



Ministry of Reconciliation

What is the Ministry of Reconciliation?

What is the Ministry of Reconciliation (also commonly known as Absolution, Penance, Reconciliation, or Confession)? Our catechism describes this ministry in questions and answers #120 and #121:

120. What is absolution?

“After repenting and confessing my sins to God in the presence of a priest...”

First, we must come to Confession with a heart desiring repentance. The Ministry of Reconciliation is not “fast food” cheap grace. A sorrow for sin (or at least a sorrow for not having appropriate sorrow for sin) and faith (that is trust) in Christ is necessary. The Ministry of Reconciliation is about the good news of Jesus’ free forgiveness and renewal of our hearts given to us by grace through faith.

Notice that confession is made **to God** in the presence of a priest. Although the priest hears your confession, it is crucial to understand that you are ultimately confessing your sins before God. All of your sin harms this world, yourself, and your neighbor, yet it is ultimately against the God who created all and sustains all by his gracious will. As David prays, “Against you, you only, have I sinned” (Ps 51:4 ESV). Simply put, Confession is about encountering Jesus.

“...the priest declares God’s forgiveness to me with authority given by God.”

The priest upon hearing your confession has been given authority by God to declare God’s forgiveness to you. This is why he is called a “minister” because he ministers God’s grace. This is the sacramental reality of the Church as expressed in the priest. In other words, God works by his Word and Spirit through humans. This is the principle of incarnation (God become flesh). As Jesus himself teaches us, “And when he had said this, he breathed on them (the apostles) and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you

withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld” (John 20:22 ESV). This is God’s great mercy and grace, that he became a human and continues to work through humans to bring healing to humans.

121. What grace does God give to you in absolution?

“In absolution, God conveys to me his pardon through the cross...”

Confession and absolution find their power in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is because of Jesus that you can have absolute confidence that your sins are forgiven. God “conveys” this blessing to you through his Word which is, “Your sins are forgiven you” (Luke 5:20b ESV). And unlike merely human words, God’s Word always performs what he describes, “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Gen 1:3 ESV). When God says you are forgiven, you *are* forgiven.

“... thus declaring to me reconciliation and peace with him, and bestowing upon me the assurance of his grace and salvation.”

Although the priest may offer you godly counsel or suggest certain spiritual practices to help your Christian walk, the substance of the Ministry of Reconciliation is declaring, giving, and assuring you of God’s unconditional love, his forgiveness, and the power of the Holy Spirit to transform you into the image of Christ.

Confession FAQ

Q: Do I have to?

A: No. Unlike in the Roman Catholic Church, the practice of the Ministry of Reconciliation in the Anglican tradition is purely voluntary and is **not** the only way for you to receive and be assured of God’s forgiveness. This is a spiritual practice available for you to help you grow in the Lord and find freedom from shame, guilt, and the power of sin.

Q: Is it confidential?

A: The 1979 Book of Common Prayer states, “The content of a confession is not normally a matter of subsequent discussion. The secrecy of a

confession is morally absolute for the confessor, and must under no circumstances be broken.”

Q: How do I prepare?

A: Before coming to Confession take time to ask the Holy Spirit for his guidance, and meditate on each of the Ten Commandments as interpreted by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount (a short guide to self examination can be found below). Take an account of the sins the Spirit brings to mind that have not yet been confessed, or are still causing shame and guilt, or are continuing patterns of behavior. Be specific and honest with yourself and God. Write these down if it helps you to remember and bring this with you to Confession. As stated before, although the minister may offer biblical counsel, the Ministry of Reconciliation is about forgiveness and not pastoral counseling.

Q: What do I do during Confession?

There is a kneeler provided for you to kneel as you confess. The minister will be separated by a screen in order to facilitate placing the focus upon God. When the priest says “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” you may cross yourself if you desire. If you have any questions feel free to ask the priest during Confession. The order for the Ministry of Reconciliation is found at the back of this booklet.

Q: How long will it take?

This depends on how much you have on your heart. Normally confessions last between 5 and 15 minutes.

Q: Why should I come to Confession?

There are many benefits but here are three. 1) By far the most important benefit of Confession is experiencing and knowing the love of God for you, a sinner. 2) It provides a safe place for you to begin to apply what you have heard and read from God’s Word in your daily life and find freedom from shame, guilt, and the power of sin. 3) It provides a time for self-reflection which is lacking in modern society.

Q: Will the priest bring up my sin at a later date?

No. Unlike pastoral counseling, the main purpose of Confession is forgiveness.

Q: How often would you recommend I come to Confession?

Come whenever a sin is burdening your conscience. Many people also find that regular monthly confession is helpful in their spiritual walk.

