

Notes from our Town Hall on February 13, 2022

We posed the following questions around the sacrament of Reconciliation and proceeded to share and unpack our own experiences of the sacrament, what we consider to be essential elements of the sacrament and thoughts about how to proceed in reimagining the sacrament in the Independent Catholic Movement.

1. The Catholic Church considers Reconciliation to be a healing sacrament.
Has that been your experience?
2. What do you think are the benefits of receiving this sacrament of reconciliation?
What are the benefits of receiving this sacrament from a priest?
What are the benefits of confessing your sins directly to God?
3. What elements need to be part of our Reconciliation service?
regreening
restoring relationship
renewing commitment to follow God
words of absolution

Whether or not people experienced healing from this sacrament depended to a large extent on who was hearing the confession. The idea that sacrament was intended to be healing was a new concept to some.

Some of the **elements that were necessary for a healing to occur** were:

- The confessor listened, as in, was actually present and attentive
- The confessor listened without judgment or focus on punishment
- The confessor listened with compassion
- The confessor listened in such a way that the person felt “heard”
- The confessor is trusted, although sometimes one may opt to go to a confessor who they do not know to preserve anonymity

The possibility of **healing** was increased if:

- The person comes to the sacrament with a ‘contrite’ heart rather than out of a sense of duty. A contrite heart helps us remember for next time – if we show up out of sense of duty, we might not learn from the experience because we are just going through the motions.
- We accept the need to say we are sorry, and the courage to say it!
- Time was spent before receiving the sacrament in thoughtful reflection, which would be aided by in-depth and nuanced prompts that invite one to go deeper, rather than mentally running through the 10 commandments checklist.
- We let go of the formulaic black/white concept of sin and move toward an understanding of sin as ‘missing the mark,’ or moving away from God instead of moving ‘Godward.’

- We acknowledge that life is complicated and nuanced, therefore, relying on a format taught to second graders may no longer be helpful for adults.
- Attendees seemed interested in developing helpful prompts for reflection to be addressed in our next Town Hall on creating a new examination of conscience.

Pros and Cons of confessing directly to God versus confessing through another person, be it a priest, spiritual director, or trusted friend:

- A human confessor can help discern and give one clarity in understanding what work still remains undone, like forgiving oneself.
- A human confessor can **validate** one's experience and give reassurance that "God has already forgiven you" even if those words are only a seed planted that will bloom later.
- A human confessor can **witness** a person's experience and help keep them accountable.
- It makes no sense to those raised in Protestant religion to relying on priest as mediator.

We discussed the issue of **vulnerability**.

- It can be stressful to open yourself up to the scrutiny of another.
- Tenderness of heart is required by both parties: a listening to where the heart is coming from, and a willingness to open the dark alleyways to God's healing light which can illuminate the darkness.
- We need more guidance on how to receive forgiveness – from God, from the ones we hurt, and from ourselves for being human
- Also needed is a recognition that our sins bring us to an awareness that we have growing edges: failing is how we learn to be better, to do better.
- "God didn't make us finished;" we have some work to do to grow into our full personhood
- *****reciprocal relationship** We could use some teaching on the relationship between eucharist and reconciliation. We have been taught that a confession and a clean heart are necessary prerequisites for receiving the Eucharist. But the opposite may make more sense: It is the Eucharist that heals us so that we are empowered to realign ourselves to live more like Christ.

Communal reconciliation services received lots of support among attendees. Communal service

- is ideally conducted in sacred prayerful environment where we are invited to talk to God in the silence of our hearts while being supported in community with others.
- makes sense to use a communal setting to heal that rift in communal relationships that sin causes.
- amplifies the idea that we are all on equal footing – we are all humans and all prone to missing the mark.
- helps us lift one another up, together.
- eliminates the 'us-them' clergy-laity dichotomy inherent in confessing to priest who has the power to absolve.
- underscores the idea that we are called to be concerned with communal well-being and salvation rather than only being worried about "my" sins and "my" getting into heaven.

Did we adequately cover the third question of identifying the essential elements of our new Rite of Reconciliation? Here are some thoughts that did come up: Our Rite of Reconciliation will include:

- idea that mercy is instantaneous, and forgiveness is already granted with or without words of absolution.
- words of absolution that make clear that it is Christ who absolves, not the priest.
- words of absolution that each one of us can use when the Spirit calls us to, and know that this power is not limited to the officially ordained. **Can we develop language for people to use?**
- idea that invites restoration and regreening, perhaps using a garden metaphor: reconciliation is like pulling up the weeds that can crowd out the healthy growth and allowing the whole garden to flourish.
- new ideas for “penance:” Rather than repeating memorized prayers on auto pilot, could we receive suggestions on how to do better/live better or make it right.
- recognizing that many times we are already living our penance.