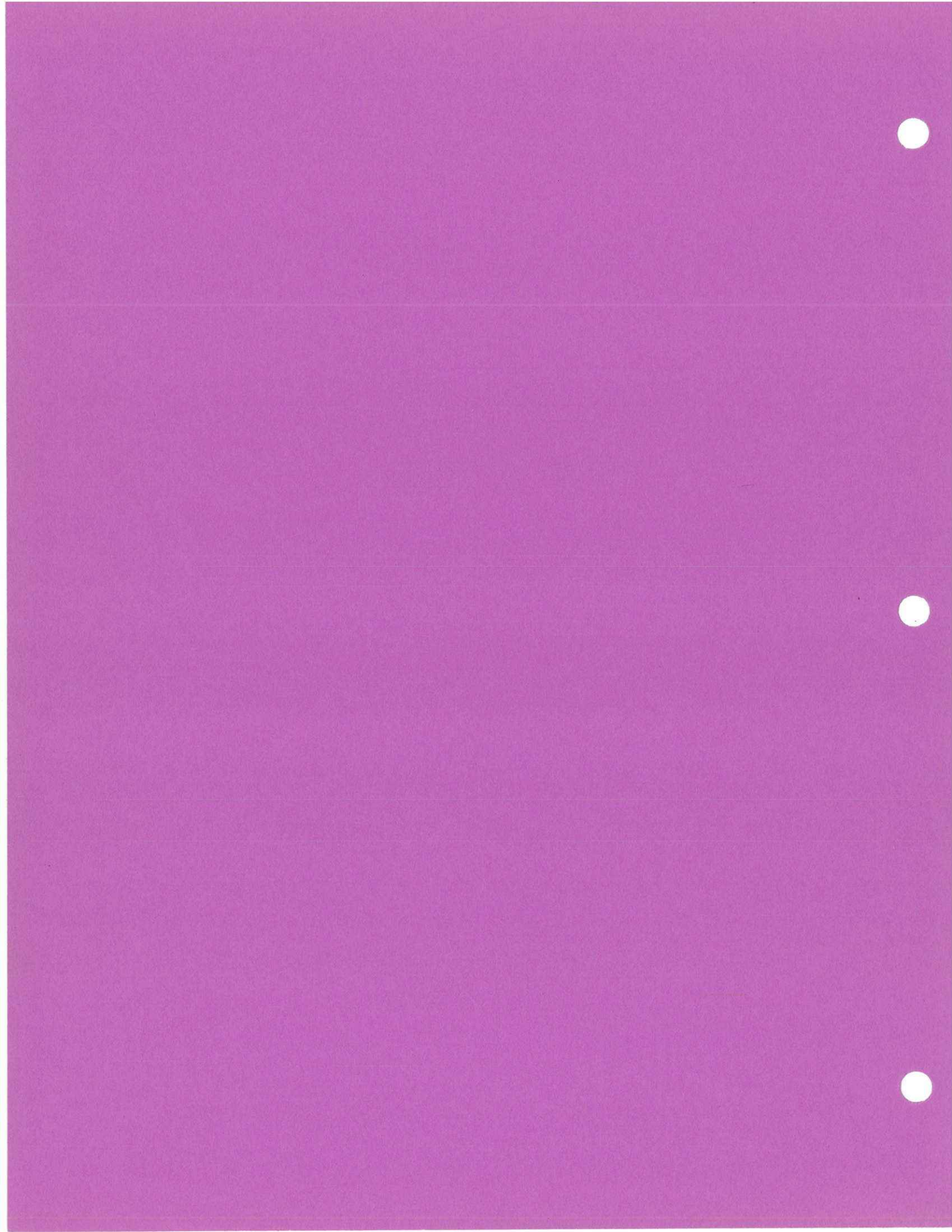


**RECONCILIATION
THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE
GUIDELINES**

DIOCESE OF GREEN BAY

JANUARY 1997





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Introduction

In our current practice, the preparation for First Reconciliation is often centered in the school and religious education program. We propose a renewal that would ground or root First Reconciliation in family and parish life. Classroom experiences have a responsibility for ongoing, developmental education, but family and parish have the basic responsibility for the life of discipleship.

These guidelines have been developed for all who would participate in the parish celebration of the Sacrament of Penance, not just those who will participate for the first time. In these guidelines, we suggest that the season of Lent is the most appropriate time for the parish to strengthen its penitential practices and to prepare all to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance. Special attention is given to those celebrating for the first time. Centering the experience of First Reconciliation in the life of the parish points to a revival of the community's practice of Reconciliation.

We therefore suggest a shift in the way preparation for First Reconciliation is viewed:

1. All sacramental preparation and celebrations are rooted in parish life. The immediate preparation for First Reconciliation takes place in a unified parish program and invites participation of all ages, young children, older youth and adults who are preparing for the first reception of this sacrament. Regular catechetical programs, Catholic schools and parish religious education programs, provide educational support through ongoing study of the sacraments to the formation provided by families and the parish.
2. The experience of First Reconciliation is seen as just the beginning of many celebrations of reconciliation.
3. The celebration of Reconciliation is seen as a part of a process of conversion highlighted but not limited to the season of Lent, from Ash Wednesday through Holy Thursday. Families with children are encouraged to participate in the parish communal celebration of the Sacrament of Penance during Lent.
4. Family and faith community together is seen as the place of formation and determine the readiness of the candidate.
5. We recommend that each parish provide annually a preparation program that will take care of the needs of all from the age of discretion onwards.

