



Suggested Best Practices

These suggestions were taken from the feedback pastors of the Diocese gave in response to the 2009 Diocesan Reconciliation Weekend about things that they did that worked well.

In preparation

- 1) Take advantage of the bulletin blurbs, prayers of the faithful, and homiletic points to keep the Reconciliation Weekend in people's minds. Posters can be downloaded from the website to be put as graphics in your bulletin in addition to the posters that have been mailed for your bulletin boards.
- 2) Begin promotions on Ash Wednesday, so that those who come for ashes may be pointed to the Sacrament to which true repentance leads.
- 3) Ask for Sunday parishioners' help in bringing the invitation for the Reconciliation Weekend to family members, coworkers and neighbors who have been estranged from the practice of the faith or from the Sacrament of Penance.
- 4) Print the examination of conscience sheet as an insert in your parish bulletin sometime in the first half of Lent to help people thoroughly examine themselves and see the need for the Sacrament.
- 5) (New this year). Highlight the Bishop's Letter, which you will have by March 13-14 (the weekend before the Reconciliation Weekend) and reiterate his personal invitation and appeal.
- 6) Let people who may be embarrassed to go to confession to their own parish priest to know that confessions will be heard simultaneously at Catholic parishes throughout the Diocese and encourage them to go.
- 7) Push the BeReconciledtoGod.com website, which has many good materials and links that go beyond what can be said in homilies, bulletins and the like.
- 8) Make arrangements for religious education students and Catholic School students to participate at some point of the Reconciliation Weekend. Send a letter to the parents of the religious ed students, inviting them to come and to bring their children as well.
- 9) Use the logo from the parish website to design a small little reminder sheet with your parish's hours for the Reconciliation Weekend to be given to people as they're leaving Church the previous Sunday.

- 10) Include notice of the Reconciliation Weekend in any Lenten or pre-Easter letters that you send to your parish mailing list. You may possibly send a letter with news of this outreach specifically to inactive parishioners.
- 11) Offer a “practical” talk on the Sacrament of Penance a few weeks before the Reconciliation Weekend, including perhaps a “dry confession” with some volunteers, so that people who do not know how to go to confession may more easily see it demonstrated for them. This may also be a good time to talk about any “bad experiences” of the Sacrament in the past.
- 12) Ask people to pray for the “success” of the weekend, that many of those who need the Sacrament most will return. In a particular way, ask the sick and the shut-ins for their help in praying for this intention.

During the Weekend Itself

- 1) Arrange for a few ushers to greet those who come to the Church. Many of those coming may be from outside your parish and may not know where the confessional or reconciliation room is. Ushers can make them not only feel welcome, but they can keep an eye on the Church while the priest is hearing confessions. Ushers may hand out an examination of conscience sheet with an act of contrition written on it to help people who have been away from the Sacrament of Penance for a while. As penitents are leaving, they may hand them a bulletin or some other point of contact to try to encourage those who may be regularly practice the faith to return.
- 2) Arrange for Eucharistic adoration to be ongoing at the front of the Church while confessions are being heard. There are various advantages to this: people can be praying for all those who are coming to receive the Sacrament of Penance, creating a real sense of community in prayerful solidarity; it creates a “near occasion of prayer” for those who have had their confessions heard, and may be a means by which to help them re-center their life on our Eucharistic Lord; it brings more people to Church, which not only helps with security but gives people who might be on the fence about returning to the Sacrament of Penance an excuse to go to Church, where God’s grace may move them to confess.
- 3) Try to arrange for two priests to be hearing by speaking to priests who are retired or living in religious communities. Not only does a second priest help when there are big crowds, but also it allows a priest to be more patient with a penitent who might need extra time.
- 4) Have some type of sacred music playing in the Church to help drown out the sound that comes from penitents (or confessors!) who speak loudly.
- 5) Make arrangements, if necessary, for those who are handicapped in any way to have their confessions heard in a way more convenient to them. Possibly announce it ahead of time or coordinate with the ushers what to do in the event someone in such circumstances arrives.