces should be set up as well. These spaces must provide appropriate privacy and provision for anonymous confession. Particularly for First Reconciliation attention should be paid to the environment of each temporary confessional. They should be set up to minimize distraction and to help the Penitent focus on the sacrament.

Essential Teachings on Reconciliation, Sin and Conscience

With every doctrine of the Faith there are certain elements that are essential for understanding the teaching. In other words, if the essential element is not taught, the truth will remain unknown. Catechists cannot simply hope that students will pick these up by chance. The doctrines must be presented in a way that is appropriate to their audience.

Reconciliation

Premise (Foundational Truth):

Baptized persons may lose the life of God within through sin and so God arranged for the possibility of renewing baptismal graces (CCC 1420, 1421). One of these ways is through the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Essentials:

1. Explain that Jesus gave us this sacrament and why.
2. Explain reconciliation with God/reconciliation with the Church (CCC 1443ff.)
3. Explain the minister of this sacrament – include sacramental seal (CCC 1461-1467).
4. Explain growth in holiness by means of sacramental grace.
5. Explain the required elements: contrition, confession, absolution, penance and firm purpose of amendment.
6. Explain how we receive the sacrament (the form for the rite).

Sin

Premise (Foundational Truth):

God created us with the ability to choose to love Him. We sometimes choose our own ways to God and His ways. By using our ability to choose against God, we sin. (cf. CCC 398).

Essentials:

1. Explain that evil exists. (CCC 309, 1756)
2. Explain the effects of sin (CCC 1487)
3. Explain the requisites for sin and culpability (CCC 1860)
4. Explain temptation
 - four steps: draw near to what is forbidden, listen to desire, yield to the attraction, fall into sin
 - sources: Satan (CCC 394), concupiscence (CCC 405, 1707), the world (CCC 2541)
 - always has strength to resist if we seek God's help (CCC 2848)
5. Explain the truth of forgiveness, mercy and reconciliation (CCC 1441, 1431)

*Teaching the truth about sin and our sin problem is very helpful in avoiding sin. Teach about sin carefully, not morbidly. Convey the hope of Jesus and make the remedies to sin known.

Conscience

Premise (Foundational Truth):

Every person is created with a conscience within his innermost being where the voice of God calls him to love, to do what is good and to avoid evil (CCC 1776, 1795).

Essentials:

1. Explain that conscience is the voice of God (CCC 1776, 1795).
2. Explain that every person is created with a conscience (CCC 1776, 1795).
3. Explain that the conscience judges right and wrong, good and evil, before during and after the act (CCC 1777-1778).
4. Explain the need to properly form one's conscience including the roles of faith, prayer, reason, and the life of charity (CCC 1783-1785, 1798, 1802).
5. Explain that the fruits of a well-formed conscience are freedom and peace of heart (CCC 1784).
6. Explain the possibility of an incorrect judgment of one's conscience and even the complete silencing of one's conscience. Note the difference between vincible and invincible ignorance (CCC 1790-1794).
7. Explain that persons are obliged to act in accordance with what they know to be right through their conscience without compromising the principles that apply in every situation, namely (CCC 1778, 1780, 1789, 1800):
 - One may never do evil so that good may result from it.
 - The Golden Rule (cf. Mt 7:12)
 - Avoiding those things that may make your brother stumble (cf. 1 Cor 8:12, Rm 14:21)
8. Explain how our conscience is part of the gift of being responsible for one's actions – as humans we are not forced to sin nor are we forced to do good, thus we are held accountable for our actions (CCC 1781).



Signs of Conversion for Children

What does conversion or growth in faith look like in children?

IN GENERAL

These will not all necessarily appear in one child, any one of them can be a sign.

- Referring actions to Christ (seeing connections between scripture stories and their life)
- Praying on their own and thinking of seeking God in prayer
- Charity for others (especially for those who are not their friends)
- Selfless acts
- Questions about God
- Expressing doubts
- Spontaneous joy at learning about God
- The desire to know more

AT DIFFERENT AGES

The needs/obstacles/abilities at each stage must be addressed/overcome/tapped into.

PRIOR TO AGE OF REASON (approx. under age 6 or 7):

CHARACTERISTICS

- Willing to believe on parent's or teacher's authority
- Need for security met concretely

SIGNS OF CONVERSION:

- Referring actions to Christ – they know what Jesus would do in simple terms
- Modeling actions after Scripture, Saints, witnesses
- Selfless acts
- Spontaneous joy at learning about God
- Praying for concrete intentions

***AGE OF REASON – BEGINNING OF ADOLESCENCE/ABSTRACT REASONING
(approx. ages 7-10)***

CHARACTERISTICS:

- Begins to make the transfer from concrete to more abstract principles
- Become more aware of spiritual side of life

SIGNS OF CONVERSION:

- Questions begin: Want to know more reasons why, more depth, more "meat"
- Prayer begins to expand beyond themselves
- Sense their need for Christ, their problem with sin
- Referring actions to Christ, e.g. they want to be like Jesus in their own lives and somewhat realize the difficulty of doing so
- Reconciliation, Confirmation and Eucharist can make a big difference – they will very much so anticipate their reception of these and trust that God will work extra in their lives because of these sacraments

