

REVISITING THE RITE OF RECONCILIATION:
ALL MAY, SOME SHOULD, NONE MUST

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to
My beloved family, Ken and Delia;
My dear supporters and patrons, Connie and Randall Fegley;
and
My friend and mentor, the Reverend W. Frank Allen

ABSTRACT

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The “ministry of reconciliation” which has its roots in Christ’s life and work and is illumined by Paul in his 2 Letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 5:17-21), calls all Christians to acknowledge that the entirety of life has been reconciled to God. Thus, we are called to see him in all things and to be ambassadors of this reconciliation to the world in Christ’s name. In the Episcopal Church, there is a liturgical sacrament, known as the Reconciliation of a Penitent (commonly referred to as “private confession). This sacramental rite seeks to embody the theological concepts of reconciliation—confession, forgiveness, and the joy of being renewed in the pronouncement of absolution which is itself a mark of resurrected life—within the confines of a confidential ritual.

However, in most Episcopal Churches, this Rite is not only seldom used, it is also seldom even known! St. David’s Church in Wayne, PA is a very typically parish in this regard. Before the work of this project, members of the congregation were interviewed to explore their feelings and knowledge of this Rite. Based on this research, it was discovered that many viewed the Rite as both foreign to the Episcopal tradition and objectionable upon being told that it was an option. Yet, ignoring this ritual means that Episcopalians miss out on the opportunity to practice pastoral healing and receive the joy

of reconciliation. Thus, the work of this thesis and project is to examine the intersection between the Christian ministry of reconciliation and the realities of a modern church experience at St. David's to try to encounter and measure a reconciled and resurrected life and monitor the transformation that can occur with congregations who are educated and exposed to this sacramental grace.

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CHAPTER ONE

REVISITING THE RITE OF RECONCILIATION:

ALL MAY, SOME SHOULD, NONE MUST

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

- 2 Corinthians 5:17-21¹

“Confession?? We are not going to have to start doing that here, are we? That kind of stuff is why I left the Catholic Church!” This comment greeted me after service where I had preached a sermon on the importance of reconciliation and confession.² Though it was not exactly the kind of remark I had hoped to hear, it was not wholly unexpected. Ever since I had begun to talk about the Rite of Reconciliation of a Penitent – otherwise thought of as “private confession” – I had received a whole host of reactions ranging from the supportive to the downright defiant. That the topic of confession should elicit such strong emotions may not be surprising.

¹ All scripture citation throughout this work is taken from The New Revised Standard Version translation.

² Hillary D. Raining, “Reconciliation” (sermon, St. David’s Episcopal Church, Wayne, PA, February 3, 2013). The entire text of the sermon is in Appendix Three.

However, what was astonishing was that most of these reactions came only after people learned that private confession even existed in the Episcopal Church. For a “secret” as well kept as Reconciliation of a Penitent is in the Anglican tradition, everyone seemed to know precisely what he or she thought about it. Despite this apparent contradiction, this “secret” Rite may actually hold a key to a grace and an invitation from God to live as a people of a resurrected hope — if we would but answer the call.

I have the joy of serving as one of the Associate Rectors at St. David’s Episcopal Church in Wayne, Pennsylvania, a vibrant and busy suburb of Philadelphia. With over 3,300 members and almost as many number of events offered in a year, St. David’s is a church that lives into its mission to “know God in Jesus Christ and to make Christ known to others” by adopting a very extroverted spirituality. In fact, with a myriad of programs offered in the areas of fellowship, discipleship, pastoral care, outreach, worship, and family ministry, St. David’s perhaps only lacks attention to the more “in-reach” part of a faith journey. While congregants who come to these events at the church do, indeed, tend to feel enriched by them, they often have a hard time incorporating the spiritual lessons into their daily lives. Yet the “the ministry of reconciliation” which has its roots in Christ’s life and work and is illumined by Paul in his 2 Letter to the Corinthians would have us realize that all of our life has been reconciled to God and we must see him in all things. Thus, the work of this thesis and project seeks to examine the intersection between the Christian ministry of reconciliation and the realities of a modern church experience at St. David’s to try to encounter a reconciled and resurrected life.