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THEOLOGY OF RECONCILIATION

"Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation...All this has been done by God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation." 2 Cor. 5:17-18 (NAB)

MEANING AND SOURCE OF RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation is a proclamation and celebration of God's mercy, compassion and forgiveness. It is best described as a process of forgiveness which reunites the repentant sinner with God and with the community of the faithful. Reconciliation is a response to the Gospel imperative that calls all to repentance, conversion and the reign of God. Through reconciliation, the community celebrates its mission to accept others and walk the journey of faith with them. The word **reconciliation** means come together, or as disciples "to walk together again."

Throughout the ages, the church has given many names to this sacrament. It has been called *the sacrament of conversion* because it celebrates Jesus' call to conversion. When called *the sacrament of Penance*, the emphasis is on the sinner's process of conversion, penance and satisfaction. Most official church documents refer to this sacrament as the Sacrament of Penance. Calling this sacrament *the sacrament of confession* focuses on the confessing of sins to a priest while *the sacrament of forgiveness* emphasizes God's pardon granted through the priest's absolution. *The sacrament of reconciliation* draws attention to the God whose merciful love forgives and reconciles all to God and one another (CCC #1423, 1424).

Reconciliation is grounded in Scripture. The life and message of Jesus is the good news of God's gift of reconciliation. The Christian Scriptures recall countless stories of Jesus forgiving sinners and welcoming them into the community of disciples. Reconciliation is preached in the parables of Jesus and demonstrated through accounts of His healing body and soul, the troubled and the sinner. The mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus saves sinners and unites all again in the merciful love of God. Thus, Jesus is the primary sacrament of reconciliation with God. After the resurrection, Jesus gives the disciples the power of binding and loosing, i.e., the authority from God to forgive and reconcile sinners (John 20:19-23).

RECONCILIATION AS A PROCESS

Reconciliation is a way of life that marks the Christian as a disciple of Jesus. Reconciliation is a life-long process. God gifted human nature with the ability to make free choices. With this gift of free choice, the disciple has the responsibility to develop an informed conscience. Harmful choices may cause estrangement from others resulting in guilt and loss of inner peace. These sinful choices frustrate the human longing for a more intimate relationship with God and others. Sin is an offense which ruptures our communion with God who draws all by grace to repentance and conversion. Relationships are restored through reconciliation. The Sacrament of Penance offers the opportunity to publicly acknowledge sinfulness and to ask for the forgiveness which reestablishes a close relationship with God, self and others.

Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are some of the penitential practices in Christian life that can be a part of reconciliation. There are also daily gestures of reconciliation and peace-making that mend relationships or strengthen bonds. Reading of the Scriptures invites the believer to repentance and conversion. In the celebration of the Eucharist, the sacrifice of Christ reconciles us with God and nourishes a life of conversion (CCC#1434-1439). During Lent, the entire Christian community celebrates the journey toward conversion with an explicit desire for forgiveness of sins and a recognition of the need for repentance.

RECONCILIATION IN RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER SACRAMENTS

Baptism is the first and fundamental sacrament of conversion. In Baptism, a Christian is called to new life in Christ and enters into the on-going process of conversion. In Reconciliation, penitents renew the grace of Baptism, repent and once again “radically reorient” their whole life in Christ (CCC#1431). Reconciliation, rooted in the forgiveness and mercy shown in the life and words of Christ, became the sacrament for all who since Baptism sinned and were separated from God and the Church. Through Confirmation, one recognizes the role of the Holy Spirit who opens hearts to the mercy of God and leads disciples to further conversion.

The Eucharist is the sacrament of love and forgiveness wherein Christ embraces the Christian in unconditional love. Through the celebration of the Paschal Mystery, the Christian is called to die to sin and to rise with Christ to new life. With each celebration of Eucharist, we encounter an infinitely compassionate God who forgives sins and walks again the journey of faith. In the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, the sins of the anointed are also forgiven for inner healing.

CELEBRATING THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

The Sacrament of Penance celebrates the process of asking for and receiving of the forgiveness of sins. In response to God’s grace, Christians are called to repentance, confession of sins and a desire to make amends. Reconciliation therefore, involves on-going conversion, contrition from the heart, confession of sins, reparation and absolution. Contrition turns attention to the forgiving God who calls all to be saved through repentance. The Spirit enables penitents to make an act of contrition because they have been touched by God’s merciful love and grace. An integral confession of sins is an acknowledgment of one’s failings and of the mercy of God who alone can forgive sins. The desire to make reparation or restitution is a grateful response to the awesome experience of God’s forgiveness. The penance is a sign of one’s willingness to make amends for wrongdoings and reenkindles a desire to continue the spiritual journey (CCC #1450-1460).

