



Jesus Christ came to reconcile us to the Father and to each other. In His Incarnation, ministry, death, and Resurrection, Christ accomplishes our salvation by forgiving our sins and opening up eternal life. The alienation, sadness, violence, and death which are the fruit of sin since the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden are healed and overcome through the

victory of Christ. Baptism is the primary sacrament through which we are joined to God in this new life of grace and our sins are forgiven—both the washing away of original sin and any actual sins committed, if the person being baptized is not an infant.

The sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession is the means by which we receive the renewal of that baptismal forgiveness throughout our lives. By confessing our sins to the priest, who is acting *in persona Christi*, we are acknowledging to the Lord and the Church our sinfulness and seeking his mercy. A large part of Jesus' public ministry was the forgiveness of sinners. In this sacrament, Jesus continues to heal, love, and save his people, drawing them into relationship with the Blessed Trinity.

In chapter 20 of John's Gospel, Jesus appears to the apostles on Easter Sunday night, breathes the Holy Spirit on them, wishes them peace, and empowers them to go forth to absolve sins. It is as if Jesus cannot wait to come back from the dead in order to share the fruit of his victory over sin and death; already on Easter night, he is passing the power of absolution to the Church, so much does the Lord desire our salvation. When we go to Confession, we receive mercy, forgiveness, grace, and the healing our soul needs in order to make our pilgrim way to the Father's house. What a difference regular Confession makes in the life of a Christian disciple!

## A NOTE FROM BISHOP HYING

# CONFESSION

“

**IN THE CHURCH  
THERE ARE WATER AND  
TEARS: THE WATER OF  
BAPTISM AND THE TEARS  
OF REPENTANCE.  
- ST. AMBROSE**

”

## YEARLY FORMATION NEWSLETTER TOPICS

### EASTER 2020

The Paschal Mystery

### JUNE 2020

Evangelization

### JULY 2020

Discipleship

### AUGUST 2020

Baptism and Confirmation

### SEPTEMBER 2020

Reclaiming Sunday

### OCTOBER 2020

Interior Life: Prayer

### NOVEMBER 2020

Interior Life: Mortification

### DECEMBER 2020

Confession

### JANUARY 2021

Goodness

### FEBRUARY 2021

Beauty

### MARCH 2021

Truth

### APRIL 2021

New Methods

# OUR MERCIFUL FATHER

**MICHELLE NILSSON**

Everyone loves a good transformation story! Our culture is filled with “transformations” of homes/yards, fashion/style, weight/health, career, etc. Yet no matter how “spit-shined” someone looks on the outside, we are all broken and wounded within.

God longs for the transformation of our hearts, not our outward appearances (1 Samuel 16:7). In Baptism, we were washed of our sins and become children of the Father. And from that adoption flows our life of discipleship. This is our true identity.

Of course, most of us do not remain long in a state of perfection. We all sin, rupturing our relationship with God and distorting our identity. God is not satisfied with our choice to turn away, so he offers grace in our lives to serve as “wake-up calls” to remind us of our true identity.

## An Encounter with Mercy

In these moments of grace, God is always waiting for us to turn back and encounter him, so he can offer us his mercy. We see in the story of the woman caught in adultery an example of an encounter with God’s mercy (John 8). Jesus sees the woman as she is, in her sin. He does not condemn her, but neither does he condone her sin. Rather, he invites her into his mercy and a renewal of life.

The Church calls this encounter of mercy the sacrament of Reconciliation. In Baptism, we were washed clean of all our sin, and the sacrament of Reconciliation renews that cleansing, which should happen often. Through this sacrament, we show repentance and receive grace and healing to be his disciples. There will be times when our hearts are heavy and burdened by sin and instinctively we long for that merciful encounter. Other times, we will need to foster an interior conversion by *a daily examen* or *an examination of conscience*.

Our priests stand in the person of Jesus ready to offer us this encounter with Christ. We see Jesus entrust his apostles with this great work when he stated, “‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ And when he said this he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them and whose sins you retain are retained’” (John 20:21-23).