***BEGINNING OF ADOLESCENCE/ABSTRACT REASONING (approx. age 10-11) to
LATE ADOLESCENCE (approx. age 14):***

CHARACTERISTICS:

- Changes in body/emotions cause confusion, lack of stability.
- Can live with polar opposites in brain
- Need for security no longer fulfilled by parent/teacher---must come from inside
- Have realized that people can't always be relied upon
- Can change very easily at this age: can experience God deeply one week, big sin the next---seem to have little repentance (they are testing their limits, not thinking– your reaction is crucial)
- NOTE: The catechist must address need for security issue/changes in body-emotions; be prepared for these things, have response ready; acknowledging their capacity to be tempted and fall

SIGNS OF CONVERSION:

- Questions (challenges): want you to prove it to them, reason to believe
- Want more depth
- Relying on God as their security:
- Prayer can be more in-depth: more open for/have greater need for spiritual experience

Assessing Readiness - First Reconciliation - Possible Interview Questions

Following is a list of possible interview questions. Bolded questions are recommended to be asked. If there are few candidates additional questions may be added. You will not be able to ask every candidate every question. Be mindful of the age of the candidate and the level of appropriate comprehension.

1. Hi, (name of student), how are you doing today? or how was school today? or in larger parishes, the candidate might be asked about their family or their interests. In short, ask a few questions to put the candidate at ease. Remember if the candidate is very young, they may be quite nervous about meeting with you.

2. What sacrament have you been preparing to receive?

3. Who did we get this sacrament from? When did we get this sacrament? Why did Jesus give us this?

4. What does “reconciliation” mean? ...“forgiveness”? ...“mercy”?”being sorry”?

5. What is sin? What are some examples of sin? Are accidents sins? Are mistakes sins? Why not?

6. Can we commit sins in our thoughts? words? deeds? things we fail to do? helping others to sin?

7. When we sin does Jesus stop loving us?

8. Why should we ask God to forgive us when we sin?

9. What is contrition?

10. Why should be sorry for sinning and try to never do them again?

11. How do you prepare to receive Reconciliation? What do you do when you get inside the confessional? What do you do when you come out of the confessional?

12. What is the priest’s role in Reconciliation? Why do we tell our sins to a priest?

13. Can the priest ever tell another person what you confessed?

14. What happens in the sacrament of Reconciliation?

15. What is penance for?

16. What is absolution for?

17. How often should you receive the sacrament? Why?

18. What are some ways Jesus helps us to avoid sin?

19. What is your conscience?



The Fifteen Goals – Abbreviated
Established by Bishop Alvaro Corrada, SJ – Diocese of Tyler

PROFESSION OF FAITH

- #1: (Trinity) Recognize God as Trinity.**
- #2: (Relationship with God) Present an understanding of the human need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ based on revelation and faith**
- #3: (Faith) Illustrate a basic understanding of doctrine and dogma in light of the creed**
- #4. (Church) Illustrate a basic understanding of Church**
- #5: (Scripture) Read, understand, interpret and apply Scripture to life.**
- #6: (Creation) Exercise responsibility as caretakers of creation as an expression of our relationship with Jesus Christ.**

CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY

- #7: (Sacraments) Demonstrate the importance of sacraments, with an emphasis on the centrality of the Eucharist, in the life of Catholics.**
- #8: (Community of Believers) Demonstrate an understanding of the faith community as a sharing in the Paschal Mystery of Christ.**

LIFE IN CHRIST

- #9: (Human Dignity) Acknowledge and affirm the dignity of the human person and community.**
- #10: (Moral Conscience) Develop a moral conscience grounded in the truth of Jesus Christ.**
- #11: (Discipleship) Examine a variety of Christian vocations as a response to the baptismal call.**
- #12: (Relationship with others) Apply Catholic principles to interpersonal relations.**
- #13: (Social Justice) Know, critique and apply social justice principles to personal and societal situations.**
- #14: (Christian Service) Engage in service to the community (e.g., family, parish, local, national and global) in response to the Gospel call.**

CHRISTIAN PRAYER

- #15: (Catholic Tradition of Prayer) Know and participate in the Catholic tradition of prayer in the name of Jesus Christ**

Catechesis on
First Reconciliation
Candidates and Households of Faith

Note to Candidates:

Each baptized Christian is called to holiness. While Baptism removed sin, it did not remove the tendency to sin. Sadly each of us fails at times to love as God loves us, we choose to sin and we fail to do good. The Sacrament of Reconciliation brings absolution for sin and the grace of God to live a better life. Thus Reconciliation is an essential part of our Christian life as we respond to the Call to Holiness.

A special note for parents:

The Church teaches us that parents are the first educators and catechists of their children. This teaching means that parents have both a right and duty to instruct their children in the truths of our faith. This responsibility assumes that parents have the capacity to carry out their divine calling to teach their children. The Church's declaration of parents as first educators reveals the exalted place that the vocation of parenthood holds in God's plan for salvation.

To be true to the demands of the vocation to parenthood, parents should do all they can to learn about their faith so that their children may in turn learn from them.

Part I: What's a Sacrament?

First of all, Reconciliation is a Sacrament, one of seven in the Catholic Church. The other six are Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Holy Orders, Marriage, and Anointing of the Sick. Before we talk too much about the Sacrament of Reconciliation; it might be good to talk about what a sacrament is.