The Church exercises the authority from God to forgive sins through the role of the confessor. The priest gives God’s forgiveness and welcomes back the penitents on behalf of the community. Like the Good Shepherd, he is an instrument of God’s seeking the sinner and offering God’s mercy. Through the touch of the priest and the prayer of absolution, the penitent experiences the healing power and mercy of God (CCC #1465). The experience of absolution helps satisfy the penitents’ psychological and spiritual needs for assurance that God has heard their story and forgiven their sins. The confessor is bound by the “sacramental seal” which means he will not reveal nor act upon any information disclosed in the Sacrament of Penance. The experience of meaningful, sincere celebrations of forgiveness heals hearts, minds and souls.

Although the Sacrament of Penance is required only for those in serious sin, all are encouraged to celebrate God’s mercy and forgiveness and to experience conversion. Through the process and grace of reconciliation, the penitents experience a rebirth, a renewal of the life of grace first received at Baptism. Fences are mended, relationships restored, hurts repaired, restitution made and the bonds of community strengthened. With the help of the Holy Spirit, the forgiven are called to become bridge-builders and peace-makers; they strive to continue Christ’s process of transformation of the world.

RECONCILIATION: ITS VARIOUS FORMS THROUGH THE AGES

Reconciliation has taken various shapes and forms through the ages. What were the reasons for those various forms? The understanding of Reconciliation as a sacrament reflects a response of the early church to celebrate Jesus' ongoing conversion through a return to Baptismal grace. Through the centuries, the challenges of the changing pastoral situation fashioned and shaped the different forms of the Sacrament. In 1973, the Congregation for Divine Worship answered the pastoral need of our time with the revision of the rite of penance. That was only a start. The full response to the pastoral situation of today continues to unfold. The question is, in what way can we actively contribute to this response.

Early Penitential Discipline

In the Church of the New Testament, Baptism was the primal sacrament of forgiveness. After a long and arduous catechumenate, a candidate was baptized into "the one baptism for the forgiveness of sins." By this radical conversion, the baptized turned their lives to Christ. It was unthinkable that anyone would turn away from this life in Christ. Consequently, forgiveness of sins after baptism was a non-issue.

When the early Christians spoke of someone turning away from life in Christ, they spoke of those who lived in public and scandalous sins. Less serious post-baptismal transgressions were brought to the eucharistic table for forgiveness. The Eucharist has always been and still is the traditional sacrament of forgiveness.

There was a realization in the Church in the second and third centuries that there were some Christians who returned to their pagan ways. There was also pressure from persecutions that made some renounce their faith. When some of those who had apostatized or who had given up their christian way of living wanted to return to the Church, there was a peculiar pastoral situation. Should these be rebaptized? Wouldn't rebaptism call into question the faithfulness of God? In the Shepherd of Hermas, an allegorical work written around 150 C.E. and the writing of Tertullian, we come across for the first time a mention of a second chance for public sinners - this was to be a one-time opportunity, not to be repeated. If this second chance was used up, the sinner would be left to the mercy of God.

Canonical Penance

Through the course of time, a penitential system evolved around this second chance of forgiveness. A sort of second catechumenate took shape. It was a long period, a minimum of seven years, during which the penitent, dressed in penitential garb, was publicly kept out of the Eucharist. When the penance was completed, the bishop or the community would invite the penitent to rejoin them in the Eucharist. This canonical penance was only for public and scandalous sins. The penitent was supported in prayer by the whole community. There was a strong sense of the community.

Because this second chance was a one-time occurrence, it often became a death-bed event. Christians did not want to use up their one chance and waited to use it as a ticket to heaven. Besides, there was no other opportunity to be forgiven for all other sins. This was the pastoral situation that gave rise to another practice among the celtic and anglo-saxon monks. The monasteries were places for spiritual advancement. Through prayer, penance and community living, the monks, who were not necessarily priests, helped each other in their spiritual lives. They helped each other by listening, discerning patterns and giving advice to guide each

other closer to God. Gradually the practice developed into individual confession to a priest confessor and sacramental absolution. These private confessions were repeatable, unlike the canonical penance. By the beginning of 800's, we hear little about canonical penance and more and more about frequent confessions.

Tariff Penance

With the spiritual advice, the penitent was also given particular penance to perform. This was a healthy process in the monastery, as it was done in the context of the community. Discerning monks described particular "tariffs" for particular sins. A new form, Tariff Penance came to be. We have the first Irish penitential book, with sins and tariffs for those sins dated 680 C.E. from Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury. The positive outcome from this was that it developed a strong sense of making reparation for one's sins. However, gradually the emphasis moved away from contrition and reparation. Tariffs became mere commutation. Then people began to substitute for someone else's penance.

Private confessions were not approved by the official Church at the beginning, as is evidence in the Council of Toledo, 589 C.E., which condemned the Spanish churches for using a form of penance contrary to the canonical system. However, by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 C.E., there was ecclesiastical acceptance of private confession.

Scholastic Teaching on Penance

Peter Lombard in the twelfth century wrote of the "seven Sacraments". He listed the sacrament of penance as the fourth sacrament. What he referred to as the sacrament of penance was the private auricular confession. The scholastics were concerned about the matter and form of the sacrament. Duns Scotus insisted that the words of absolution "ego te absolvo..." was the form and hence without it the sacrament was invalid. Thus absolution, not contrition or penance, was looked upon as the essence of the sacrament.

