

**Reconciliation of a Penitent**  
**Repentance, Confession, and Forgiveness**  
**Book of Common Prayer, pages 446-452**

I. **Reconciliation**

- A. The result of Sin is alienation I Tom God, I Tom others, and within our own self
- B. God seeks and makes possible reconciliation with and for his people
- C. Reconciliation is related to Baptism
  - 1. In baptism, we enter into an unbreakable bond with Christ; but the baptismal relationship is denied by sin.
    - a. Ga13:27 *As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*
  - 2. God makes possible reconciliation and restores us to our life in Christ.
    - a. Rom 6:3-4 - *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried wit) him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*
  - 3. Forgiveness and reconciliation are grounded in Jesus Christ.
  - 4. It is only in light of Jesus' death and resurrection that forgiveness of sins takes place.
- D. God calls us to reconciliation through repentance and confession of our sins
- E. God promises that He will forgive those who turn to Him in repentance
  - 1. Psalm 103:8-12
    - 8 The LORD is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
    - 9 He will not always accuse,  
nor will he keep his anger forever.
    - 10 He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
    - 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
    - 12 as far as the east is from the west,  
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
  - 2. Classic Scripture Text - Luke 15:11-32 - *The Parable of the Prodigal Son and His Brother*
- F. Reconciliation is the action of God - it is not a program for self-improvement but an opening of the soul to salvation and redemption through the death and resurrection of Jesus
- G. The work of confession and reconciliation is a process It is not a one-shot deal to encourage us to "*continue in sin in order that grace might abound*" (Rom 6:1)

## II. **Three Means by Which a Confession Can Be Made**

### A. Personal Confession

1. This is done before God by oneself
2. This usually occurs in one's personal prayer life -- indeed, personal confession should be a regular part of everyone's prayer life

### B. The Public General Confession

1. A form for confession is a regular part of most worship services in the Episcopal Church
2. Through the common prayer of Christians assembled for public worship and through the priesthood of the Church and its ministers God declares forgiveness and absolution to his people

### C. Private Auricular Confession - The Rite of Reconciliation of a Penitent

1. This is done before God but confession takes place out loud in the presence of another human being
  - a. The confessor is often a priest or minister, but not always
  - b. The Prayer Book allows for a confession to be heard by lay persons as well
2. The Rite of Reconciliation of a Penitent is a powerful means by which God ministers saving grace to people through His Church

### D. It is God who forgives and reconciles us to himself not the priest.

## III. **Private Auricular Confession - The Reconciliation of a Penitent: a Sacramental Rite**

### A. Provision for this sacramental rite is made available in the BCP, pages 446-452

1. A general Anglican principle applies to this sacramental rite
  - a. All can
  - b. None must
  - c. Some should

### B. "The Reconciliation of a Penitent" is a sacrament of renewal (BCP, 861)

1. A sacrament is in "outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace.
2. This rite reconciles us with God

### C. During this rite, those who repent of their sins

1. Confess them to God in the presence of a priest or another person
2. Receive the assurance of pardon
3. Receive the grace of absolution

### D. The outward sign of this sacramental rite is . . .

1. Examination of conscience
2. Confession of Sin
3. Absolution of sin in the name of Christ

### E. The inward grace of this sacramental rite is

1. The forgiveness of sin
2. Reconciliation (peace and unity) with God and His Church
3. The power of the Holy Spirit to amend life

### F. This sacramental rite

1. Enlarges our spiritual life
2. Sets us on the firm ground of spiritual growth

#### IV. **How to Make a Private Auricular Confession Using the Prayer Book**

##### A. Choose a Confessor

1. Your confessor can be either a lay person or a priest (BCP, 446)
2. The would-be penitent is not obliged to come to their own priest for confession
  - a. He/she may prefer to go to another priest
  - b. Some people may find confessing to their own priest very threatening

##### B. Recognize that people prepare for confession in very individual ways, but some general considerations may prove helpful

##### C. **General Considerations** that may be helpful in preparing for confession

1. Find a quiet time and place and begin with centering prayer
  - a. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you the ways you have failed to be faithful
  - b. Meditation on Scripture is often helpful
2. Undertake a self-examination
  - a. Reflect on the past day, week, month
  - b. Several forms are available in various devotional and prayer books to aid in the reflection process
    - (1) Form from *St. Augustine's Prayer Book*
      - (a) This form is based on the seven deadly sins and is exhaustive
      - (b) A handout is available from the rector
    - (2) The *Litany of Penitence* from the Ash Wednesday Liturgy, BCP 267
3. Some people find writing down the results of their self-examination helpful
  - a. This is a useful aid in making a confession
  - b. The destruction of the list after the absolution can be a powerful sign that God has put away one's sins
4. Some penitents have found that bringing to the confession an object that represents what they are confessing is helpful
  - a. Laying this tangible item before the altar during the rite and then turning one's back on it can have profound significance
5. Determine a place and time with the Confessor you have chosen
  - a. "Confessions may be heard anytime and anywhere" according to the rubrics in the *Prayer Book* (BCP, 446)
  - b. A priest often chooses to talk with a person before engaging with the formal rite

##### D. **Two Forms** for auricular confession are available in the *Prayer Book*

1. Form 1 (BCP, 447) is a shorter form and is particularly appropriate for someone who makes a confession regularly
2. Form 2 - BCP, 449
  - a. This form is longer
  - b. It seems more appropriate for someone who is seeking reconciliation after a long lapse or when burdened by a particularly serious sin
  - c. Some people experience Form II as the fuller and more moving rite

- V. **An Outline of "The Reconciliation of a Penitent - Form Two," BCP, 449**
- A. Personal Preparation for both penitent and confessor
  - B. Word of invitation from the confessor
  - C. Psalm 51 and the Trisagion
  - D. Word of Scripture
  - E. Invitation and Confession
  - F. Words of comfort and counsel
  - G. The examination two questions reminiscent of the Baptismal rite
    - 1. The promise of repentance
    - 2. A promise to forgive others
  - H. The absolution usually with the laying on of hands
    - 1. The preferred option in the rubric is for the confessor to lay a hand on the head of the penitent, unless otherwise led by the Spirit
    - 2. The sense of touch is important and significant, providing a "palpable form of contact"
      - a. Physical contact conveys assurance and acceptance.
      - b. Is very "incarnational" - through touch, "blessing and healing energy flow" (Price, 272)
    - 3. The dismissal
- VI. **REMEMBER: "The secrecy of a confession is morally absolute for the confessor and must under no circumstances be broken" (BCP 446)**

### Helpful References

- Smith, Martin L., *Reconciliation: Preparing for Confession in the Episcopal Church*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1985.
- Gavitt, The Rev. Loren, ed. *St. Augustine's Prayer Book: A Book of Devotion for members of the Episcopal Church*. West Park & New York: Holy Cross Publications, 1947.
- Hyde, Clark. *To Declare God's Forgiveness*. Wilton: Morehouse Barlow, 1984.
- Woerner, Ralph. *Overcoming Hurt*. Birmingham: Gospel Publishing Association, 1992..