The classic definition of sacrament in older catechisms was, "an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace". The current Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) defines sacraments in the following way:

1131. The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signifies and makes present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions.

Through the grace of the
sacrament of marriage, parents
receive the privilege
and responsibility of
evangelizing their children.

CCC 2225

When each sacrament is properly celebrated, the visible part we see and hear makes present an invisible reality that is truly taking place.¹ For example, in Confirmation we see the anointing of chrism and the laying on of hands by the Bishop, and we hear the words of the rite: an actual physical event is taking place. We cannot see, however, the spiritual event that is taking place at the same time: a deepening and strengthening of baptismal grace and the permanent mark on a soul in preparation for public witness. Two things are unfolding whenever any sacrament is celebrated: the visible, physical event of the liturgy; and the invisible, spiritual event of a soul entering into a new and deeper phase of life with the Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

There is sometimes some confusion surrounding the phrase, "instituted by Christ". If we say that the sacraments were instituted by Christ, does this mean He set in place each of the seven sacraments in their present form during His life on earth? If not, are the sacraments mere inventions of the institutional Church? The Church teaches us to steer clear of both extreme views. The sacraments truly come from Christ. They developed into their present form over time in the life of the Church. The Catechism teaches the following.

1116. Sacraments are 'powers that comes forth' from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church. They are 'the masterworks of God' in the new and everlasting covenant.

1117. As she has done for the canon of Sacred Scripture and for the doctrine of the faith, the Church, by the power of the Spirit who guides her 'into all truth,' has gradually recognized this treasure received from Christ and, as the faithful steward of God's mysteries, has determined its 'dispensation'. Thus the Church has discerned over the centuries that among liturgical celebrations there are seven that are, in the strict sense of the term, sacraments instituted by the Lord.

Jesus died on the cross to save us. He instituted the Church to save us. Through the Church, He gave us seven concrete ways to help us share in His life; these are the Sacraments of the Catholic Church.

Another aspect of sacraments that is sometimes misunderstood concerns how one understands that the sacraments "give grace". It is true that we want to obtain as much grace as we can in this life, but we shouldn't understand this as obtaining a quantity of something--like gas at a gas station. Instead, we begin to understand what grace is by seeing it as life in Christ. Thus, an increase in grace means a growing in your relationship with Jesus Christ.



The Father has sent His Son as
the Savior of the world.

1 Jn 4:14; CCC 457



Part II. What is the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is probably the most misunderstood sacrament in popular culture. Many TV and movie dramas portray the sacrament as dark and foreboding. Many comedies mock the sacrament as something that is done by simple and superstitious people who have the misfortune of being Catholic.

These negative portrayals of the Sacrament of Reconciliation likely have an impact on the way many Catholics approach the sacrament in their own lives.

A fresh, unbiased look at the Sacrament of Reconciliation, however, yields a much different view from the one we see in the movies. Very simply, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a real encounter with Jesus Christ in which we enter in broken and wounded and come out whole and healed. This sacrament is a wonderful gift from God.

It's a wonderful gift, because it's something we really need: forgiveness for the sins we commit and a renewed help in overcoming our inclination to sin. The truth is very plain; we all sin. We all do things, either privately or publicly, that we should not do. This fact does not mean that humans are evil to the core, but it does mean that original sin is a reality in the lives of us all.

One might ask, "What if we do something sinful, but do not know that it is sinful? How can this do us harm?" It is important to understand that sin is an objective reality. Sin wounds the soul--plain and simple. One might liken the effect of sin to the act of drinking poison. A sip of poison is harmful even if a person thinks he is drinking milk. The man who lies is a liar through and through--whether he realizes it or not.

There are also subjective realities to sin: namely, how free a person is in doing something; and how aware a person is of the sinful nature of an act. These subjective realities affect the culpability (guilt) of the person who sins. Since these subjective realities are known only to God, and to a lesser extent, the one who sins, it is not good to spend much time accessing the guilt of others.

If we take the reality of sin in the human condition as a granted, there are at least two human reactions to this reality. One reaction is to ignore sin (or rationalize it) and to act as though it does not affect us in any way. Most everybody has had personal experience with this way of dealing with sin. We all know, furthermore, that this response does not work. It doesn't work on several fronts. Sin has a way of begetting sin. Small sins have a way of developing into big sins. All these natural progressions in the world of sin are generally recognized by people of all cultures. It is perhaps for this reason that honesty about one's faults is universally praised as a virtue and is commonly regarded as a sound psychological practice.

Another human approach to sin, one that readily recognizes the personal dimension of sin, is to try and punish ourselves for the wrong we know we do. By itself, this approach leaves people broken, self-brooding, and sometimes seriously ill--either physically or mentally. No matter how hard we try, there is no perfect way to "make right" the sins we do on our own. There is no sacrifice we can make by ourselves that completely heals the wound of sin in our soul.



Reconciliation is a
wonderful gift, because
it's something we really need:
forgiveness for the sins
we commit and a renewed
help in overcoming
our inclination to sin.



Without a perfect way of atonement (making right) for sins, humanity is desperate and without hope. Jesus is this perfect way.