Tridentine Teaching on Penance

The Council of Trent was addressing the situation created by the reformers. In response to the reformers, the Council upheld the sacrament of penance as the sacrament of forgiveness of sins, issuing 15 canons on this sacrament. It further stated that all mortal sins were to be confessed in number, kind and circumstance. The Council also decreed that confession must be made to a priest. It created a legal climate for the sacrament. The priest was the judge who handed down the penance. The judicial nature of the sacrament was stressed. It was more juridical than pastoral in tone. In the place of the process of penance, as was the case in the early Church and the monasteries, we have an instance of fulfilling some penance. The virtue of penance was replaced by the ritual of doing penance.

The New Rite of Penance

The Tridentine form of penance remained unchanged until well into the second half of this century. Vatican II was aware of a revision that was needed for celebrating penance. In response, the Congregation for Divine Worship promulgated the new Rite of Penance ("Ordo Poenitentiae") in December of 1973, which was made operative in 1976. (The Rites of Penance are presented elsewhere in these guidelines.)

RECONCILIATION

COMPETENCIES, COMPONENTS AND EXPERIENCES

These statements of competencies, components and experiences are meant for those who coordinate or direct the formation process for all who wish to celebrate reconciliation, including those preparing for First Reconciliation. They are also written to assist those who are reviewing their understanding of this sacrament prior to a celebration of the Sacrament of Penance in the parish. **Competencies, components and experiences that can be expected of elementary children, including those who have reached the age of reason, are indicated by this sign (+).** All these competencies reflect an on-going process of conversion.

Key to References used in this section:

NCD = National Catechetical Directory; CL = Canon Law, DP = Decree on Penance,
 MK = Gospel of Mark, Jn = Gospel of John, CCC = Catechism of Catholic Church,
 Mt = Gospel of Matthew, Lk = Gospel of Luke

A. UNDERSTANDING OF RECONCILIATION

COMPETENCIES:

Candidates and participants in Reconciliation:

- + demonstrate an understanding of God as loving, merciful and forgiving (NCD #84, #125).
- + understand that sinful actions are sinful because they offend God and also offend others.
- identify Reconciliation as a community's celebration of healing, confession of sins and renewing one's relationship with God and the community (CL #959, DP I, 1).
- + identify the primary minister of the sacrament as a priest who represents the activity of God by imparting God's forgiveness and represents the response of the whole community. He must honor the sacramental seal at all times (Mk 2:5, Jn 8:11, NCD #126, CL #965, 966, 983, DP #8).
- relate how the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not intended merely as an enumeration of faults, but a renewed experience of the love of God and the resolution to work towards living an upright life.
- show an understanding that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a celebration of the Easter mysteries of conversion that brings reconciliation with God and reconciliation with all who are affected by our sins.
- + explain (appropriate to age) the elements of the sacrament: contrition, integral confession, absolution and satisfaction.
- connect the grace of the Sacrament of Reconciliation with the grace of Baptism which is lost through sin; it is a return to the grace of Baptism and to the Eucharistic community (DP Int 2, II 7b, CCC #1446).
- + demonstrate (appropriate to age) an ability to examine one's life honestly and critically in light of Christian moral standards (DP IV B22).
- * demonstrate an ability to confess serious (mortal) sins according to number and kind to the best of one's ability.

COMPONENTS:

Leaders and participants in the parish process may:

- + listen to a priest explain the role of the minister of the Sacrament of Penance and the Sacramental seal.
- + use a textbook or resource to learn the meaning of reconciliation as a sacrament of conversion.
- + learn/memorize a standard version of the Act of Contrition or demonstrate the ability to pray a suitable prayer of sorrow.
- + associate gestures, signs and symbols in life that convey sorrow.
- realize the importance of the Lenten season as a particularly appropriate time for the experience and celebration of penance and reconciliation in the parish community.
- + identify the proper place for the Sacrament of Penance as the Reconciliation Room in church, the main body of the church or other private places where the confession cannot be overheard by others (CL #964).
- identify the Rites of Penance, especially Rite I and Rite II as the ordinary sacramental way of reconciling the faithful with God and with the community.
- + identify the commandments, Christian law of love, the beatitudes as Christian moral standards.
- + identify Scriptures that tell the stories of Christian forgiveness (DP IV B22).
- compose several examinations of conscience based on the commandments, the law of love and the beatitudes.

EXPERIENCES:

Leaders and participants of the parish process may:

- + participate in an experience of the celebration of Rite II.
- help to celebrate a prayer service for families:
 - to connect Reconciliation to Baptism at the Baptismal font in church
 - to emphasize a forgiving God and the church as a forgiving community
 - to celebrate the Eucharistic community of love
 - to break open the Lenten Scriptures of lost son, lost coin, lost sheep, etc.
- create learning centers to demonstrate the meaning of the Paschal Triduum and its connection to Reconciliation.
- + role-play a celebration of the Sacrament of Penance, including the recounting of sins.
- + visit the reconciliation room in the parish church.