Overview of the Project

In order to study Reconciliation as both a liturgical and theological construct, within the setting of St. David's, the project itself needed to be grounded in doctrinal and contextual considerations. To that end, the second chapter of this thesis deals with the spiral like nature of the Rite and concept of reconciliation. The study of this grace begins with a brief examination of the Biblical and historical roots of the concept that leads to an inspection of sin and justification as displayed in the reconciling work of Christ on the cross. Jesus's death there points to the love that is displayed in that sacrificial action. Yet, what we know from scripture is that God intends to have us offer this reconciling action to the whole world. Thus, an exploration is made into possible confusion in our role as ministers of reconciliation and our duty as the Church to perform it. Finally, a brief study of the modern lack of the use of this Rite in the Church leads to a fuller understanding of the important need for this work to be done in Christ's name.

Having grounded the argument in the theological and contextual understandings of reconciliation in Chapter Two, this thesis turns its attention to the nature of felt need at St. David's itself as well as the work of the Lay Advisory Committee (LAC). The first description of the LAC's work focuses on their own education and emerging awareness of reconciliation as well as the tools that they employed to form interview questions for other members of the church. From there, the project itself is surveyed – including its formation, application, and evaluation that also consisted of interviews preformed by the LAC.

Chapter Four delves more deeply into the Lenten six-week program that was developed through the effort of the LAC. That course followed the findings of the LAC's interviews and progressively invited participants into an increased understanding and experience of reconciliation. Each week focused on a different topic including history and theology; shame, guilt, and joy; forgiveness and *kenosis*, resurrection and incarnation; and growth in reconciliation. The final session was a large worship service tying together the themes examined in the classes. Each class also offered worship experiences and meditations.

Finally, Chapter Five is an examination of the marks of transformation in the participants, the LAC, the clergy of the parish, St. David's and myself. To try and glean such marks, the LAC again employed interview techniques to gather data from participants. Sermons and clergy reflections were also used as indicators of change. In conjunction with those signs, attention is paid to the writings, worship, and classes of parishioners and participants alike.

Ultimately, this project has shown that Reconciliation as a Rite of the Church and a grace from God can indeed lead to a life that is more at peace and felicity by laying down the burdens of sin and shame. We are then called upon to complete that circle of reconciliation by being its Ambassadors to the world. The people who engaged this reality at St. David's Church considered themselves to have been changed by that reconciling grace and have been forever changed – a joy that comes from God's love alone.

CHAPTER TWO

CONGREGATIONAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND LITURGICAL CONCERNS

Theological and Biblical Roots of Reconciliation

Any venture into the grace-filled nature of reconciliation must be rooted in Christian salvation history as displayed in scripture and tradition. Through that lens, the nature of reconciliation can be seen to be spiral-like in its ability to raise a person up out of sin and grief through the forgiveness of Christ. From that moment forth, the reconciled have a call to go forth and be Ambassadors of Reconciliation for the world. In doing so, they will help lift others up to that same state of justification with God's help. The Ambassador will feel joy anew and the spiral of resurrected life continues upward through the reconciling work of God.

Reconciliation Defined

As stated in the introduction, the data gathered from the opinions and stories shared by participants in this study show a lack of a deep spirituality that may spring from our disregard of liturgical and theological Reconciliation. It is a tendency of many

Episcopal Churches, St. David's included, to shy away from the Rite in the Book of Common Prayer called the "Reconciliation of a Penitent," or more commonly known as "private confession." Could it also be that the lack of "theological awareness" in liturgical format is also indicative of an equal lack of understanding about the "Ministry of Reconciliation" as Paul refers to it in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21? If so, why has this happened to our churches?