After Baptism, to heal our own personal sins, we tap into the grace (the life) of Jesus' sacrifice again in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

of doing this examination is to reflect on the Ten Commandments. Another method is to consider the ways in which you have acted like Jesus Christ in your relationships to others.

The sacramental seal of confession means that the priest must keep anything said in the confessional private, even the name of the person. There are no exceptions.

CCC 1467

dialogue, or spiritual direction, is one of the many fruits of this sacrament. When the time is appropriate, the priest gives the penitent something to do (a penance) in partial satisfaction for the sins that have been confessed. The penance can be prayer, an offering, works of mercy, or any other sacrifice or service that is in keeping the nature of the sins confessed. By doing the penance, the penitent unites himself or herself to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross. We can never make up for our sins on our own, but we can share in the one, perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ and show our sorrow for what we have done.

Without a perfect way of atonement (making right) for sins, humanity is desperate and without hope. The entrance of Christ into human history is a sign of God's merciful love for humanity. The free act of Jesus' death on the Cross is the one, perfect sacrifice that redeems mankind once and for all. That one perfect sacrifice is made present to us in the sacrifice of the Mass. To heal our own personal sins, we tap into the grace of that sacrifice again in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation consists of the following three acts on the part of the penitent: repentance for the sins that have been committed; confession of those same sins; and the intention to make reparation.

In order to prepare for the sacrament, the penitent should undertake an examination of conscience. A traditional way

After examining his conscience, the penitent goes to a priest and confesses his sins. Except in emergency situations, the confessing of sins is done on a private, individual basis. The priest is solemnly bound to keep anything said in the confessional private. The sacramental seal of confidentiality in this sacrament is one of the most solemn laws in the Church. It is never to be broken for any reason. A priest may not even mention the name of the person.

The role of the priest, acting in the person of Jesus Christ, is to give absolution. After hearing the penitent confess his sins, the priest may also offer some spiritual advice.

Conversely, the penitent may ask some questions. This

After penance is assigned, the priest invites the penitent to say an Act of Contrition, such as:

My God, 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.



or

Oh My God, I am heartily sorry for having offended thee, and I detest all my sins,
because of Thy just punishments, but most of all, because they offend Thee, my God,
Who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of
Thy grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin. Amen.

Although one might not always see the benefits of a sacrament, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is one sacrament that often affords at least the feeling of something actually happening. You may go in with the weight of the world on your shoulders, but you come out with your burden lightened and the world at your feet. There are also many spiritual fruits that come from the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The catechism lists the following as spiritual effects from this sacrament:



The whole power of the
Sacrament of Reconciliation
consists in restoring us to
God's grace and joining us with
him in an intimate friendship.

CCC 1468



- reconciliation with God and a recovered state of grace
- reconciliation with the Church
- remission of eternal punishment for mortal sins
- remission, at least in part, of temporal punishment resulting from sin
- peace and serenity of conscience; and spiritual consolation
- increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle (CCC 1496)

Throughout the whole Sacrament of Reconciliation, it is important to remember that the priest acts *in persona Christi capitis*, in the person of Jesus Christ the Head. Christ acts through the person of the priest in order to heal the wound of sin. The person who enters into this sacrament encounters the person of Jesus Christ in His infinite mercy. The priest who offers the sacrament may be rather ordinary and plain, but he offers something that is rich and precious beyond measure to the human person.

III. How Can I Help My Child In The Sacrament of Reconciliation?

The most important thing you can do to help your child in the Sacrament Reconciliation is to know, love, and receive the sacrament yourself. If you have not gone to confession in a long time, the simplest way to remedy the situation is to go to the sacrament and confess. If you don't know exactly what to do, approach a priest and explain the situation. Catholics are required to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a year, but any one who truly understands this sacrament would want to receive it more often than this (cf. CCC 2042).

The second most important thing you can do to help your child with this sacrament is to talk to him or her. Ask them how they understand the sacrament. Explain in your own words what the Sacrament of Reconciliation is. Help him or her with the Act of Contrition. Practice it together. To help you, there are many books that offer good explanations. Perhaps the best place to start is the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Read the sections which cover the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Your parish will also have resources to help you work with your child. Ask your parish priest or the Faith Formation Leader for the curriculum and other guidance.

Again, the most important thing to keep in mind is that you cannot give to your child what you do not have. If you have (or are in the process of acquiring) a knowledge and love of this sacrament, you will be able to communicate that love and knowledge to your child. If you feel as though you are just beginning, that's OK as well; you and your child can learn together. It is never too late to experience the merciful love of our God.



The most important thing you can do to help your child in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to know, love and receive the sacrament yourself.



¹An excellent resource for understanding more about the sacraments is [Understanding the Sacraments](#) by Peter M.J. Stravinkas. Many of the explanations in this handbook have been drawn from chapter one.

Part IV: **The Catechism of the Catholic Church on Penance and Reconciliation**

Following are selected paragraphs from the Catechism of the Catholic Church on Reconciliation. The footnotes have not been included. The Catechism of the Catholic Church is the sure norm in our day and age for knowing and teaching what the Catholic Church holds. Every home should have a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and a copy of the Bible. If your home does not have a copy, look online or contact your parish.

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION

1422 "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."