B. SIGNS OF READINESS:**1. PSYCHOLOGICAL/SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING****COMPETENCIES:****Candidates and participants in Reconciliation:**

- + demonstrate (appropriate to age) the ability to reflect personal actions and attitudes.
- + show the capacity to accept love and express love meaningfully.
- + demonstrate sufficient self-knowledge and self-control that is appropriate to one's age.
- + show a capability (appropriate to age) to forgive and ask for forgiveness of God and from others, to make amends and to resolve to change one's behavior (DP IV; II, 4, CCC #1459).
- + demonstrate an ability to make choices.
- + distinguish between a sin, accident or mistake.
- show growth in peace of mind, release of guilt and consolation of God and the community.
- + understand (appropriate to age) the laying of hands and the prayer of absolution as a gesture symbolizing the forgiveness of sins and God's mercy. Through this gesture and prayer the actual forgiving of sins takes place (DP IV, 19).

COMPONENTS:**Leaders and participants of the parish process may:**

- + pray night prayers to reflect on the day, to ask forgiveness and to give thanks.
- + use open ended stories to show how decisions are made.
- use a simple reflection journal that involves families.
- + relate family stories or personal experiences of accidents, mistakes, intentional action and sin.
- + view videos to demonstrate how choices are made and their consequences.

EXPERIENCES:**Leaders and participants of the parish process may:**

- + role-play actions and decisions at home, in the neighborhood, at school.
- interview several people to determine the meaning of forgiveness.
- listen to others give witness to the release of guilt and peace of mind through reconciliation with God and others.
- + participate in a demonstration by the priest for the words and ritual of the prayer of absolution.
- + demonstrate ways of reconciling or "making-up" with God and someone hurt by one's words or actions.

2. MORAL DEVELOPMENT

COMPETENCIES

Candidates and participants in Reconciliation:

- + distinguish (appropriate to age) between temptation and sin.
- + distinguish (appropriate to age) between acts that are serious or mortal sin and lesser sins or venial sins.
- describe the effect of sin upon the community and express sorrow for what sin does to people (CL #987, DP II, 6a, Mt 4:17, Mk 1:15, C #1455).
- + understand (appropriate to age) the call to turn away from sin and selfishness and to return to love and conversion.
- + develop a sense of conscience, distinguish between right and wrong (CL #960, 988, DP III, 10).
- + name or articulate what is sinful (CL #960, 988).
- + articulate (appropriate to age) a healthy sense of responsibility and guilt for one's commissions and omissions (CL #959).
- + demonstrate (appropriate to age) an awareness of goodness in life and what is sinful (DP II, 5).
- understand the three conditions of mortal sin: grave matter, full knowledge and complete consent (CCC #1857).

COMPONENTS:

Leaders and participants of parish process may:

- + review familiar stories of reconciliation involving returning to the community.
- + demonstrate (appropriate to age) an ability to examine one's conscience (CCC #1454)
- study the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.
- practice (appropriate to age) concrete steps for decision making.
- provide input on the role of conscience
- study the local community's current peace and justice issues.
- + give examples of people in Scripture and modern life who have changed or undergone conversion.
- + discuss and name possible sinful actions of people at home, school or work.

EXPERIENCES:

Leaders and participants of parish process may:

- + role-play instances of temptation to distinguish from sin.
- develop practical family examinations of conscience.
- create an art project to describe the effects of sin on the community.
- + create posters, booklets, etc. to teach the commandments, Christian law of love and beatitudes as moral standards.
- + create an experience that symbolizes change such as rough wood to sanded wood, stoney hearts to soft hearts, etc.

C. EXPERIENCES OF RECONCILIATION: DEMONSTRATED SKILLS**1. PERSONAL EXPERIENCE****COMPETENCIES:****Candidates and participants in Reconciliation:**

- + desire to receive the Sacrament of Penance and other rites of forgiveness as a free response of faith (CL #843, DP II 6, DP III:11).
- + demonstrate (appropriate to age) a sufficiently developed faith life, i.e., an awareness of a personal relationship with God.
- + accept and respond to the gracious love and forgiveness of God and others (DP II 5, IV 19).
- perceive self and others as members of a Christian community who sometimes fail in relationships with God, self, and others and offer forgiveness (NCD #125).

COMPONENTS:**Leaders and participants of the parish process may:**

- participates in parish's ongoing catechesis of the sacrament through adulthood (age appropriate).
- + write/create prayers of forgiveness and thanksgiving for God's mercy.
- + draw pictures or cartoons to illustrate people in need of forgiveness.
- + role-play family experiences of forgiveness and reconciliation
- + pray the *Our Father* as a prayer of forgiveness.

EXPERIENCES:**Leaders and participants of the parish process may:**

- + participate in an interview with a priest, catechetical leader or catechist to express adequate knowledge of the sacrament .
- make a video to demonstrate the scriptures or life experiences that ask for or offer forgiveness.
- experience conversations with parishioners about having a change of heart.
- + participate in giving and receiving the *Sign of Peace* in the Eucharistic Liturgy.