To answer that question, we must first look at the core meaning of reconciliation to be able to understand its importance in the life of a Christian. Reconciliation, as applied in this project, is not simply about identifying sins and then asking God for forgiveness. Nor is it just a catchphrase for particular theologies that seek to attract people who have otherwise been pushed to the margins in the church or in society.

Reconciliation in its classical theological form can hence be defined thus;

meaning much the same as redemption, atonement, or even, salvation [sic]. It refers to the removal of division between God and humanity, a division brought by sin and overcome by Jesus Christ, both Son of God and new Adam, in whom divinity and humanity are reconciled. More than redemption, the word suggests necessary mutuality of action. Reconciliation cannot be a one-sided achievement. Whatever is offered has also to be accepted, including forgiveness, an integral element within reconciliation whether human or divine. The Lord's Prayer with its suggested mutuality linking divine forgiveness with 'as we forgive those who trespass against us' and the injunction of the Sermon on the Mount, 'first be reconciled to your brother' (Matt. 5:24) provide a model, but this very sense of mutuality may have resulted in the word 'reconciliation' being less used in theologies that insist on the depravity of humanity and the single-sided character of God's redemptive and forgiving action [sic].¹

Thus, rather than being a call to wallow in our brokenness, reconciliation is God's call to know freedom of sin; freedom from thinking that we could ever permanently separate

¹ Adrian Hastings, "Reconciliation," in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought: Intellectual, Spiritual, and Moral Horizons of Christianity*, ed. Adrian Hastings, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 597-598.

ourselves of the love of God; freedom from thinking any part of our life is somehow not a part of God's story; freedom to go out and proclaim God's good news and justice to all; and the freedom of peace which passes all understanding.

In other words, as a theological grace, reconciliation is comprised of and can be defined as the saving action of God's call to redemption; the full forgiveness of our sins made possible through Jesus' atoning action on the cross; and having its full completion in the Holy Spirit's work of making us new creations as a mark of resurrected life. It is God's self-sacrificing invitation to live as the full creations that we were intended to be.

Unpacking that definition first requires a survey of the Biblical and theological roots of the nature of sin and God's action in salvation history. We understand that God, never desiring humanity to suffer under the weight of our own destructive actions, "sent the prophets to call us back to himself, to show us our need for redemption, and to announce the coming of the Messiah."² Yet, the question of sin and the damage it causes needs to be addressed in any treatment of reconciliation. To that end, the nature of sin will be examined later in this chapter where it will be argued that sin is not merely the product of an inborn human fallenness. Rather, it is the "seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation."³ Sin is the choice to turn away from God's redeeming love. Reconciliation is the invitation to turn around and return to one true self.

The next consideration in the definition of reconciliation is the role of the Messiah – Jesus. In classic atonement theory, emphasis is placed on Jesus's crucifixion as the

² *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1986), 849.

³ *Ibid.*, 848.

moment of “man’s reconciliation with God through [his] sacrificial death. The need for such reconciliation is implicit in the Old Testament [sic.] conception of God’s absolute righteousness, to which nothing impure or sinful can approach. Its achievement is here represented as dependent on an act of God Himself [sic.]....”⁴ Clearly, Christ’s deed on the cross is an important and salvific aspect of reconciliation. Without it, we could not hope to know the truth of ourselves – as God’s children -- in the face of Jesus’s self-sacrificing death. Yet, the cross and the atoning love that it symbolizes are not the end of the reconciliation action that God extends to us. The lack in atonement theory in the theology of reconciliation is that it leaves out the all-important empty tomb thus failing to emphasize the resurrection as an equally important part of resurrection.