WHAT IS THIS SACRAMENT CALLED?

1423 It is called the sacrament of conversion because it makes sacramentally present Jesus' call to conversion, the first step in returning to the Father from whom one has strayed by sin. It is called the sacrament of Penance, since it consecrates the Christian sinner's personal and ecclesial steps of conversion, penance, and satisfaction.

1424 It is called the sacrament of confession, since the disclosure or confession of sins to a priest is an essential element of this sacrament. In a profound sense it is also a "confession" - acknowledgment and praise - of the holiness of God and of his mercy toward sinful man. It is called the sacrament of forgiveness, since by the priest's sacramental absolution God grants the penitent "pardon and peace." It is called the sacrament of Reconciliation, because it imparts to the sinner the love of God who reconciles: "Be reconciled to God." He who lives by God's merciful love is ready to respond to the Lord's call: "Go; first be reconciled to your brother."

WHY A SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION AFTER BAPTISM?

1425 "YOU were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." One must appreciate the magnitude of the gift God has given us in the sacraments of Christian initiation in order to grasp the degree to which sin is excluded for him who has "put on Christ." But the apostle John also says: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." And the Lord himself taught us to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses," linking our forgiveness of one another's offenses to the forgiveness of our sins that God will grant us.

1426 Conversion to Christ, the new birth of Baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Body and Blood of Christ received as food have made us "holy and without blemish," just as the Church herself, the Bride of Christ, is "holy and without blemish." Nevertheless the new life received in Christian initiation has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls concupiscence, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life. This is the struggle of conversion directed toward holiness and eternal life to which the Lord never ceases to call us.

THE CONVERSION OF THE BAPTIZED

1427 Jesus calls to conversion. This call is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." In the Church's preaching this call is addressed first to those who do not yet know Christ and his Gospel. Also, Baptism is the principal place for the first and fundamental conversion. It is by faith in the Gospel and by Baptism that one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is, the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life.

1428 Christ's call to conversion continues to resound in the lives of Christians. This second conversion is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church who, "clasping sinners to her bosom, [is] at once holy and always in need of purification, [and] follows constantly the path of penance and renewal." This endeavor of conversion is not just a human work. It is the movement of a "contrite heart," drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first.

MANY FORMS OF PENANCE IN CHRISTIAN LIFE

1437 Reading Sacred Scripture, praying the Liturgy of the Hours and the Our Father - every sincere act of worship or devotion revives the spirit of conversion and repentance within us and contributes to the forgiveness of our sins.

1438 The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church's penitential practice. These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as fasting and almsgiving, and fraternal sharing (charitable and missionary works).

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION

1440 Sin is before all else an offense against God, a rupture of communion with him. At the same time it damages communion with the Church. For this reason conversion entails both God's forgiveness and reconciliation with the Church, which are expressed and accomplished liturgically by the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

1441 Only God forgives sins. Since he is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, "The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" and exercises 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.

1442 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 that 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."

1443 During his public life Jesus not only forgave sins, but also made plain the effect of this forgiveness: he reintegrated forgiven sinners into the community of the People of God from which sin had alienated or even excluded them. A remarkable sign of this is the fact that Jesus receives sinners at his table, a gesture that expresses in an astonishing way both God's forgiveness and the return to the bosom of the People of God.

1444 In imparting to his apostles his own power to forgive sins the Lord also gives them the authority to reconcile sinners with the Church. This ecclesial dimension of their task is expressed most notably in Christ's solemn words to Simon Peter: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." "The office of binding and loosing which was given to Peter was also assigned to the college of the apostles united to its head."

1445 The words bind and loose mean: whomever you exclude from your communion, will be excluded from communion with God; whomever you receive anew into your communion, God will welcome back into his. Reconciliation with the Church is inseparable from reconciliation with God.

1446 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, and have thus lost their baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion. It is to them that the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification. The Fathers of the Church present this sacrament as "the second plank [of salvation] after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace."

1447 Over the centuries the concrete form in which the Church has exercised this power received from the Lord has varied considerably. During the first centuries the reconciliation of Christians who had committed particularly grave sins after their Baptism (for example, idolatry, murder, or adultery) was tied to a very rigorous discipline, according to which penitents had to do public penance for their sins, often for years, before receiving reconciliation. To this "order of penitents" (which concerned only certain grave sins), one was only rarely admitted and in certain regions only once in a lifetime. During the seventh century Irish missionaries, inspired by the Eastern monastic tradition, took to continental Europe the "private" practice of penance, which does not require public and prolonged completion of penitential works before reconciliation with the Church. From that time on, the sacrament has been performed in secret between penitent and priest. This new practice envisioned the possibility of repetition and so opened the way to a regular frequenting of this sacrament. It allowed the forgiveness of grave sins and venial sins to be integrated into one sacramental celebration. In its main lines this is the form of penance that the Church has practiced down to our day.

1448 Beneath the changes in discipline and celebration that this sacrament has undergone over the centuries, the same fundamental structure is to be discerned. It comprises two equally essential elements: on the one hand, the acts of the man who undergoes conversion through the action of the Holy Spirit: namely, contrition, confession, and satisfaction; on the other, God's action through the intervention of the Church. The Church, who through the bishop and his priests forgives sins in the name of Jesus Christ and determines the manner of satisfaction, also prays for the sinner and does penance with him. Thus the sinner is healed and re-established in ecclesial communion.

