THE SACRAMENTS OF RECONCILIATION AND HEALING

*“In the light of Christian faith, reconciliation and healing involve God’s grace bringing about change, development and new ways of being, whether within the individual person or the wider society.”*

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Reconciliation

These two sacraments are closely related to one another. The liturgy of reconciliation begins with scripture proclaiming God’s compassion and mercy (Psalm 51, Psalm 103), then continues with the priest’s assurance that God offers love, mercy and enlightenment to the penitent sinner. The penitent confesses his or her sins, followed by words of comfort and counsel spoken by the priest, who then asks for assurance from the one confessing that he or she turns again to Christ and forgives those who have sinned against him or her. The priest announces absolution in Jesus’ name by means of his sacrifice on the cross. Priest and penitent pray the Lord’s Prayer together. The ritual concludes with the priest’s blessing and the penitent’s response of thanksgiving.

This brief liturgy is found on pages 166 to 170 of the Book of Alternative Services 1985, the Anglican Church of Canada. The church doesn’t require its people to participate in the rite of private confession – the approach is that “all can, some should, none must” [Scott Gun and Melody Wilson Shobe, Walk in Love: Episcopal Beliefs & Practices, Forward Movement: Cincinnati, Ohio: 2018, p. 83] - but it is recommended because of the many benefits it offers.

Confession, or reconciliation, is regularly part of the Sunday liturgy, which in that case is spoken corporately (as a group), and the same process takes place, including assurance of God’s mercy in scripture and in the words of the priest spoken from the altar as comfort and counsel and absolution, promising God’s forgiveness.

The opportunity for individual, private confession and absolution is also part of the church’s ministry. In the Book of Common Prayer (Anglican Church of Canada, 1962, p0. 90-91), Anglicans are exhorted at least four times a year to devoutly prepare for the Sacrament of the Eucharist by giving thanks to God for the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, to examine their lives according to the Ten Commandments, to confess any offences with the intention of amending their behaviour, be reconciled with anyone they have offended, forgiving them as we have been forgiven by God. If this preparation doesn’t produce full trust in God and a “quiet conscience”, but requires further comfort and counsel, that person should approach a priest or other Christian minister and make private confession, in order to be delivered from his or her troubled conscience and doubt.

*“The Christian life is an unfolding and ongoing practice of seeking forgiveness, from one another and from God.” (Walk in Love, ibid., p. 83)*

The penitent may be sure that the confidentiality of the confession is faithfully kept. The church declares “The secrecy of a confession of sin is morally absolute for the confessor, and must under no circumstances be broken.” (BAS, p. 166)

These are ancient rituals, described in old-fashioned words, but the experience of confession and forgiveness is an actual, genuine, ongoing reality, which is why the church today makes provision for it to happen.

*“Confession of sin, and above all the confession of God within which confession of sin takes place, is itself the eternal life offered us in Christ, the reality for which we long.”*

*Adam Johnson (*[*http://scriptoriumdaily.com/gospel-confession*](http://scriptoriumdaily.com/gospel-confession)*)*

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