A Guide to Self-Examination for Adults

IMPORTANT: Before self-examination, always pray to invite the Holy Spirit to protect you and guide you in this exercise. Pray that God help you feel the appropriate sorrow for your sin, but know that God does not bring up your sin in order for you to live in shame and guilt, but to bring you to forgiveness and freedom in Jesus Christ.

1. I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me.

- Do I expect all good things and safety from God or do I look for good and safety from money, power, people, glory, etc?
- Do I seek to love God with my entire self?
- Have I been involved in occult, superstitious practices, or Christ-less religion?
- Do I seek to surrender myself to God's Word or do I resist it?
- Do I pray every day?

2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

- Have I used God's name as a curse instead of a blessing?
- Have I made a false oath using God's name?
- Have I used God as a pretense to not love my neighbor?
- Have I made God another way for me to get what I want or avoid responsibility for my actions?
- Have I called myself a "Christian" but lived unlike Christ?

3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.

- Have I deliberately missed Church service?

-Have I neglected taking time away from work so that I can invest in my spiritual growth and my family?

-Am I addicted to work? Am I addicted to being “always connected?”

4. Honor your father and your mother.

-Do I honor my parents/relatives with my words and deeds, and care for their needs if they are infirm or aged?

-Am I grateful for my parents despite their failures?

-Do I honor the civil authorities in my words and deeds?

-Do I spend time to nurture my children?

5. You shall not kill.

-Have I had an abortion or encouraged anyone to have an abortion?

-Have I physically harmed anyone?

-Have I abused alcohol or drugs?

-Did I, through my example, lead someone into sin?

-Have I been angry, resentful, or even hateful?

-Have I gossiped or used my words to tear someone down?

-Have I mutilated my body?

-Have I viewed others as less than myself for any reason, including ethnic group, culture, sex, age, nationality, etc?

-Have I participated in or approved of euthanasia?

-Do I always seek to protect the vulnerable from harm?

6. You shall not commit adultery.

-Have I been faithful to love and serve my spouse in thought and action?

-Have I engaged in any sexual activity outside of marriage?

-Am I open to God blessing my marriage with new life?

-Do I practice masturbation?

-Do I seek to direct my thoughts and imaginations away from lust toward God's purpose for my sexuality?

-Have I respected others (soul and body) as made in God's image and therefore intrinsically valuable or have I thought of other people as objects to be used?

-Have I been involved in homosexual activity?

-Am I careful to dress with modesty?

7. You shall not steal.

- Have I taken what is not mine?
- Have I returned or made restitution for what I have stolen?
- If unemployed, am I seeking gainful employment?
- Do I waste time that I should use for work, school, and family?
- Do I put supporting my family at risk through gambling or compulsive spending?
- Do I pay my debts and bills promptly?
- Do I share what I have with the poor?
- Do I give to my local church?
- Do I pay my workers a fair wage for their work?

8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

- Have I lied?
- Have I gossiped or slandered anyone?
- Am I sincere in my dealings with others?
- Am I critical, negative or uncharitable in my thoughts of someone else?
- Do I keep secret what should be kept confidential?

9. You shall not desire your neighbor's wife.

- Have I indulged in inappropriate thoughts?
- Have I cultivated these thoughts through my choices of reading, movies, and television, including pornography?
- When tempted do I immediately pray to God for rescue?
- Have I treated others disrespectfully in my words or actions?

10. You shall not desire your neighbor's goods.

- Am I jealous of what other people have?
- Do I envy the family, status, or possessions of others?
- Am I greedy or selfish? Do I consider what I have as "mine" or as temporarily entrusted to me by God?
- Do I find my happiness in acquiring or keeping material possessions?

Ministry of Reconciliation

Parishioner **Bless me, for I have sinned.**

Minister The Lord be in your heart and upon your lips that you may truly and humbly confess your sins: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.+ Amen.

Parishioner **I confess to Almighty God, to his Church, and to you, that I have sinned by my own fault in thought, word, and deed, in things done and left undone; especially_____.** For these and all other sins that I cannot now remember, I am truly sorry. I pray God to have mercy on me. I firmly intend amendment of life, and I humbly beg forgiveness of God and his Church, and ask you for counsel, direction, and absolution.

[Here the Minister may offer counsel, direction, or comfort.]

Minister Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given power to his Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgive you all your offenses; and by his authority committed to me, I absolve you from all your sins: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.+ Amen. The Lord has put away all your sins.

Parishioner **Thanks be to God.**

Minister O most loving Father, by your mercy you put away the sins of those who truly repent, and remember their sins no more. Restore and renew in your servant whatever has been corrupted by the fraud and malice of the devil, or by his/her own selfish will and weakness. Preserve and protect him/her within the fellowship of the Church; hear his/her prayers and relieve his/her pain; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Go live in peace, and pray for me, a sinner.

[You may now leave.]