1449 The formula of absolution used in the Latin Church expresses the essential elements of this sacrament: the Father of mercies is the source of all forgiveness. He effects the reconciliation of sinners through the Passover of his Son and the gift of his Spirit, through the prayer and ministry of the Church:

God, the Father of mercies, through the death and the resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

THE ACTS OF THE PENITENT

1450 "Penance requires . . . the sinner to endure all things willingly, be contrite of heart, confess with the lips, and practice complete humility and fruitful satisfaction."

1451 Among the penitent's acts contrition occupies first place. Contrition is "sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again."

1452 When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called "perfect" (contrition of charity). Such contrition remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible.

1453 The contrition called "imperfect" (or "attrition") is also a gift of God, a prompting of the Holy Spirit. It is born of the consideration of sin's ugliness or the fear of eternal damnation and the other penalties threatening the sinner (contrition of fear). Such a stirring of conscience can initiate an interior process which, under the prompting of grace, will be brought to completion by sacramental absolution. By itself however, imperfect contrition cannot obtain the forgiveness of grave sins, but it disposes one to obtain forgiveness in the sacrament of Penance.

1454 The reception of this sacrament ought to be prepared for by an examination of conscience made in the light of the Word of God. The passages best suited to this can be found in the moral catechesis of the Gospels and the apostolic Letters, such as the Sermon on the Mount and the apostolic teachings.

1455 The confession (or disclosure) of sins, even from a simply human point of view, frees us and facilitates our reconciliation with others. Through such an admission man looks squarely at the sins he is guilty of, takes responsibility for them, and thereby opens himself again to God and to the communion of the Church in order to make a new future possible.

1456 Confession to a priest is an essential part of the sacrament of Penance: "All mortal sins of which penitents after a diligent self-examination are conscious must be recounted by them in confession, even if they are most secret and have been committed against the last two precepts of the Decalogue; for these sins sometimes wound the soul more grievously and are more dangerous than those which are committed openly." When Christ's faithful strive to confess all the sins that they can remember, they undoubtedly place all of them before the divine mercy for pardon. But those who fail to do so and knowingly withhold some, place nothing before the divine goodness for remission through the mediation of the priest, "for if the sick person is too ashamed to show his wound to the doctor, the medicine cannot heal what it does not know."

1457 According to the Church's command, "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." Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion, even if he experiences deep contrition, without having first received sacramental absolution, unless he has a grave reason for receiving Communion and there is no possibility of going to confession. Children must go to the sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time.

1458 Without being strictly necessary, confession of everyday faults (venial sins) is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church. Indeed the regular confession of our venial sins helps us form our conscience, fight against evil tendencies, let ourselves be healed by Christ and progress in the life of the Spirit. By receiving more frequently through this sacrament the gift of the Father's mercy, we are spurred to be merciful as he is merciful:

1459 Many sins wrong our neighbor. One must do what is possible in order to repair the harm (e.g., return stolen goods, restore the reputation of someone slandered, pay compensation for injuries). Simple justice requires as much. But sin also injures and weakens the sinner himself, as well as his relationships with God and neighbor. Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused. Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must "make satisfaction for" or "expiate" his sins. This satisfaction is also called "penance."

1460 The penance the confessor imposes must take into account the penitent's personal situation and must seek his spiritual good. It must correspond as far as possible with the gravity and nature of the sins committed. It can consist of prayer, an offering, works of mercy, service of neighbor, voluntary self-denial, sacrifices, and above all the patient acceptance of the cross we must bear. Such penances help configure us to Christ, who alone expiated our sins once for all. They allow us to become co-heirs with the risen Christ, "provided we suffer with him."

The satisfaction that we make for our sins, however, is not so much ours as though it were not done through Jesus Christ. We who can do nothing ourselves, as if just by ourselves, can do all things with the cooperation of "him who strengthens" us. Thus man has nothing of which to boast, but all our boasting is in Christ . . . in whom we make satisfaction by bringing forth "fruits that befit repentance." These fruits have their efficacy from him, by him they are offered to the Father, and through him they are accepted by the Father.

THE MINISTER OF THIS SACRAMENT

1461 Since Christ entrusted to his apostles the ministry of reconciliation, bishops who are their successors, and priests, the bishops' collaborators, continue to exercise this ministry. Indeed bishops and priests, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, have the power to forgive all sins "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

1462 Forgiveness of sins brings reconciliation with God, but also with the Church. Since ancient times the bishop, visible head of a particular Church, has thus rightfully been considered to be the one who principally has the power and ministry of reconciliation: he is the moderator of the penitential discipline. Priests, his collaborators, exercise it to the extent that they have received the commission either from their bishop (or religious superior) or the Pope, according to the law of the Church.

1463 Certain particularly grave sins incur excommunication, the most severe ecclesiastical penalty, which impedes the reception of the sacraments and the exercise of certain ecclesiastical acts, and for which absolution consequently cannot be granted, according to canon law, except by the Pope, the bishop of the place or priests authorized by them. In danger of death any priest, even if deprived of faculties for hearing confessions, can absolve from every sin and excommunication.