It is the resurrection of Jesus -- not just his death -- that Christians participate in through the work of reconciliation, and it is that truth that Paul pointed to in his treatise on the Ministry of Reconciliation. Indeed,

[In his] elaboration of the doctrine [of reconciliation], the Church owes a unique debt to St. Paul [who held both the crucifixion and the resurrection as important for the grace of salvation]. Christ’s death and resurrection were the means by which we are redeemed from the effects of the Law and its transgression, namely sin, from God’s condemnation, and from death. By Baptism [sic.] the Christian mystically shares in Christ’s death and His victory over it (that is the resurrection), and acquires, by God’s free gift, a new status of sonship [sic.] or justification.⁵

In other words, because we have been justified – put in reconciled right relationship with God through God’s grace – we are given the opportunity to truly live as people of the resurrection. In 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, “Paul is suggesting that when we do this – when we reach out to touch those things that are sinful – then we are acting as one who is

⁴ F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., s.v. “Atonement” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 124.

⁵ *Ibid.*

forgetting their true identity [that of child of God]. That when we are continent to sin, we forget that we are to be living as a people who have been made a new creation [having been resurrected with Christ]. We forget that we have been forgiven of our sin that threatens to keep us chained to our old habits, our old ways of life, to death itself.”⁶

Finally, reconciliation is an invitation -- not only to freedom of sin and resurrected life – but to ministry. Perhaps the greatest gift that reconciliation offers is the ability to extend God’s love to others by calling all to reconciliation and forgiveness in God’s name. That is one of the gifts of the Rite of Reconciliation – the Church’s answer to the call to be an Ambassador for Reconciliation -- in particular.

Confession offers an opportunity to change, an opportunity to face our fears and to let God pluck up and pull down those thing in our hearts and souls which hold us back from being all God calls us to be. Confession is a call that we answer that allows us to move past fears and live more fully into the life that God offers. When we confess our sins, we lay down the heavy burdens that they are. We let God pull down the pride and the hypocrisy. We let God pluck out the barriers that we have erected between God, and others, and ourselves. We eradicate the sins that threaten to destroy and over come us. Our heart, hardened by the ice-cold winter of sin will thaw and become fertile. A place full of life.⁷

Paul tells us that this reconciliation is now ours to offer to the world as Christ did for us.

St. David’s, like many Episcopal churches, has not paid overt attention to this important ministry, so the opportunity for transformation in rediscovering this vital grace from God is a rich one. Using the theology and Rite of Reconciliation as our guide, St. David’s may become a community that is able to better model the Body of Christ – the very body in which the infinite and the human are reconciled back to God – by fully delving into the rich ministry of reconciliation to which Jesus has called us, both in an

⁶ Hillary Raining, “Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Lent” (sermon, St. David’s Episcopal Church, Wayne, PA, March 9, 2013). This sermon can be found in Appendix Two.

⁷ Hillary Raining, “Reconciliation” (sermon, St. David’s Episcopal Church, Wayne, PA, February 3, 2013). This sermon can be found in Appendix Two.

increased awareness of the fullness of the new life it offers and the actual Rite of Reconciliation itself.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Roots of Reconciliation

The theological roots of the so-called “ministry of reconciliation” comes from the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21⁸, in which Paul expands on the nature of God’s love and its implications for the Christian life. It is not only his theology, however, that makes Paul a good model for this congregation, but also his personal life. In many ways, Paul’s journey and personal faith match the experiences of St. David’s members while offering a possible call to growth.

Paul was a well-educated Roman citizen who was originally a member of an unusually well-tolerated religion, thus making him a relatively powerful member of society. Before his conversion, Paul practiced his Judaism at a time when other religions were not allowed that same freedom.

During the first century, Judaism enjoyed some general popularity....The reason for the favorable reception of Judaism by many non-Jews in the first-century was that Judaism was perceived to be a pragmatic, sensible alternative to other religions and ways of thinking. Monotheism appealed to many first-century urbanites as a cosmopolitan, sophisticated view of God.⁹

⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:17-21: So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

⁹ Marion L. Soards, *The Apostle Paul: An Introduction to his Writings and Teaching* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 14-15.

