



National Apostolate for
Inclusion Ministry

Material on this tip sheet
is adapted and
reproduced from
Chapter 1, **Sacramental
Preparation
Reconciliation:
Individualizing
Lesson Plans**
© 1996 University of
Dayton.
Reprinted with
Permission for Internet
Dissemination.

Nihil Obstat:

The Rev. Robert L Hagedorn
March 2, 1996

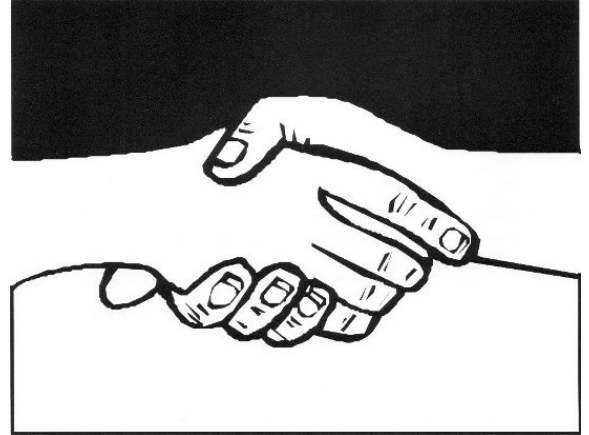
Imprimatur:

The Most Reverend
Carl K. Moeddel
Vicar General and Auxiliary
Bishop
Archdiocese of Cincinnati
March 5, 1996

*Promoting the Full Inclusion of People with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities in the
Life of the Catholic Church*

What is Reconciliation

By Marilyn Bishop



Introduction

In this tip sheet, preparation for the sacrament of Reconciliation will focus on catechesis of adults and children with intellectual, cognitive and developmental disabilities. According to the *Guidelines for Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, published by the U.S. Catholic Bishops in 1995, "As long as the individual is capable of having a sense of contrition for having committed sins, even if he or she cannot describe the sin precisely in words, the person may receive sacramental absolution. Those with profound mental disabilities who cannot experience even minimal contrition may be invited to participate in penitential services with the rest of the community to the extent of their ability."

What is the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

The church is to invite all people to repent and become a community of followers of Jesus Christ. Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist all recognize and celebrate the conversion (or re-conversion) of a people to God. Reconciliation is a rite by which through the ministry of the Church, we are reconciled to God even when we have sinned gravely after being liberated from original sin in Baptism. The sacrament may be celebrated also by those who have sinned but not gravely.

Most people are aware of both offending others and being offended. The sacrament of Reconciliation formalizes the awareness that there is a need for forgiveness individually and within the context of community. A person with limited cognitive ability can learn that there are consequences to their hurtful actions. While choices that lead to wounding another person may not carry clear moral culpability when done by a person who is intellectually/developmentally disabled, there is an awareness that hurt has been caused. From such feelings, the desire for reconciliation can be nurtured.

Children and adults with a mental age of pre-adolescence can do wrong. They commit deeds which hurt others. They know what they are doing and have some moral responsibility. However, this does not constitute a mature moral consciousness. Therefore, the sacrament of Reconciliation for the person with intellectual/developmental disabilities must focus on the

© 2010 National Apostolate for Inclusion Ministry. All Rights Reserved. Exact copies of this Information Sheet may be made for personal use or for distribution in a diocese or local congregation provided the material is distributed free of charge. For all other uses, permission must be obtained from the National Apostolate for Inclusion Ministry.

statement of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “This sacrament is called the sacrament of reconciliation, because it imparts to the sinner the love of God who reconciles: ‘Be reconciled to God.’ (2 Cor 5:20). He who lives by God’s merciful love is ready to respond to the Lord’s call: ‘Go, first be reconciled to your brother.’ (Mt 5:24)”

True reconciliation has three key elements: contrition, confession, and satisfaction. Contrition implies genuine sorrow; confession refers to the actual confessing of the sins in the sacrament. Satisfaction means the person is willing to do one’s best to avoid the sin and to do a penance.

