

Reconciliation of a Penitent

Sacramental rite in which those who repent may confess their sins to God in the presence of a priest and receive the assurance of pardon and the grace of absolution (BCP, p. 861). It is also called penance and confession. The church's ministry of reconciliation is from God, "who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18). The ministry of reconciliation has been committed by Christ to the church. It is exercised through the care each Christian has for others, through the common prayer of Christians assembled for public worship, and through the priesthood of the church and its ministers declaring absolution (BCP, p. 446). The Reconciliation of a Penitent is not limited to times of sickness. Confessions may be heard at any time and any place.

The BCP provides two forms of service for the Reconciliation of a Penitent. Only a bishop or priest may pronounce absolution. A declaration of forgiveness may be used by a deacon or lay person who hears a confession. When a confession is heard in a church building, the confessor may sit inside the altar rails while the penitent kneels nearby. The confession may be heard in a place set aside for greater privacy. It is also appropriate for the confessor and penitent to sit face to face for a spiritual conference that leads to absolution or a declaration of forgiveness. After the penitent has confessed all serious sins troubling the conscience and given evidence of contrition, the priest offers counsel and encouragement before pronouncing absolution. Before pronouncing absolution, the priest may assign a psalm, prayer, or hymn to be said, or something to be done, as a sign or penitence and act of thanksgiving.

The 1979 BCP is the first American Prayer Book to provide forms for the Reconciliation of a Penitent as a separate office. Form One (p. 447) is shorter and less elaborate than Form Two (p. 449), which includes material similar to the Byzantine form for confession. Form Two begins with verses from Psalm 51 and the Trisagion, and it includes scriptural words of comfort. A rubric in Form Two also directs that the priest lay a hand upon the penitent's head or extend a hand over the penitent at the absolution. This gesture also may be used at the absolution in Form One. The secrecy of the confession is morally absolute for the confessor and must not be broken (BCP, p. 446).

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/glossary/reconciliation-of-a-penitent/>

From the Book of Common Prayer

The Reconciliation of a Penitent

Form One

The Penitent begins

Bless me, for I have sinned.

The Priest says

The Lord be in your heart and upon your lips that you may truly and humbly confess your sins: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Penitent

I confess to Almighty God, to his Church, and to you, that I have sinned by my own fault in thought, word, and deed, in things done and left undone; especially _____. For these and all other sins which I cannot now remember, I am truly sorry. I pray God to have mercy on me. I firmly intend amendment of life, and I humbly beg forgiveness of God and his Church, and ask you for counsel, direction, and absolution.

Here the Priest may offer counsel, direction, and comfort.

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The Priest then pronounces this absolution

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has left power to his Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of

his great mercy forgive you all your offenses; and by his authority committed to me, I absolve you from all your sins: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

or this

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered himself to be sacrificed for us to the Father, and who conferred power on his Church to forgive sins, absolve you through my ministry by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and restore you in the perfect peace of the Church. *Amen.*

The Priest adds

The Lord has put away all your sins.

Penitent Thanks be to God.

The Priest concludes

Go (or abide) in peace, and pray for me, a sinner.

Declaration of Forgiveness

to be used by a Deacon or Lay Person

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered himself to be sacrificed for us to the Father, forgives your sins by the grace of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

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Form Two

The Priest and Penitent begin as follows

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness;
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.

Wash me through and through from my wickedness,
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions only too well,
and my sin is ever before me.

Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One,
have mercy upon us.

Penitent Pray for me, a sinner.

Priest

May God in his love enlighten your heart, that you may
remember in truth all your sins and his unfailing mercy.
Amen.

*The Priest may then say one or more of these or other appropriate verses
of Scripture, first saying*

Hear the Word of God to all who truly turn to him.

Come to me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I
will refresh you. *Matthew 11:28*

God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son,
to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but
have everlasting life. *John 3:16*

This is a true saying, and worthy of all men to be received,
that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.
1 Timothy 1:15

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If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus
Christ the righteous; and he is the perfect offering for our

sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. 1 John 2:1-2

The Priest then continues

Now, in the presence of Christ, and of me, his minister, confess your sins with a humble and obedient heart to Almighty God, our Creator and our Redeemer.

The Penitent says

Holy God, heavenly Father, you formed me from the dust in your image and likeness, and redeemed me from sin and death by the cross of your Son Jesus Christ. Through the water of baptism you clothed me with the shining garment of his righteousness, and established me among your children in your kingdom. But I have squandered the inheritance of your saints, and have wandered far in a land that is waste.

Especially, I confess to you and to the Church . . .

Here the Penitent confesses particular sins.

Therefore, O Lord, from these and all other sins I cannot now remember, I turn to you in sorrow and repentance. Receive me again into the arms of your mercy, and restore me to the blessed company of your faithful people; through him in whom you have redeemed the world, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

The Priest may then offer words of comfort and counsel.

Priest

Will you turn again to Christ as your Lord?

Penitent I will.

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Priest

Do you, then, forgive those who have sinned against you?

Penitent I forgive them.

Priest

May Almighty God in mercy receive your confession of sorrow and of faith, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. *Amen.*

The Priest then lays a hand upon the penitent's head (or extends a hand over the penitent), saying one of the following

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered himself to be sacrificed for us to the Father, and who conferred power on his Church to forgive sins, absolve you through my ministry by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and restore you in the perfect peace of the Church. *Amen.*

or this

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has left power to his Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgive you all your offenses; and by his authority committed to me, I absolve you from all your sins: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

The Priest concludes

Now there is rejoicing in heaven; for you were lost, and are found; you were dead, and are now alive in Christ Jesus our Lord. Go (*or abide*) in peace. The Lord has put away all your sins.

Penitent Thanks be to God.

Declaration of Forgiveness
to be used by a Deacon or Lay Person

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered himself to be sacrificed for us to the Father, forgives your sins by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Amen.