In other words, pre-conversion Paul's Judaism was seen to be a "thinking-man's" religion that was rational and not a threat to the established government. I believe that "traditional Christianity" currently has a similar "safe" feel to it; Episcopalians, especially, pride themselves as being very rational and "non-confrontational" as a denomination.

More than the religious similarities, however, Paul's position is similar to that of St. David's members by virtue of his unique position as a Roman citizen. "Paul and his original readers were citizens of the Roman Empire...[T]he Romans were the overlords of the period....The age was characterized by extensive travel, rapid expansion of populations and cities, a questing of the past and its values, and a searching for new answers."¹⁰ This description of the era could just as easily fit today's demographic in Wayne, Pennsylvania. Wayne is a place of vast wealth which maintains a strong link to its colonial and revolutionary history. Further, as a Roman citizen, as opposed to being merely a subject or slave of the Empire, Paul was able to move through the known world virtually free. Many of the residents of the so-called "Main Line" in which Wayne is situated, likewise have the means, the cause, and the clout to move in the world easily.

This combination of religious and social power found in both Paul's pre-conversion life and amongst the people of St. David's is very important to an exploration of the ministry of Reconciliation. For his chief metaphor for reconciliation, Paul chose the term "ambassador," a position that was as substantial and important then as now, and one that carries the authority and weight of power "Main Liners" are quite familiar.

As we can see, Paul uses powerful language to describe the nature of ministry in 2 Corinthians 5:20, where he describes his – and all Christians' – main task to be

¹⁰ Ibid., 16.

“ambassadors for Christ.” The word for “ambassador” in Greek, in which language Paul was writing, is *presbeuein* or *presbueuein*.¹¹ Although this word is used most prevalently in the Old Testament, in the New Testament it is used metaphorically. In this instance, the term refers to a man who was directly representing the Emperor.¹² For Paul, a *presbeuein* is a person who represents the highest authority, and in Paul’s case, that person is higher than the Emperor; it is Christ himself.

However, this word may have a double meaning. When the Roman government of the time decided that a country should become a province, it would send *presbutai* to officially set up a local system of government, which then fulfilled duties such as establishing boundaries, instituting a legal system, and drawing up a new constitution for that area.¹³ Paul describes the work of an Ambassador of Christ as having the same responsibilities as the *presbutai*. He sees himself as bringing “the offer and the conditions of God, whereby men can become citizens of the empire of God and members of his family.”¹⁴ Since earlier in this letter, Paul uses his own life as an example for the way Christians ought to live, they, too, are to be Ambassadors for Christ.

This practical theological insight has many implications for Christians’ lives: firstly, there are times that contemporary Christians may feel like strangers in their own lives. As people who are trying to live out Jesus’s lifestyle, they struggle by being continually confronted with secular choices that encourage them to center on money, self,

¹¹ J. D. Douglas, ed., *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 29.

¹² William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: the Westminster Press, 1956), 234.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

power, or any number of idols which are not God. Secondly, as Ambassadors, they must act honorably because people will judge accordingly the new place – or in this case the new values and ideas – that one is representing. Remembering again the power and authority that an Ambassador has – both in Paul’s time and today – Christians are to understand that they are not appointed to this stature by their own merits, but rather by the honor of Jesus, in whose name they are sent to spread this new understanding of life. To this end, they must truly contemplate the way they are, in Christ, a new creation, and must begin to live accordingly.

Sin and Justification in Reconciliation

If they all lived as perfect Ambassadors of Reconciliation according the model of Jesus, then Christians would be living without sin. However, the sad truth of the human experience is that we do continue in lives that are broken and that fall short of being worthy of the title “Ambassador”. We seem to be tangled in a circle of sin and brokenness that lead to more of the same. Yet, the work of reconciliation actually works to free us from that circle and move us upwards in a spiral of forgiveness and Ambassadorship.

