

Resources for Parish Liturgy Groups

Preparing the Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution.

When a number of penitents assemble at the same time to receive sacramental reconciliation, it is fitting that they be prepared for the sacrament by a celebration of the word of God.

Those who will receive the sacrament at another time may also take part in the service.

Communal celebration shows more clearly the ecclesial nature of penance. The faithful listen together to the word of God, which proclaims his mercy and invites them to conversion; at the same time they examine the conformity of their lives with that word of God and help each other through common prayer. After each person has confessed his sins and received absolution, all praise God together for his wonderful deeds on behalf of the people he has gained for himself through the blood of his Son.

If necessary, several priests should be available in suitable places to hear individual confessions and to reconcile the penitents.

(Rite of Penance: Introduction 22)

Tasks

A: To prepare Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents

- Through reflection on the liturgy and scripture
- Through evaluation of previous parish celebrations

B: To review parish practice (see *Reviewing Parish Ministry of Rite of Penance*)

- Through a study of the Rite of Penance: Introduction
- An audit of current provision and practice
- Planning formation and catechesis

Outline

This process presumes that: the group will have had the opportunity to prepare before the meeting; key individuals will take responsibility for aspects of the celebration and that they will be part of the preparation process. These include the Presider, musician, ministers of the liturgical environment etc.

It is assumed that with good preparation there will only need to be one meeting of the parish liturgy group for this liturgy and that any working out of decisions will be carried out by individuals. The group will have an eye to how the rite fits into the celebration of the liturgical season that is being prepared and will reflect on the celebration of the rite afterwards either as part of its evaluation of the season or as individual celebration.

**Liturgy
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This leaflet is part of a series of material for parish liturgy groups that is being prepared by the Liturgy Office. Other parts of the series look at the role of the parish liturgy group and preparing liturgical seasons. Though this leaflet can be used by itself some of the points and processes will be explained more fully in other parts. *Liturgy Preparation — Rite of Penance* © 2004 Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. Excerpts from *Rite of Penance* © 1973 International Commission on English in the Liturgy, Inc. All rights reserved. It is included in the series of resources supporting the Rite of Penance prepared by the Liturgy Office. www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources

Preparation

Before the meeting various elements will need to be prepared beforehand. Some of these may be decisions that have already been made; others will be the individual preparation of members of the group. To assist this individual preparation material can be selected and distributed beforehand — questions for reflection may be included with this material.

Practical

- Is the celebration parochial or for a group of parishes?
- If it is for a group of parishes will the liturgy be prepared by a deanery liturgy group, the host parish or representatives from each of the parishes? (Though this process is written in terms of a parish group it can easily be applied to other groups)
- Who is presiding? Are they part of the preparation group?
- How many priests have been invited to assist with the individual confessions?
- Is it intended to offer refreshments afterwards? What arrangements have been made?
- Whose responsibility is it to look after the preparation of publicity and printed material?

Documents

Rite of Penance:

Introduction 22–30

Chapter II — structure (see page xxx)

In Lent — **Paschale Solemnitatis** Chapter I (6–26), in particular 6, 14–15 ¹

Texts

Lectionary (also found in Rite of Penance Chapter IV)

The complete set of Lectionary texts is quite long and unwieldy and allows for other readings to be selected. It would help before the preparation meeting if a selection of readings were chosen beforehand.

Rite of Penance; Chapter IV

Choices about the liturgical texts may be best made as part of or after the meeting. Reflection on the texts beforehand may assist understanding the Rite. In particular it may be helpful to look at the Opening Prayer and Concluding Prayer of Thanksgiving

- Greeting — 4 texts
- Opening Prayer — 6 texts
- Examination of Conscience — 2 examples (4 further examples in Appendix 3)
- General Confession of Sins — 6 examples
- Concluding Prayer of Thanksgiving — 7 texts
- Blessing — 4 texts
- Dismissal — 3 texts

¹ Both documents can be found on Liturgy Office website (www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources)

Music

Rite of Penance

The Rite offers a number of suggestions for the Opening Song and the Proclamation of Praise. It would be advantageous for musicians to consider the 16 biblical texts and identify settings in the parish repertoire.