2. FAMILY EXPERIENCE

COMPETENCIES:

Candidate's family members and participants in Reconciliation:

- + participate in catechizing the candidate for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and demonstrate the ability to determine the readiness of the candidate to receive the sacrament .
- + recognize the power of the example of family and community participation with the candidate in the sacrament.
- + understand the communal nature of sin and forgiveness (CL #837, DP II 5, III 8).

COMPONENTS:

Families and participants of the parish process may:

- + share experiences of being forgiven at home, in school and in daily life.
- + name individual sins that offend God and sins that offend God, individuals and society (appropriate to age).
- + compose night prayers asking God's forgiveness or pray together the psalms suitable for children.
- + learn signs of readiness for receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation presented at a family session.
- + compliment participants when they do good things, point out and correct them when they do hurtful or harmful things.
- + model a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation in the home (say "I'm sorry, I apologize").
- + listen to prayers or pray with candidates, especially the *Our Father* and *Act of Contrition*.

EXPERIENCES:

Leaders and participants of the parish process may:

- + attend family sessions geared toward assisting parents in conscience formation of children.
- + create games for learning vocabulary and concepts about reconciliation.
- + attend a family reconciliation mini-retreat (time with God) prior to First Reconciliation.
- + attend as a family Advent and Lenten services that emphasize reconciliation whenever possible.
- + practice the steps for The Sacrament of Penance.
- + participate in family sessions geared toward formation in the process of preparing for reconciliation.

3. COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE: PARISH PARTICIPATION**COMPETENCIES:****Candidates and participants in Reconciliation:**

- + celebrate with joy one's reconciliation with God in the context of communal worship particularly in the Lenten Season (RCIA #138, NCD #125, DP IV, 13).
- describe the seriousness of social sin in light of its effect upon the community (GS #10, NCD #170).
- affirm the experience of on-going conversion process - our story of continually "coming home" and celebration of the arrival in the Sacrament of Reconciliation (2Cor. 5:17-18, NCD #126).
- + interpret (appropriate to age) the confession of sins and absolution as cleansing and healing acts of God that renew our journey with God (CCC #1469).
- recall the elements of reconciliation incorporated within the community's celebration of the weekly Eucharistic Liturgy.

COMPONENTS:**Leaders and participants of the parish process may:**

- + view TV programs or video movies to point out examples of sin, especially social sin.
- use a variety of examinations of conscience with different perspectives (available in the parish).
- + focus emphasis on reconciliation within the liturgy— penitential rite, Our Father, Sign of Peace.
- + request prayerful support for the candidates for sacraments in the parish bulletin.

EXPERIENCES:**Leaders and participants of the parish process may:**

- invite the witness of parishioners during Lenten Liturgies about conversion and the healing acts of God.
- + enroll candidates for sacraments with the context of a parish liturgy.
- provide prayerful support for candidates for sacraments.
- + become prayer partners with candidates for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- + create a visible bulletin board introducing sacramental candidates to the parish community.

TEACHER'S GUIDE TO REFERENCES CITED IN THE COMPETENCIES, COMPONENTS and EXPERIENCES

The following references are given in the order in which they were cited in the preceding section on the Competencies, Components and Experiences. References occurring more than one time are not repeated but are cited at the first position. Words in parenthesis indicate a sensitivity to inclusion in language used. Complete copies of the Code of Canon Law, Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Decree on Penance are available in the resources of parish leaders. It is assumed that all teachers and catechists have access to the *National Catechetical Directory: Sharing the Light of Faith* and to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Nevertheless, we have chosen to highlight several citations from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and *The National Catechetical Directory*.

National Catechetical Directory 125 An understanding of sin, of oneself as a sinner, and of the conditions requisite for a serious sin are necessary preliminaries in catechesis for this sacrament. The catechesis itself emphasizes God's mercy and loving forgiveness. It also emphasizes that faith, a gift of God, is a call to conversion from sin. Catechesis for Reconciliation challenges people to acknowledge the difference between good and evil in the social order, to measure their values and priorities against those of the gospel and the church, to accept individual and corporate responsibility for their decisions and the consequences of those decisions, and to repent of their participation in evil.

Canon 959 - In the sacrament of penance the faithful, confessing their sins to a legitimate minister, being sorry for them, and at the same time proposing to reform, obtain from God forgiveness of sins committed after baptism through the absolution imparted by the same minister; and they likewise are reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by sinning.

Decree on Penance I, 1.

Jesus, however not only exhorted men (people) to repentance so that they should abandon their sins and turn wholeheartedly to the Lord, but he also welcomed sinners and reconciled them with the Father. Moreover, by healing the sick he signified his power to forgive sin. Finally, he himself died for our sins and rose again for our justification. Therefore, on the night he was betrayed and began his saving passion, he instituted the sacrifice of the new covenant in his blood for the forgiveness of sins. After his resurrection he sent the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, empowering them to forgive or retain sins and sending them forth to all peoples to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins in his name.

The Lord said to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed also in heaven" {Matthew 16:19}. In obedience to this command, on the day of Pentecost Peter preached the forgiveness of sins by baptism: "Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" {Acts 2:38}. Since then the Church has never failed to call men (all) from sin to conversion and by the celebration of penance to show the victory of Christ over sin.

Canon 965 Only a priest is the minister of the sacrament of penance.

