

Notes from our Town Hall on March 13, 2022

At this second Town Hall on Reconciliation, we attempted to identify the essential elements of the sacrament and began exploring a framework for writing our own examination of conscience. Our hope is that we can have the first iteration of the examination of conscience ready before our communal Reconciliation Service on April 8th at 7pm.

Beginning with an emphasis on the sacrament as renewing, regreening and restoring our relationships with God, with others, and especially with ourselves (rather than a punishing, retributive focus), we identified the following four elements:

1. Examination of Conscience: Reflecting on the rightness of our relations with (1) God, (2) others, (3) self, and (4) creation make up the framework for inviting community input. We talked about the level of specificity. Some may need lots of detailed questions, others may feel that too much specificity creates loopholes and feels too much like second grade catechesis. We will invite community feedback in upcoming newsletters on this point.
2. Confession: While this is a private act between the person and God, the priest can stand in both as a community representative and as *Persona Christi*.
3. Act of Contrition: Here we ask for forgiveness and express sorrow for acts or omissions.
4. Words of Absolution: Importance of reflecting that it is Christ who absolves you, rather than the priest. Hearing these words is essential; they make us feel forgiven and loved even though we are sinners.

There was quite a bit of discussion about forgiving ourselves as the hardest task. It is helpful to realize that God created us as humans and allows us to learn from our mistakes. Those mistakes make us who we are and can engender empathy for others. The movie "Amish Grace" was raised as a beautiful example of the healing power of forgiveness.

Suggested language:

"May we have the grace to forgive ourselves."

"Until you can forgive others, just let "God forgive them!"

The language of the examination of conscience, and perhaps some teaching around this, should emphasize the need to release and let go of past sins once they have been confessed and absolved. Also raised was the awareness that forgiveness does not always result in reconciliation, especially with abusive others. In those cases, while forgiveness is challenging, reconciliation with those others may never be attainable. However, reconciliation with God is always available.

We also discussed the feeling of anger, which is not necessarily a sin itself, but can be a sign of injustices committed or values breached. How you respond to the anger makes a difference. We identified a need to identify helpful actions to take with respect to those who trigger anger in us:

Prayer, journaling, using lovingkindness meditation, sending out positive energy rather than allowing negativity to take root.

Notes from our Education Meeting of March 15, 2022

With Shanon, Carol and Mary in attendance, we have decided on the following steps:

1. Invite community input on developing the Examination of Conscience using a vague framework:

- a. How is my relationship with God?
 - i. Have I allowed people or things to take God's place?
 - ii. Have I moved toward or away from God?
- b. How is my relationship with self?
- c. How is my relationship with others?
 - i. How have I harmed others?
 - ii. How have I been harmed by others and am I still carrying that hurt?
- d. How is my relationship with earth/creation?

2. Craft and deliver teaching around

- Difference between forgiveness and reconciliation
- Spiritual bypassing
- Confession is not substitute for therapy
- The sacrament is a process of healing, not a magic wand
- Balance between confidential nature of sacrament and duty to report. Pat and I will be developing this piece, perhaps including input from Bishop Phil.