Questions for Reflection

- Note down the images, words and phrases that strike you in your reflection on the texts.
- In what ways is the text speaking to you?
- In what ways is the text speaking to our community?
- Are there particular ways these could be expressed in your ministry/responsibility or on other ways?

Meeting

Reflection on Scripture

- The meeting begins with the reading of one of the chosen scripture readings (probably the Gospel)
 - The reading is read twice with a period of silence in between.
 - After the second reading members of the group are invited to share a word or phrase that struck them.
 - The leader will then ask the group to reflect on a question that he/she has prepared. The question will pick up on themes of the reading and may also reflect issues in the news and/or in the community.
 - The purpose of this reflection is to begin the meeting in prayer and to place the work of the group in this context.

Liturgy Preparation

- Review previous Celebrations of Reconciliation
 - It may be helpful for the liturgy group to recall previous celebrations: what had worked well, what could be improved.
 - This should not be a long discussion and it will be helped if the group is in the habit of recording and evaluating parish liturgies.
- Celebrating the Season
 - Many liturgy groups will work on preparing a liturgical season. How do these plans and ideas affect the Celebration of Reconciliation?
 - This may include specific music choices, aspects of the liturgical environment.
 - It is important to see this celebration in the context of the whole season. In Lent the celebration is part of the approach to celebrating the Easter Triduum but the rite should also be seen in the light of the preceding Sunday Masses and other liturgies which, in some way, are part of the preparation for reconciliation.
- Feedback from Preparation
 - At this point it may be helpful to gather together any of the reflections from individuals' preparation.

- This will include themes and images but specific suggestions should be made at the appropriate point of the meeting.
- Rite of Reconciliation — Structure
 - Before looking at parts of the rite in detail it will be helpful for the group to consider first the structure of the liturgy so that they can identify the key points of the rite and be aware of the flow of the whole celebration.
 - This section should be a presentation rather than a discussion. Any points that are raised should be discussed later at the appropriate point of the meeting.
- Liturgy of the Word
 - [This presumes that as part of the preparation either a specific set of readings was given or a selection from the Lectionary.]
 - If a selection of readings was given the group decides on what readings to use.
 - There is flexibility in the Rite about how many readings can be used. It can follow the pattern of the Liturgy of the Word at either Sunday or Weekday Mass or it can comprise of a single reading (preferably the gospel). Whatever is chosen should allow everyone to understand the word of God more deeply and give it their heartfelt assent (cf. RP 55).
 - What has been chosen should be reviewed in the light of the opening reflection and feedback.
 - The group will need to address if there are any specific issues regarding how the word will be proclaimed: choice of readers, Gospel procession etc.
 - If a psalm and Gospel Acclamation have been chosen the musician(s) should have identified settings. The psalm (or canticle) should not be replaced by a hymn or a song. The Gospel Acclamation will most likely be the seasonal setting the parish has chosen.
 - The group will record any reflections for the homilist or to be included in the Examination of Conscience. (It is assumed that the homilist and those drawing up an examination of conscience will be present)
 - At the end of this section the group should be able to
 - Agree the structure and content of the Liturgy of the Word
 - Identify any issues regarding proclamation or ceremonial
 - Indicate suitable music.
 - Inform the homilist and compiler(s) of the examination of conscience of specific issues and reflections.
- Liturgy of Reconciliation
 - General Confession of Sins: six examples are given in the Rite. Care should be taken to distinguish this from an Examination of Conscience. Each General Confession has the following structure
 - *I confess...* introduced by the deacon or other minister
 - Penitential Intercessions
 - Lord's Prayer
 - Brief concluding prayer led by priest.