Canon 966.1 For the valid absolution of sins it is required that, besides the power received through sacred ordination, the minister possess the faculty to exercise that power over the faithful to whom he imparts absolution.

Canon 983.1 The sacramental seal is inviolable; therefore, it is a crime for a confessor in any way to betray a penitent by word or in any other manner or for any reason.

Canon 983.2 An interpreter, if there is one present, is also obliged to preserve the secret, and also all others to whom knowledge of sins from confession shall come in any way.

Decree on Penance III, 8.

The whole Church, as a priestly people, acts in different ways in the work of reconciliation which has been entrusted to it by the Lord. Not only does the Church call sinners to repentance by preaching the word of God, but it also intercedes for them and helps penitents with material care and solicitude to acknowledge and admit their sins and so obtain the mercy of God who alone can forgive sins. Furthermore, the Church becomes the instrument of the conversion and absolution of the penitent through the ministry entrusted by Christ to the apostles and their successors.

Decree on Penance: Introduction, 2.

This victory is first brought to light in baptism where our fallen nature is crucified with Christ so that the body of sin may be destroyed and we may no longer be slaves to sin, but rise with Christ and live for God. For this reason the Church proclaims its faith in "the one baptism for the forgiveness of sins."

Decree on Penance II, 7.

Moreover, frequent and careful celebration of this sacrament is also very useful as a remedy for venial sins. This is not a mere ritual repetition or psychological exercise, but a serious striving to perfect the grace of baptism so that, as we bear in our body the death of Jesus Christ, his life may be seen in us ever more clearly. In confession of this kind, penitents who accuse themselves of venial faults should try to conform more closely to Christ and to follow the voice of the Spirit more attentively.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1446

Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance for all sinful members of his Church: above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion. It is to them that the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification. The Fathers of the Church present this sacrament as "the second plank (of salvation) after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace."

Decree on Penance IV, 22.

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 (or her) 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.

Canon 964.1 The proper place to hear sacramental confessions is a church or an oratory.

Canon 964.2 The conference of bishops is to issue norms concerning the confessional, seeing to it that confessionals with a fixed grille between penitent and confessor are always located in an open area so that the faithful who wish to make use of them may do so freely.

Canon 964.3 Confessions are not to be heard outside the confessional without a just cause.

Decree on Penance II, 4.

The people of God accomplishes and perfects this continual repentance in many different ways. It shares in the suffering of Christ by enduring its own difficulties, carries out works of mercy and charity, and adopts ever more fully the outlook of the Gospel message. Thus the people of God becomes in the world a sign of conversion to God. All this the Church expresses in its life and celebrates in the liturgy when the faithful confess that they are sinners and ask pardon of God and of their brothers and sisters. This happens in penitential services, in the proclamation of the word of God, in prayer, and in the penitential aspects of the eucharistic celebration.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1459

Many sins wrong our neighbor. One must do what is possible in order to repair the harm {e.g., return stolen goods, restore the reputation of someone slandered, pay compensation for injuries}. Simple justice requires as much. But sin also injures and weakens the sinner himself (or herself), as well as his (or her) relationships with God and neighbor. Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused. Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his (or her) full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he (or she) must "make satisfaction for" or "expiate" his (or her) sins. This satisfaction is also called "penance."

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1456

Confession to a priest is an essential part of the sacrament of Penance: "All mortal sins of which penitents after a diligent self-examination are conscious must be recounted by them in confession, even if they are most secret and have been committed against the last two precepts of the Decalogue; for these sins sometimes wound the soul more grievously and are more dangerous than those which are committed openly."

When Christ's faithful strive to confess all the sins that they can remember, they undoubtedly place all of them before the divine mercy for pardon. But those who fail to do so and knowingly withhold some, place nothing before the divine goodness for remission through the mediation of the priest, "for if the sick person is too ashamed to show his wound to the doctor, the medicine cannot heal what it does not know."

Decree on Penance IV, 19.

After this the penitent manifests his (or her) contrition and resolution to begin a new life by means of a prayer for God's pardon. It is desirable that this prayer should be based on the words of Scripture.

Following this prayer, the priest extends his hands, or at least his right hand, over the head of the penitent and pronounces the formula of absolution, in which the essential words are: **I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.** As he says the final words the priest makes the sign of the

cross over the penitent. The form of absolution (see no. 46) indicates that the reconciliation of the penitent comes from the mercy of the Father; it shows the connection between the reconciliation of the sinner and the paschal mystery of Christ; it stresses the role of the Holy Spirit in the forgiveness of sins; finally, it underlines the ecclesial aspect of the sacrament because reconciliation with God is asked for and given through the ministry of the Church.

Canon 987 In order to receive the salvific remedy of the sacrament of penance, the Christian faithful ought to be so disposed that, having repudiated the sins committed and having a purpose of amendment, they are converted to God.