Before we can break free of sin, however, we need to understand it. Although an exploration into the reasons people continue to sin is a subject worthy of its own thesis, it is important to cite the magnitude of this reality as it relates to the subject of reconciliation. After all, if there were no sin, one would not need such a sacramental offering as the Rite of Reconciliation to help turn away from that sin and return to God.

Thus, for the purposes of this project, The Book of Common Prayer's definition of sin will suffice: "Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation."¹⁵

While it is indeed true that people sin, Paul has already commented that Jesus has redeemed humanity, through his death and resurrection that made full atonement for all sins. This saving action could be called "justification" or a "putting in the right" or to "place someone in the right."¹⁶ As Alan Torrance puts it:

in the Septuagint and the New Testament [justification] is generally used in a positive sense to denote justification, vindication, or treating someone as just. In Paul, it is used almost exclusively of God's judgment and again, in a positive sense, of the acquittal of men and women, of their being pronounced and treated as righteous — being liberated to become righteous. Thus, at the heart of Christian theology there is to be found a profoundly positive concept of justification which, nonetheless, takes full account of the negative implications of attributing righteousness to an alienated humanity.... Thus both the positive and the negative aspects are held together. In Christ, we are both exposed to our guilt and also made righteous, we are judged and condemned, and at the same time vindicated.¹⁷

In other words, all have sinned and thus need to be brought back into relationship to God. Thus, Christ was sent into this world to save sinners by taking on their sin and making them worthy to stand before God. To be sure, this is Christ's victory. However, all are given this grace and made whole by this justification. Therefore all are both sinner and saint (through Jesus's grace) and are thus called to live a resurrected life again and again.

Yet, how does this change of life occur? 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 explains, "For the love of Christ urges us on, because all are convinced that one has died for all:

¹⁵ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 848.

¹⁶ Alan Torrance, "Justification," in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought: Intellectual, Spiritual, and Moral Horizons of Christianity*, ed. Adrian Hastings, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 362.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 362.

therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.” Thus one should never be boastful, but humble because we are to be servants of the Lord. God’s wisdom has turned the world’s thinking upside-down. Commonly, the term “powerful leader” calls to mind a person who is out in front who receives the entire honor, accolades, and glory for themselves. To be a Christian Ambassador, however, means to live a life of service rather than to be served – it is a reversal of how the secular world proceeds in all things. Christians can know this powerful truth regarding the reversal of power paradigms because of the love of the risen Christ, which will transform them into the “new creation” that Paul speaks of later in this passage.

Up until this point, we have followed the traditional lines of Atonement Theology, but we must remember that Paul – and indeed God – is not chiefly concerned with our sins alone. If that were the case, there would be no need for the resurrection since the crucifixion would have taken away any “taint of original sin” which would have solved the “human dilemma.” Rather, Paul explains that God loved humanity so much that Jesus not only died but also rose again for all so that we might truly live as the children of God were created to be. This message of grace should be all the justification and credentials that Christians need to proclaim the Word. Thus, when a Christian seeks reconciliation with God, they are claiming the belief that they have been made a new creation and are not somehow broken by Adam’s original sin. Seeking Reconciliation of a Penitent, rather than being simply an amendment of some habit in a hopeless spiral of unavoidable sinful behavior due to a human defect – is a mark of being free in Christ. In

doing so, the reconciled let their lives point to God for the whole world as Ambassadors of Reconciliation.

This holy mystery is the true nature of the “ministry of reconciliation.” Christ died for all in order that all should cease to live only for themselves, and should live for him and for others. Like a perfect spiral, Christians receive the love of Christ, and in turn, live their lives for that love. Through God’s grace, they are able to know salvation. Their faith in this salvation and the new life that it brings will lead them to have an unselfish life in which they live to serve others.

