

If someone is detected in sin, you who live by the spirit should gently set him right, each of you trying to avoid falling into temptation himself. Help carry one another's burdens; in that way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

GAL 6: 1-2

PENANCE

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PENANCE

I. INTRODUCTION

Repentance and reconciliation were central to the saving mission of Jesus Christ. Through the blood of the cross, Christ reconciled the world to himself and offered us the forgiveness for our sins. Christ forgave sinners and brought healing to those burdened by their sins. He beckoned to them with parables of the lost sheep and the prodigal son, and welcomed Zacchaeus into companionship. The mercy Christ offered stirred hearts, minds, and souls to repentance and conversion of heart.

Jesus' ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation is continued in the sacrament of Penance. This sacrament is a call to conversion that is known by various names. Together these names provide a multifaceted understanding of this sacrament of the Church and its meaning in our lives. It is one of the sacraments of healing, and is variously called the sacrament of penance, confession, forgiveness, reconciliation, and the "second conversion," for it restores baptismal grace (see *CCC*, 1423-1424, and 1427).

Christ has blessed us with the sacrament of Penance to heal persons of sins committed after baptism, to strengthen us against temptation and weakness, and to unify us in the Body of Christ that we might follow him more closely and be strengthened to bear witness to his Gospel in the world.

II. RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

- PN 1. All baptized Catholics are strongly encouraged to receive the sacrament of Penance on a regular basis. The seasons of Advent and Lent are times when the celebration of this sacrament is especially fitting. Baptized Catholics who are in a state of serious sin at any time are obliged to receive the sacrament of Penance in order to be able to receive Holy Communion.**
- PN 2. Pastors are to provide weekly opportunities for the celebration of Penance at times convenient to parishioners. The faithful should have the opportunity to receive the sacrament at a regularly scheduled time in close proximity to the weekend Mass schedule.**
- PN 3. Individual confession—Form I or Form II of the Rite of Penance—is the sole ordinary means for a penitent to be**

reconciled with God (*CIC*, c. 960). Therefore, in accordance with the pastoral practice of the Universal Church, general absolution—Form III of the Rite of Penance—is not to be given except in those extraordinary cases approved by the Archbishop.

- 3.a. Deaneries are to organize themselves to ensure adequate confessors for reconciliation services conducted by individual parishes. Priests are to respond generously to deanery requests for their assistance as confessors.
- 3.b. In the event of hazardous weather or other emergencies (e.g.: civil conflict, natural disaster, etc.) the priest may give general absolution with subsequent notification given to the Archbishop (cf., Rite of Penance). In such exceptional circumstances, the priest is to exercise pastoral judgment according to the mind and heart of the Church, and to notify the Archbishop as soon as possible. In other doubtful cases, the permission of the Archbishop is to be sought before administering the sacrament in the form of general absolution.
- 3.c. The procedure for such emergencies or exigent circumstances is as follows:
 - During regular business hours, Monday through Friday, call the Chancery Office at 206-382-4560.
 - After business hours, or on weekends, call 425-608-3745.

PN 4. Candidates preparing for full communion should receive the sacrament of Penance prior to their reception of the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist.

PN 5. Because, through Baptism, catechumens and elect are cleansed from both original and personal sin, those who are not baptized are not to participate in the sacrament of Penance prior to their Baptism (see *CIC*, c. 842 §1).

III. THE MINISTER OF PENANCE

PN 6. Only a priest may administer the sacrament of Penance.

PN 7. All penitents have the right to choose their own confessor, and to decide whether they will celebrate the sacrament face to face or anonymously.

Parishes should provide reconciliation rooms that offer parishioners the option of celebrating the sacrament of Penance in either format.

IV. CONFIDENTIALITY: THE SEAL OF CONFESSION

PN 8. A person's confession in the sacrament of Penance is to be held in the strictest confidence, and no one is to repeat what has been heard in the confession of another. If one finds a list of someone's sins, the list and the one who reads it are bound by this sacramental "seal of confession."

Only the penitent, with regard to his/her own confession, is not bound by the seal. All penitents should exercise discretion and prudence, as casual talk about one's own confession may amount to sinful behavior owing to the risk of scandal, and of damage to the reputation of the confessor who remains bound by the sacramental seal.

PN 9. Interpreters assisting penitents and confessors who do not speak the same language are also bound by the seal of confession.

V. DOCUMENTATION

See archdiocesan *Sacramental Records Policies*: SR, V, "Reconciliation."