1464 Priests must encourage the faithful to come to the sacrament of Penance and must make themselves available to celebrate this sacrament each time Christians reasonably ask for it.

1465 When he celebrates the sacrament of Penance, the priest is fulfilling the ministry of the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, of the Good Samaritan who binds up wounds, of the Father who awaits the prodigal son and welcomes him on his return, and of the just and impartial judge whose judgment is both just and merciful. The priest is the sign and the instrument of God's merciful love for the sinner.

1466 The confessor is not the master of God's forgiveness, but its servant. The minister of this sacrament should unite himself to the intention and charity of Christ. He should have a proven knowledge of Christian behavior, experience of human affairs, respect and sensitivity toward the one who has fallen; he must love the truth, be faithful to the Magisterium of the Church, and lead the penitent with patience toward healing and full maturity. He must pray and do penance for his penitent, entrusting him to the Lord's mercy.

1467 Given the delicacy and greatness of this ministry and the respect due to persons, the Church declares that every priest who hears confessions is bound under very severe penalties to keep absolute secrecy regarding the sins that his penitents have confessed to him. He can make no use of knowledge that confession gives him about penitents' lives. This secret, which admits of no exceptions, is called the "sacramental seal," because what the penitent has made known to the priest remains "sealed" by the sacrament.

THE EFFECTS OF THIS SACRAMENT

1468 "The whole power of the sacrament of Penance consists in restoring us to God's grace and joining us with him in an intimate friendship." Reconciliation with God is thus the purpose and effect of this sacrament. For those who receive the sacrament of Penance with contrite heart and religious disposition, reconciliation "is usually followed by peace and serenity of conscience with strong spiritual consolation." Indeed the sacrament of Reconciliation with God brings about a true "spiritual resurrection," restoration of the dignity and blessings of the life of the children of God, of which the most precious is friendship with God.

1469 This sacrament reconciles us with the Church. Sin damages or even breaks fraternal communion. The sacrament of Penance repairs or restores it. In this sense it does not simply heal the one restored to ecclesial communion, but has also a revitalizing effect on the life of the Church which suffered from the sin of one of her members. Re-established or strengthened in the communion of saints, the sinner is made stronger by the exchange of spiritual goods among all the living members of the Body of Christ, whether still on pilgrimage or already in the heavenly homeland:

It must be recalled that . . . this reconciliation with God leads, as it were, to other reconciliations, which repair the other breaches caused by sin. The forgiven penitent is reconciled with himself in his inmost being, where he regains his innermost truth. He is reconciled with his brethren whom he has in some way offended and wounded. He is reconciled with the Church. He is reconciled with all creation.

1470 In this sacrament, the sinner, placing himself before the merciful judgment of God, anticipates in a certain way the judgment to which he will be subjected at the end of his earthly life. For it is now, in this life, that we are offered the choice between life and death, and it is only by the road of conversion that we can enter the Kingdom, from which one is excluded by grave sin. In converting to Christ through penance and faith, the sinner passes from death to life and "does not come into judgment."

INDULGENCES

1471 The doctrine and practice of indulgences in the Church are closely linked to the effects of the sacrament of Penance.

What is an indulgence?

"An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints."

"An indulgence is partial or plenary according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin." Indulgences may be applied to the living or the dead.

The punishments of sin

1472 To understand this doctrine and practice of the Church, it is necessary to understand that sin has a double consequence. Grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life, the privation of which is called the "eternal punishment" of sin. On the other hand every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth, or after death in the state called Purgatory. This purification frees one from what is called the "temporal punishment" of sin. These two punishments must not be conceived of as a kind of vengeance inflicted by God from without, but as following from the very nature of sin. A conversion which proceeds from a fervent charity can attain the complete purification of the sinner in such a way that no punishment would remain.

1473 The forgiveness of sin and restoration of communion with God entail the remission of the eternal punishment of sin, but temporal punishment of sin remains. While patiently bearing sufferings and trials of all kinds and, when the day comes, serenely facing death, the Christian must strive to accept this temporal punishment of sin as a grace. He should strive by works of mercy and charity, as well as by prayer and the various practices of penance, to put off completely the "old man" and to put on the "new man."

In the Communion of Saints

1474 The Christian who seeks to purify himself of his sin and to become holy with the help of God's grace is not alone. "The life of each of God's children is joined in Christ and through Christ in a wonderful way to the life of all the other Christian brethren in the supernatural unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, as in a single mystical person."

1475 In the communion of saints, "a perennial link of charity exists between the faithful who have already reached their heavenly home, those who are expiating their sins in purgatory and those who are still pilgrims on earth. between them there is, too, an abundant exchange of all good things." In this wonderful exchange, the holiness of one profits others, well beyond the harm that the sin of one could cause others. Thus recourse to the communion of saints lets the contrite sinner be more promptly and efficaciously purified of the punishments for sin.

1476 We also call these spiritual goods of the communion of saints the Church's treasury, which is "not the sum total of the material goods which have accumulated during the course of the centuries. On the contrary the 'treasury of the Church' is the infinite value, which can never be exhausted, which Christ's merits have before God. They were offered so that the whole of mankind could be set free from sin and attain communion with the Father. In Christ, the Redeemer himself, the satisfactions and merits of his Redemption exist and find their efficacy."

