

Texts

Prayers The Rite of Penance offers nine model celebrations in Appendix II. These include appropriate prayer texts for use or adaptation.

Scripture The model celebrations include readings and further ideas can be found in the Lectionary, Volume III, Penance. Further ideas can come from the texts for Various Needs and Occasions in Volume III and the texts of the liturgical season in Volume I. There is no required number of readings.

Other Writings Before or after the readings from scripture, readings from the Fathers or other writers may be selected which will help the community and each person to a true awareness of sin and heartfelt sorrow, in other words, to bring about conversion of life. (Rite of Penance 36)

Elements

Season Whatever the celebration it would be appropriate consider how it might be affected by the liturgical season.

Attention will need to be paid to the liturgical **Environment**, the use of Symbol and **Music**.

Ministry Though in many cases it will be an ordained minister or presides it need not be. All ministers should be provided with the materials for them to prepare properly.

Penitential Celebrations

Notes for Parish Liturgy Groups

What are Penitential Celebrations?

The Penitential Celebration is at heart a time when God's people gather, and together listen more closely to his word, and reflect on their lives in the light of that word. It is a time for contemplation, for being attentive to those things that at other times we cannot find time to focus on. We take part in such services to learn how to live lives more deeply grounded in the Gospel.

Are they different to Reconciliation Services?

These forms of Penitential Celebration can easily be confused with the Penance or Reconciliation services that parishes regularly hold towards the end of Lent or Advent. Yet both services are quite distinct from each other.

The Penance or Reconciliation Service is when the parish gathers having kept Lent or Advent together, and to celebrate the communal form of the Sacrament of God's mercy together. The Penitential celebration, by contrast, is a liturgy which might be repeated a number of times during Lent or Advent, to help people to focus on the spiritual meaning of the season, so as to keep it fruitfully.

The Penitential celebration does not include the Sacrament of Penance because it is a service which helps people to prepare for that Sacrament. Sometimes however it is appropriate for opportunities for individual reconciliation to be provided after the Penitential Service.

Why do we need them?

The Church has a wide variety of rites and practices all of which have their different benefits.

The particular benefits of this form include:

- It gathers the Church for common prayer
- It is focussed on prayerful listening to the word of God

One further particular value of this form of liturgy is that a Penitential Celebration provides an opportunity to examine one's life in the light of the Gospel without pushing participants to any specific response.

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London SW1V 1PL. www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources

A Reconciliation Service, of course, does not oblige people to ‘go to Confession’ but the celebration of the sacrament is the high point of such a service. Yet for some people the time is not yet right for them to celebrate the sacrament. They may either feel excluded by such a service, or find that they have been persuaded to do too much too soon.

Penitential Celebrations make their own demands on people – they are not an easy option – but they provide much more space for people to consider the circumstances of their life, and how they find themselves called to respond to the challenge and consolation offered by the Gospel. Often well prepared and prayerfully executed Penitential celebrations which provide that greater space will help people to take their first steps back to the Sacrament of Penance.

For this reason there is great value in a parish scheduling a series of Penitential celebrations during the seasons of Lent and Advent, or indeed throughout the year.

Who might be invited?

Those for whom a Reconciliation Service is less suitable: members of an RCIA group, those in irregular relationships, or parents of children in sacramental programmes not frequenting the sacraments themselves.

What is the theme of these celebration?

As with all liturgy, the central focus is the Paschal Mystery, the saving life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and mystery of God’s reconciling love which this reveals.

There are many different dimensions of this mystery that we can focus on, and normally each celebration will take a single different focus. This focus may be related to the Liturgical Season being celebrated. Each person present will engage with this in a particular way, depending on their situation in life, and how they hear the word of God and seek to respond in prayer.

The focus of the celebration may be global rather individual. It would be entirely appropriate to use the Cycle of Prayer to highlight different aspects of the Church’s mission, exploring our participation in these through a series of celebrations throughout the year.

Preparing a Penitential Celebration

Starting points

The following questions may be helpful.

- Is this a single celebration or one of a series?
- Who else might be involved in the preparation?
- What will be the focus of the celebration?
- How will it be reflect and impact on the other ways the liturgical season is kept in the parish?

Model Structure

Introductory	Song	
Rites	Greeting Prayer	
Liturgy of the Word	Readings from Scripture [Psalms Song Silence Non-scriptural readings]	<i>One or more biblical readings be chosen with songs, psalms, or periods of silence inserted between them.</i>
Liturgy of Penance	Homily Examination of Conscience Act of Repentance Our Father Concluding Prayer	<i>It is desirable that the congregation, united in voice and spirit, pray together in a litany or in some other way suited to general participation.</i>
Concluding Rite	Song Blessing Dismissal	<i>The Rite of Penance offers a number of models for the Act of Repentance including litanies, familiar prayers such as the I Confess, sprinkling with holy water, or adoration of the Cross.</i>