## The Rite of Reconciliation

To receive the sacrament fruitfully, it is necessary to prepare well. First, take time to examine your conscience. Identify and name sins of thought, words, and actions, what we have done (sins of commission) and what we have failed to do (sins of omission).

Then in the confessional:

- Make the sign of the cross.
- Say, “Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It has been [amount of time] since my last confession.”
- List your sins in order from most serious to least (name the number/frequency of each sin).
- Receive penance from Father (a loving act of reparation in response to God’s forgiveness).
- Pray an Act of Contrition (use a memorized prayer or simply express sorrow for your sins).
- Receive absolution from Father.

Finally, in the words of absolution, we are set free to follow Christ:

*God, the Father of mercies, through the death and Resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

## FURTHER STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

- [Daily Examen](#)
- [Examination of Conscience](#)

### TO READ

- Vinny Flynn, [7 Secrets of Confession](#)
- Benedict Baur, [Frequent Confession: Its Place in the Spiritual Life](#)

### TO WATCH

- Fr. Mike Schmitz, [Confession is a Place of Victory](#) (YouTube)
- Fr. Mike Schmitz, [Making a Good Confession](#) (YouTube)

### TO STUDY

- [Forgiven: The Transforming Power of Confession](#) (Formed)

### TO LISTEN

- Fr. Larry Richards, [Confession](#)

## TIPS FOR PARISH LEADERSHIP

Over the past four newsletters, we have studied the four spiritual practices and habits that Bishop Hying is asking all of us to focus on.

- Keeping holy the Lord's day (Sunday).
- Spending at least 15 minutes in prayer each day.
- Practicing mortification every Friday.
- Going to Confession at least once a month.

Studying about these practices and reflecting on them in the moment is a great start. With the help of God's grace, growing and developing our practice of them is the work of a lifetime. As we embrace the coming months of formation with our fellow staff or team members, make time each month for honest sharing about how your life is being transformed by giving more time and space to God. Talk about ways that you can keep one another accountable in between meetings.

## FORMATION IN THE PARISH

### QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

- Do you ever find yourself hiding from God—like Adam and Eve in the Garden?
- What have been some of the "wake up moments" when God has brought you back to him to help you discover your identity in him?
- How often do you frequent the sacrament of Reconciliation? What's your goal for how often to go to Confession?
- Is there something keeping you from the sacrament of Reconciliation (shame, guilt, anger)?