1477 "This treasury includes as well the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are truly immense, unfathomable, and even pristine in their value before God. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by his grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission the Father entrusted to them. In this way they attained their own salvation and at the same time cooperated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body."

Obtaining indulgence from God through the Church

1478 An indulgence is obtained through the Church who, by virtue of the power of binding and loosing granted her by Christ Jesus, intervenes in favor of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishments due for their sins. Thus the Church does not want simply to come to the aid of these Christians, but also to spur them to works of devotion, penance, and charity.

1479 Since the faithful departed now being purified are also members of the same communion of saints, one way we can help them is to obtain indulgences for them, so that the temporal punishments due for their sins may be remitted.

THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

1480 Like all the sacraments, Penance is a liturgical action. The elements of the celebration are ordinarily these: a greeting and blessing from the priest, reading the word of God to illuminate the conscience and elicit contrition, and an exhortation to repentance; the confession, which acknowledges sins and makes them known to the priest; the imposition and acceptance of a penance; the priest's absolution; a prayer of thanksgiving and praise and dismissal with the blessing of the priest.

1481 The Byzantine Liturgy recognizes several formulas of absolution, in the form of invocation, which admirably express the mystery of forgiveness: "May the same God, who through the Prophet Nathan forgave David when he confessed his sins, who forgave Peter when he wept bitterly, the prostitute when she washed his feet with her tears, the Pharisee, and the prodigal son, through me, a sinner, forgive you both in this life and in the next and enable you to appear before his awe-inspiring tribunal without condemnation, he who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen."

1482 The sacrament of Penance can also take place in the framework of a communal celebration in which we prepare ourselves together for confession and give thanks together for the forgiveness received. Here, the personal confession of sins and individual absolution are inserted into a liturgy of the word of God with readings and a homily, an examination of conscience conducted in common, a communal request for forgiveness, the Our Father and a thanksgiving in common. This communal celebration expresses more clearly the ecclesial character of penance. However, regardless of its manner of celebration the sacrament of Penance is always, by its very nature, a liturgical action, and therefore an ecclesial and public action.

1483 In case of grave necessity recourse may be had to a communal celebration of reconciliation with general confession and general absolution. Grave necessity of this sort can arise when there is imminent danger of death without sufficient time for the priest or priests to hear each penitent's confession. Grave necessity can also exist when, given the number of penitents, there are not enough confessors to hear individual confessions properly in a reasonable time, so that the penitents through no fault of their own would be deprived of sacramental grace or Holy Communion for a long time. In this case, for the absolution to be valid the faithful must have the intention of individually confessing their sins in the time required. The diocesan bishop is the judge of whether or not the conditions required for general absolution exist. A large gathering of the faithful on the occasion of major feasts or pilgrimages does not constitute a case of grave necessity.

1484 "Individual, integral confession and absolution remain the only ordinary way for the faithful to reconcile themselves with God and the Church, unless physical or moral impossibility excuses from this kind of confession." There are profound reasons for this. Christ is at work in each of the sacraments. He personally addresses every sinner: "My son, your sins are forgiven." He is the physician tending each one of the sick who need him to cure them. He raises them up and reintegrates them into fraternal communion. Personal confession is thus the form most expressive of reconciliation with God and with the Church.

Sacrament of Reconciliation Review Questions

DIRECTION: Suggested review questions for candidates

1. What is the sacrament of Reconciliation?

Reconciliation is the way Jesus has given to me to start over. In Reconciliation my sins that I commit after I am baptized are forgiven. A good confession is the sure way to be in the state of grace before receiving Confirmation. A priest listens to my sins and forgives me in the name of Jesus Christ.

2. What is a sin?

Sins are actions and choices we make when we choose to disrespect others, ourselves, and God. We forget God's love for us. We fail to act the way Jesus teaches. We act mean and selfish.

4. How do I find out what my sins are? How do I "examine my conscience"

Do I share with others?

Do I use God's name for praying and not swear God's name for fun or in anger?

Do I worship God at Mass on Sunday?

Do I show help when people ask me?

Do I respect others? And myself?

Have I been hateful or mean to anyone?

Have I done anything to hurt my own or someone else's body?

Have I taken or destroyed things that belong to others?

Do I tell the truth? Do I gossip about others?

Do I forgive instead of trying to get even?

Have I been jealous of what others have?

Do I treat others fairly?



5. How do I make a good confession?

First: Find out what my sins are.

Second: Go into the confessional and begin with the sign of the cross: "Bless me Father, for I have sinned. This is my first confession." Or tell the priest how long it has been since your last confession.

Third: Tell the priest your sins.

Fourth: Listen to the words of advice the priest tells you.

Fifth: Say an Act of Contrition loud enough for the priest to hear.

Sixth: Listen to the prayer of "absolution" the priest says.

Seventh: Do the penance the priest gives you. If you don't understand what he says be sure and ask him to explain.

Eighth: Promise to try not to sin again.

6. How often should I go to confession?

After First Reconciliation a person should celebrate the Sacrament monthly, or at least every other month, in preparation for Confirmation and First Eucharist. Again, it would be hoped that others in the household of faith would be joining them in frequenting this Sacrament