Peace, Love, and New Creation through Reconciliation

Thus, reconciliation includes at least two more very important, yet often neglected, facets of a complete life: peace and love. Reconciliation is the grace that guides all people. Through it, Christians learn who they are in relationship to God, how to treat others, and how to live an integrated and holistic existence. That is what it means to be a “new creation.” Harkness describes it thus:

Reconciliation is *agape* [that is to say the covenant love of God for humans, as well as the human reciprocal love for God which necessarily extends to the love of others] in action, but *agape* felt and expressed in the face of all that stands in the way of its fulfillment. It is not something to be engaged in by a soft and flabby soul, any more that it can be by stern and callous one... Amid the frustrating realities of the human situation, love that is truly Christian ‘bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things,’ and thus becomes a reconciling force to be used by God in the advancement of his long purposes... *Shalom*, or peace in the biblical sense, is also a very close synonym of reconciliation. This is true as an ingredient of the spirit that prompts one to act in reconciling love. Yet it is also the fruit of reconciling love. It is the high reward of one that does not seek the peace of passivity through avoidance of struggle, but who sees his duty and does it in trust of God and the power of love. ¹⁸

¹⁸ Georgia Harkness, *The Ministry of Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 12-14.

In other words, a newly created life that is dedicated to the work of the love and peace of God, both for the soul and for the world, will need to actively strive to be an ambassador for God and help establish his kingdom on earth.

Again, Paul's life serves as an example of this kind of reconciliation in action. Although a full exploration into the conversion, context and subsequent ministry of Paul cannot be made here, it is important to highlight the way Paul's journey to reconciliation with the very Jesus and his believers that he was persecuting before his conversion is currently understood in this congregational setting. Of those who consider themselves familiar with the conversion story of Paul, his initial opposition to followers of Jesus is of great importance. All of the scriptural references to Paul's pre-conversion lifestyle point to his persecution of the earliest followers of Jesus.¹⁹ Indeed, "Luke consistently portrays him as a murderous wretch without redeeming quality."²⁰ He was known for being "a Pharisee zealous for God and God's honor, determined to stamp out those who, from his perspective, blasphemed the holy name."²¹ This noteworthy hatred for the earliest followers of Jesus certainly made Paul an unlikely candidate for reconciliation.

What we see here is a man whose original beliefs and actions were placing him out of relationship with Jesus – both personally as well as with Jesus's followers – until Jesus came to him and called him to repentance. From there, Paul was blinded and was told by Jesus in Acts 9:10 to visit the follower of Jesus, Ananias, who stands in as a

¹⁹ See 1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13; Philippians 3:6; Acts 9:1-19.

²⁰ Philip H. Kern, "Paul's Conversion and Luke's Portrayal of Character in Acts 8-10", *Tyndale Bulletin* 54, no 2 (2003), 70.

²¹ Tom Kuepfer, "'I Saw the Light': The Significance of the Apostle Paul's Conversion Testimony", *Vision* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2009), 15.

model of the way Christians are to embody the healing action of Christ for others. Ananias indeed restores Paul's sight and gives him instruction in the way of the Lord, and Paul then becomes one of the greatest Ambassadors for Christ the world has ever seen. In this episode, we see the cycle and theology of reconciliation: Through his death and resurrection, Jesus offers us the grace and opportunity to live a new life, Christians are called to change their ways and heed his call to be reconciled back to God, and then they are called to bring that message into the world for others. Thus, Paul's life and conversion offers an example of an individual confession – his confession of faith during his vision of the risen Lord – as well as a private confession and absolution. The role of Ananias in this story is one of confessor and healer on behalf of Jesus & his Church, mirroring the priest's role in the Rite of Reconciliation.

