



The Ministry of Reconciliation: a Guide for Priests and Penitents

Through baptism, Christians pass from the death of sin to the new life of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Ministry of Reconciliation renews that gift of forgiveness in baptism, restoring the grace of the font. Reconciliation is offered to all Christians as a medicine for the soul, and a discipline through which they may grow in holiness and love as part of a rule of life.

All priests authorised to hear confessions regularly will themselves be penitents and will have been received training the hearing of confessions and safeguarding.

Penitents are encouraged to unburden themselves of any sin, guilt and fear by speaking freely what is in their heart in the knowledge that nothing disclosed during confession will ever be disclosed or referred to again except at their request.

To make a good confession, penitents must examine their conscience carefully and sincerely desire to leave past habits, behaviour and attitudes behind them and, as far as may be possible, to make reparation and the priest will support them in this. Priests must never put pressure on a penitent or be intrusive but may ask questions to help the penitent and may offer advice and an act of penance as a celebration of forgiveness.

In the case of a disclosure which would in other circumstances require the priest to make a referral to the police or relevant safeguarding authority, the priest will explain that in order to demonstrate true penitence and the desire for reparation, the disclosure must be repeated to someone who can take the safeguarding process forward outside the seal. In these circumstances the priest will withhold absolution until this has been done. The priest will then continue to offer support to the penitent.

If the penitent refuses to do this, the priest will terminate the confession without absolution whilst making it clear that the individual is always free to return. In these circumstances the priest is still bound by the seal.

Where a penitent discloses abuse by another person, the priest will do everything possible to offer reassurance and to encourage him or her to repeat the disclosure outside confession so that the relevant authorities can take action to protect any who are vulnerable.

A penitent is free to terminate the confession at any point and is always free to find another confessor.

Please contact the Bishop's Adviser on the Ministry of Reconciliation, The Venerable Jonathan Sedgwick, Archdeacon of Southwark by email at jonathan.sedgwick@southwark.anglican.org if you have any questions or concerns about this guide.