

Doctrinal Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the RCIA
Penance and Reconciliation

Catechist Preparation

Clarifying the Essentials

The new life in Christ we are given in Baptism does not abolish our frailties and weaknesses.

- ◆ Even the baptized experience concupiscence, that is, the inclination to sin. (See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] 1426.)
- ◆ All mortal (serious) sins must be confessed in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation to obtain God's forgiveness at least once a year and always before receiving Holy Communion. (See CCC 1457.)
- ◆ Celebrating this sacrament builds up a correct conscience and fights against evil tendencies. (See CCC 1458.)

Reconciling with God cannot be separated from reconciling with the Church.

- ◆ Sin offends against God but also causes a rift between us and God's Church, impairing our communion with the Church. (See CCC 1440.)
- ◆ The spiritual effects of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation include: remission of eternal punishment incurred by mortal sin, partial remission of temporal punishments due to sin, a more peaceful conscience, and an increase in spiritual strength for fighting against evil. (See CCC 1496.)

Why Is This Important?

Sin tends, by its nature, to overwhelm us. In the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, we have recourse to Christ's healing balm, his rescuing love.

No sin is too great for God to heal. The Holy Spirit works tirelessly to convince us in our darkest moments that we are always welcomed back to divine love, mercy, and life in this sacrament.

*Whoever confesses his sins . . .
is already working with God.*

SAINT AUGUSTINE

Doctrinal Session Guide

(Approximately 60 minutes)

Arrange the space with chairs and a focal point with a candle, Bible, and a purple stole. Provide name tags and have some refreshments available.

Welcome

Greet the participants as they arrive, and take time for introductions. If you meet at the parish, gather near the reconciliation space. Provide a copy of the Confiteor for each person, and pray this prayer together.

Engage

Invite the participants to think of an experience of forgiveness in their own life, and invite them to share the story with one other person. (Confidentiality is essential.)

Teach

Summarize or invite the group to read silently Church Teaching. Then discuss the following:

- ◆ Conversion is a lifelong process of turning away from sin and turning toward God. When we sin, we turn away from God. We also separate ourselves from others on the journey with us.
- ◆ We need to say we are sorry and to continue forward on our conversion journey.
- ◆ God is always ready to accept our sorrow. There is no sin that God will not forgive.
- ◆ The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is a Sacrament of Healing. It heals the pain of separation and division that is the result of sin.

Apply

Encourage the participants to complete the following statements and reflect on the questions:

From the prayer, discussion, and study for this topic, I understand the Church's teaching to be . . .

I am challenged to live the message of this teaching by . . .

Pray

Pray the Act of Contrition (found in the Resources section) or the Confiteor. Pray aloud: *May the Lord guide [our] hearts in the way of his love. Amen. (Rite of Penance 58)*