Decree on Penance II, 6, a

The most important act of the penitent is contrition, which is "heartfelt sorrow and aversion for the sin committed along with the intention of sinning no more." "We can only approach the Kingdom of Christ by metanoia. This is a profound change of the whole person by which one begins to consider, judge, and arrange his (or her) life according to the holiness and love of God, made manifest in his Son in the last days and given to us in abundance" (see Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:19 ff). The genuineness of penance depends on this heartfelt contrition. For conversion should affect a person from within so that it may progressively enlighten him (or her) and render him (or her) continually more like Christ.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1455

The confession (or disclosure) of sins, even from a simply human point of view, frees us and facilitates our reconciliation with others. Through such an admission man(one) looks squarely at the sins he(she) is guilty of, takes responsibility for them, and thereby opens himself(herself) again to God and to the communion of the Church in order to make a new future possible.

Canon 960 Individual and integral confession and absolution constitute the only ordinary way by which the faithful person who is aware of serious sin is reconciled with God and with the Church; only physical or moral impossibility excuses the person from confession of this type, in which case reconciliation can take place in other ways.

Canon 988.1 A member of the Christian faithful is obliged to confess in kind and in number all serious sins committed after baptism and not yet directly remitted through the keys of the Church nor acknowledged in individual confession, of which one is conscious after diligent examination of conscience.

Canon 988.2 It is to be recommended to the Christian faithful that venial sins also be confessed.

Decree on Penance III, 10.

In order to fulfill his ministry properly and faithfully the confessor should understand the disorders of souls and apply the appropriate remedies to them. He should fulfill his office of judge wisely and should acquire the knowledge and prudence necessary for this task by serious study, guided by the teaching authority of the Church and especially by fervent prayer to God. Discernment of spirits is a deep knowledge of God's action in the hearts of men (all); it is a gift of the Spirit as well as the fruit of charity.

The confessor should always be ready and willing to hear the confessions of the faithful when they make a reasonable request of him.

By receiving the repentant sinner and leading him (or her) to the light of the truth the confessor fulfills a paternal function: he reveals the heart of the Father and shows the image of Christ the good Shepherd. He should keep in mind that he has been entrusted with the ministry of Christ, who mercifully accomplished the saving work of man's (human) redemption and who is present by his power in the sacraments.

Decree on Penance II, 5

Since every sin is an offense against God which disrupts our friendship with him, "the ultimate purpose of penance is that we should love God deeply and commit ourselves completely to him." Therefore, the sinner who by the grace of a merciful God embraces the way of penance comes back to the Father who "first loved us" {1 John 4:19}, to Christ who gave himself up for us, and to the Holy Spirit who has been poured out on us abundantly.

"By the hidden and loving mystery of God's design men (all) are joined together in the bonds of supernatural solidarity, so much so that the sin of one harms the others just as the holiness of one benefits the others." Penance always entails reconciliation with our brothers and sisters who are always harmed by our sins.

In fact, men (all) frequently join together to commit injustice. It is thus only fitting that they should help each other in doing penance so that freed from sin by the grace of Christ they may work with all men (people) of good will for justice and peace in the world.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1454

The reception of this sacrament ought to be prepared for by an *examination of conscience* made in the light of the Word of God. The passages best suited to this can be found in the moral catechesis of the Gospels and the apostolic Letters, such as the Sermon on the Mount and the apostolic teachings.

Canon 843.1 The sacred ministers can not refuse the sacraments to those who ask for them at appropriate times, are properly disposed and are not prohibited by law from receiving them.

Decree on Penance - III, 11

The acts of the penitent in the celebration of the sacrament are of the greatest importance.

When with proper dispositions he (or she) approaches this saving remedy instituted by Christ and confesses his (or her) sins, he (or she) shares by his (or her) actions in the sacrament itself; the sacrament is completed when the words of absolution are spoken by the minister in the name of Christ.

Thus the faithful Christian, as he (or she) experiences and proclaims the mercy of God in his (or her) life, celebrates with the priest the liturgy by which the Church continually renews itself.

National Catechetical Directory 125, continued

Catechesis prepares the community to celebrate in ritual the realities of repentance, conversion, and reconciliation. Everyone needs this sacrament, for we are all sinners, not just those seriously estranged from God and the Church, and we all find here an opportunity to confront our sinfulness, acknowledge our need for conversion, seek

SELECTED SCRIPTURE FOR RECONCILIATION

Luke 15:4-7

Share my joy: I have found my lost sheep.

Luke 15:8-10

Rejoice over the repentant sinner.

Luke 15:11-32

The father welcomed the lost son and celebrated his return.

Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus finds forgiveness in Jesus.

John 15:1-8

Do not be a withered branch, but a branch bearing fruit as a disciple.

John 15:9-14

You are my friends if you do what I command you.

Luke 7:36-50

Her many sins were forgiven because she loved much.

Mark 12:28-34

The first commandment.

Matt. 9:9-13

I did not come to call the just, but the sinner.

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Matt. 9:1-8

Have confidence, your sins are forgiven

Matt 5:13-16

Let your light shine before all.

Matt. 5:12-17

Repent, the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.

1 Letter of John 1:5-10. 2:1-2

Confess sin and God will forgive us and cleanse us from all injustice.

2 Letter of Peter 2 Pt. 1:3-11

Be careful so that you may make firm your calling and election.

Eph. 6:10-18

Put on God's armor so that you will stand firm against evil.

Eph. 5:1-14

Once you were in darkness; now you walk as children of light.