The elements of the sacrament of Reconciliation to be emphasized for the person with intellectual/developmental disabilities are: to feel sorry, to express in some way that he or she hurt someone, and to indicate that he or she will try to avoid the hurtful action in the future.

Much flexibility must be offered to the person in the way that they participate in the sacrament. Simple means for participation must be planned.

Symbols and Rituals of the Sacrament

Symbols

The symbols of the sacrament of Reconciliation are not as unique for this sacrament as they are for some of the other sacraments. However, there are certain objects, places and people who can be considered symbols for this sacrament.

Priest: The priest is a symbol of Jesus. His presence in the Reconciliation room or in the body of the Church expresses the closeness of Jesus Christ to his faithful.

Church Building: Although this sacrament may be received in many surroundings, the church building often brings the person closer to the feeling of the sacred and thus provides an environment suitable for reflection and reconciliation with God.

Confessional or Reconciliation Room: The reconciliation room provides an atmosphere of privacy and confidentiality.

Bible: The Bible, placed in a place of prominence, is used with reverence to express that it contains the reconciling words of God, not mere human words.

Rituals

The rituals of the sacrament of Reconciliation are person centered. They may occur in a communal (group) gathering or a one-on-one setting. Either way, the priest, as representative of Jesus Christ, is the presider.

Welcome: The priest greets the person in a warm manner. This helps the individual to feel comfortable.

Scripture Reading: The word of God is read to affirm the connection between sin and God’s forgiveness.

Confession of Sins: The person admits his or her sins, confessing his or her wrongdoing.

Act of Contrition: The person expresses sorrow for the action.

Absolution: The priest blesses the person in the name of Christ and through this prayer, reconciles the sinner with the Church. This formula expresses both God’s forgiveness and the return to the bosom of the People of God:

*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.*

Penance: The priest assigns a prayer or activity to the person which will support the person in the new way of life.

Proclamation: At the close of the ritual, the person is sent forth with a prayer of joy that recognizes the reconciliation event.

What Does the Sacrament of Reconciliation Do?

Since this tip sheet focuses on the sacrament for people with limited cognitive ability, reconciliation rather than sin and punishment are emphasized. These such as God's love and welcome, God's help when making choices, plus God's forgiveness are to be emphasized. Since the student with intellectual/developmental disabilities does not easily generalize from one situation to the next, the catechist must be careful to provide clear examples of these themes.

For all people, reconciliation with God is the chief purpose and effect of the sacrament of Reconciliation. Other effects are within the person and other are within the church community.

Effects of the sacrament for the individual

The most important effect of the sacrament for the individual is that sins are forgiven. Also, those who receive the sacrament of Reconciliation in an appropriate manner usually experience peace and serenity in their heart. Additionally, the sacrament deepens the dignity and blessings of life with God and intensifies friendship with God.

This sacrament, like all of the others, confers grace on the individual which inspires the person to renew their orientation to do good, to love others and to perform works of mercy and charity. In other words, the sacrament helps the person to be good to others, which is something that most people with intellectual/developmental disabilities can understand.

Effects of the sacrament on the community

The primary effect of the sacrament on the community is that the sacrament repairs the break caused by sin and the damage it causes to the community. It revitalizes the life of the Church in a way similar to the revitalization of a family when someone who has been alienated returns to the love and warmth of the household.

Concluding Remarks

There is a need for the sacrament of Reconciliation which helps one to experience the feeling of coming home to one's true place where one finds liberation from fear and frustration. There is a need to find one's authentic existence, and to find peace from restlessness, anxiety and discontent. And ultimately to find peace with God and other people.

There is a need to offer a rite in which the person not only expresses contrition, receives penance and absolution but also feels genuine contrition and a purpose of amendment. We



National Apostolate for
Inclusion Ministry

may not know that the person fully comprehends the entire aspects of contrition, penance and absolution. However, we can trust in the Lord to bring real moments of peace and reconciliation to the person whose intellectual ability and judgment are less than average. The community is enriched by full participation of all of its members.

NATIONAL APOSTOLATE
FOR INCLUSION
MINISTRY

P.O. Box 218
Riverdale, MD 20738
phone: 800.736.1280
email: qnafim@aol.com

www.nafim.org