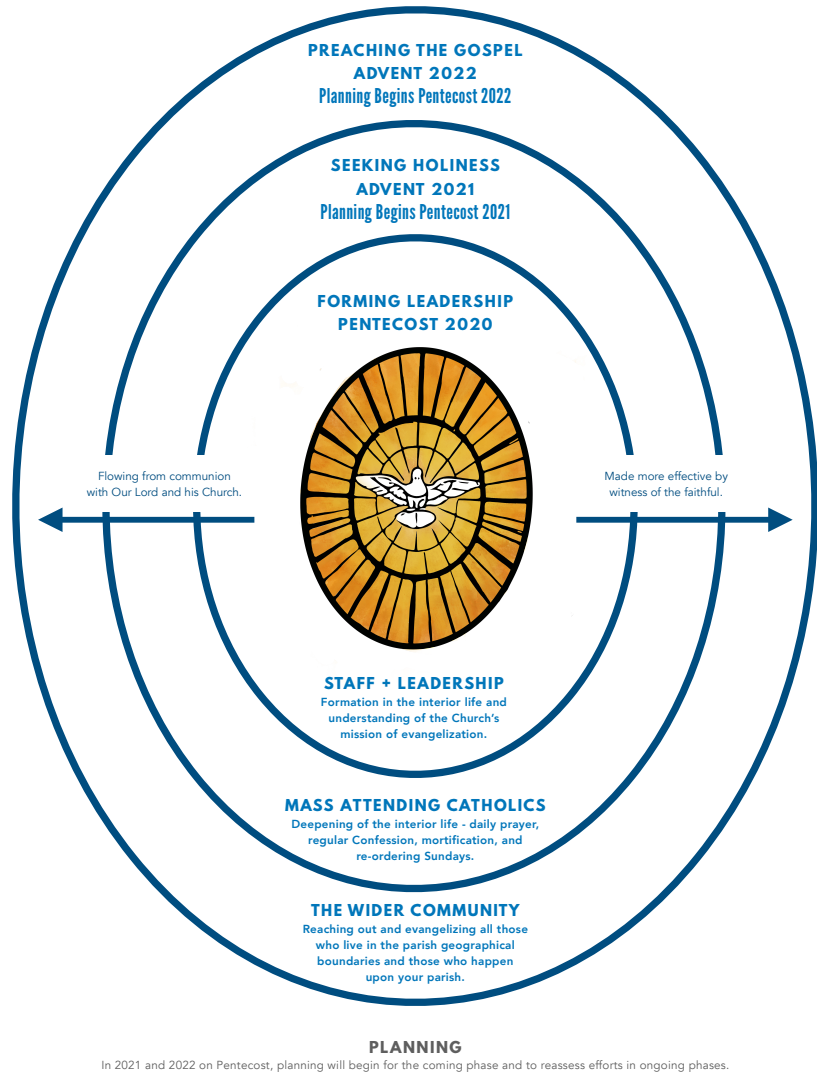
### REFLECTION IDEA FOR LEADERSHIP MEETINGS

Have everyone reflect on the different accounts from Scripture where Jesus forgives or offers mercy to someone. Share which one resonates or speaks to you?

**TO READ:** Prodigal Son (Luke 15), Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8), Woman at the Well (John 4), Jesus & Peter (John 21), Conversion of Paul (Acts 9).

Bishop Hying shared at the presbyteral gathering in September some changes to the timeline for the rollout of the Go Make Disciples initiative. See the diagram and points below to catch up on the changes! All mentors and priests should be able to help answer questions about these changes.

- The beginning of Phase 2, focused on helping practicing Catholics seek holiness with greater enthusiasm and fervor, is delayed until Advent 2021. This doesn't give us reason to delay on getting started in Phase 1; instead we have the opportunity to dive deeper into formation.
- There is now a specific time set aside for planning for Phase 2. Along with planning, formation of leadership is expected to continue.



## CONTACT INFORMATION

### ON THE WEB:

[WWW.MADISONDIOCESE.ORG/GMD](http://WWW.MADISONDIOCESE.ORG/GMD)

### E-MAIL:

[EVANGELIZE@MADISONDIOCESE.ORG](mailto:EVANGELIZE@MADISONDIOCESE.ORG)





## THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON, 1669

REMBRANDT

The sacrament of Reconciliation calls to mind the story of the Prodigal Son found in Luke 15. The younger son decides that he no longer wants to live in the home of his father. He demands his inheritance and then "gathered all he had and took his journey to a far country, where he squandered his property in loose living" (Luke 15:13).

But then one day he remembers his father and the home that he left. He humbles himself and returns home to ask forgiveness. The compelling beauty

of the story is not simply in the conversion of the son, but also in the response of the father: "But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). The parable evokes an emotional scene of re-connection between father and son. We don't see a father who is angry or withholding of forgiveness. The father was eagerly waiting to receive the son no matter what wrongs he had committed. But it was the son who had to take the first step. He had to choose the unconditional mercy offered by the father and be willing to return home.

We know when we have moved far from the Lord. We often find it difficult to return to the Father in humility and repentance. If we only knew how eagerly our Father in heaven is waiting for us with that unconditional gift of mercy, even when we are a long way off, we would run to him without a moment's delay. We can find comfort and joy in the image of our Father in heaven running to meet us as we approach the sacrament of Reconciliation.