- Individual confession and absolution:
 - Consideration needs to be given to the practical arrangements for confession: the number of priests and the expected number of penitents.
 - The preparation group also need to be aware of how the flow of the overall celebration will be affected by the length of this part.
 - Music. It may be helpful for there to be quiet reflective singing during this time. The music should be suitable for singing in procession — as people process to make individual confession and receive absolution — it should probably use short refrains, be memorable and not need the carrying of a participation aid. Other forms of music, including instrumental, may be suitable. The music needs to be sustained through and support both people’s preparation for individual confession and their time of prayer afterwards. Musicians need to be sensitive to the volume of the music: part of its purpose is to provide an ambience of privacy but it should not be intrusive making quiet conversation difficult. Care should be taken to allow the musicians to receive the sacrament.
- Use of symbols
 - Many recognise the need for some use of symbol as part of the time of Individual Confession and Absolution. It is important first to recognise the use of symbol throughout the rite: in the gathered assembly; in listening to God’s word; in the person of the minister; in the minister’s extending his hands over the head of the penitent.
 - A opportunity for a symbolic action by individuals as they return having received absolution is welcomed by many. People should not feel that it is obligatory also avoid using symbols in a way that inadvertently highlights those who have chosen not to go forward for confession and absolution. It is best to use familiar symbols such light, incense, water. The group may find that some of the images people identified as part of their reflection helpful. A symbol when used well, such as the use of candles gradually lightening a church, can help articulate the transformation effected by the rite.
- Proclamation of Praise for God’s mercy
 - This should be the musical highpoint of the celebration. As noted above the starting point for choosing a song should be the Psalms and Canticles which are given in the Rite — these are ‘specially recommended’
- Concluding Prayer of Thanksgiving
 - There is a choice of 7 prayers on the Rite
- At the end of this section the group should be able to
 - Have chosen the form of General Confession
 - Identify the practical issues relating to Individual confession and considered how best through music an other means to meet them.
 - Have chosen a Proclamation of Praise and Concluding Prayer
- Concluding Rite
 - The liturgy ends with a blessing and dismissal. There are alternatives to be chosen from for each text.

- Introductory Rites
 - The Introductory Rites are very simple. They should serve as an introduction to the whole liturgy.
 - Opening Song. The purpose of the Song is to help form people into the Body of Christ; to express repentance and introduce the themes of the celebration.
 - There is a choice of Opening Prayers (6)
- Overall structure
 - At this point it would be sensible to review what has been decided particularly in the light of initial discussion of the structure.
 - Are there any points that have not been picked up?

Practicalities

- Responsibilities
 - Check what now still has to be decided and whose responsibility it is.
 - Check what is dependent on these decisions — such as the preparation of a participation aid.
 - It may be helpful to prepare a full text for the presider and other key ministers. The presider's text should be placed in a worthy folder. The readings should be proclaimed from the Lectionary.
- Parish preparation
 - How will the parish be informed about the celebration of the Rite?
 - How will individuals be invited to prepare for the celebration?
 - What material can be made available to them?
 - What links can be made with the parish's celebration of the liturgical season and Sunday Mass?
- What else?
 - What other ways can individuals and the community engage with acts of repentance and forgiveness? e.g. fast days

Concluding Prayer

End the meeting by saying together the Lord's Prayer.

Celebration

It will be of value for future preparation to keep a record of the actual celebration together with the participation aid and full text, where used.

Evaluation

At a later meeting of the parish liturgy group it is valuable to reflect briefly on the celebration:

- what was good?
- what could be improved?

Appendix 1

Sample Agenda

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------|
| 1. Reflection of Scripture | 7.30pm |
| 2. Liturgy Preparation | 8.00 |
| a. Review previous Celebrations | |
| b. Celebrating the Season | |
| c. Feedback from Preparation | |
| d. Liturgy of the Word | 8.20 |
| e. Liturgy of Reconciliation | |
| f. Concluding Rite | |
| g. Introductory Rites | |
| h. Overall structure | |
| 3. Practicalities | 9.00 |
| a. Responsibilities | |
| b. Parish Preparation | |
| c. What else | |
| 4. Concluding Prayer | 9.15 |

Appendix 2

Planning Sheet for Rite of Penance

Date:	_____	Time:	_____
Presider:	_____	Deacon	_____
Other priests	_____		_____
	_____		_____
	_____		_____

Introductory Rites

Song	_____
Greeting	No. _____
Opening Prayer	No. _____

Liturgy of the Word

Reading 1	_____
<i>Reader</i>	_____
Psalm	_____
<i>Cantor</i>	_____
Reading 2	_____
<i>Reader</i>	_____
Gospel Acclamation	_____
Gospel	_____
<i>Proclaimed by</i>	_____
Homily	_____
Examination of Conscience	_____

Liturgy of Reconciliation

General Confession of Sins	_____
Individual Confession & Absolution	_____

Proclamation of Praise	_____
Concluding prayer of Thanksgiving	No. _____

Concluding Rite

Blessing	No. _____
Dismissal	No. _____