What Reconciliation Is *Not*

This circle of reconciliation — Christ living and dying and then living again for Christians, Christians dying the death to sin and then rising to new life in him and helping to lead others back to Christ again — can be said to encompass the whole of salvation history and God's action in the world. As a result of such an expansive of meaning, reconciliation theology has been widely misunderstood and narrowed in scope in both the academic and ecclesial realms. It has historically been equated with such segmented schools of thought as liberation theory, feminist theology and social justice issues – as the

emphasis on treating all as equals would suggest – , and even an attempt to describe the act of forgiveness alone. Again, as Georgia Harkness writes:

From a theological standpoint, the term reconciliation is often used — or at least it was formally often used—to denote personal salvation through the atoning death of Christ. . . . A much more common understanding of reconciliation today is the bridging of rifts, sometimes between individuals in face-to-face and person-to-person relationships, but more often between groups. . . . To some [churches] it means reconciliation to God through the atoning death of Christ. . . . To others, it means getting out “where the action is” and engaging in projects, endeavors, and demonstrations of power to enable those long deprived of their just rights to come to their full dignity as persons.²²

In other words, many have tried to make “reconciliation” fit all kinds of large and small definitions. Clearly, reconciliation as a concept has resisted such definitions, yet it is foundational to the whole of Christianity. It is no wonder, then, that churches such as St. David’s struggle to make sense of how to live into this calling.

The Role of the Modern Church as the Reconciling Body of Christ

Given this history, what is a modern church to do? If reconciliation itself does indeed include justice, forgiveness, atonement, personal responsibility, and equality for all — *and* a call to a resurrected life in Christ – then why are churches today not centers of reconciliation for the world? Indeed, why is reconciliation largely ignored by so many Episcopal churches and replaced with “therapeutic jargon when we should understand our life in terms of the good news?”²³

²² Harkness, *The Ministry of Reconciliation*, 8-9.

²³ Malcolm C. Young, “Chapter Four: Personal, Intimate, Authentic, Incarnate: A Theology of Reconciliation,” in *Ambassadors for God: Envisioning Reconciliation Rites for the 21st Century: Liturgical Studies Five*, ed. Jennifer M. Phillips (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2010), 48.

These are especially important questions for Episcopal Churches like St. David's, where the rich liturgical tradition stands in relationship with the modern world. The Catechism which contains the outline of faith in the *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP) has much to say about the important place of this theological concept within the Church. When describing the duty of the church, it states that "the mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ."²⁴ This description of ecclesiastical duty is in actuality a working definition of reconciliation. The BCP goes even further when it lays out the ministry of the laity and bishops: "The ministry of the lay persons [and bishops] is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and according to the gifts given to them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world...."²⁵ In other words, reconciliation is so essential to the Episcopalian view of Christianity that it is central to the very calling of each member and to their leadership.

Indeed, we have the capabilities to live this theology out liturgically at St. David's both privately and corporately. The corporate act of reconciliation which is also known as "The Confession" in the Anglican tradition, is practiced weekly in the Eucharist. Before parishioners make their way to the Eucharistic prayer and the altar rail, they confess their sins and then have their sins pronounced forgiven by the Celebrant of the service. This act is perhaps the only liturgical form of confession an Episcopalian is likely to make.

²⁴ *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1986), 855.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

However, it is not our only option. Though few Episcopalians know it, we have within our tradition and current Prayer Book a form of private confession known as “The Reconciliation of a Penitent,” described in the BCP as follows: “The ministry of reconciliation, which has been committed by Christ to his Church, 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.”²⁶ In this rite, Christians are encouraged to come and to confess those things separating them from living as the new creation that God has called them to be. The priest listens, offers counseling, perhaps suggests a spiritual exercise or Bible reading that may bring further healing to the penitent, asks them if they will turn again to Christ as their Lord, and asks them if they forgive others who have sinned against them. Then the priest pronounces the good news that they are forgiven and invites them to rejoice in the fact that they “were dead, but are now alive in Christ Jesus our Lord. [The Penitent may then] go (*or abide*) in peace, [for] the Lord has put away all their sins.”²⁷ Far from being a ritual of shame or judgment, as it may have been perceived, this rite is in keeping with the joy that comes with the full form of reconciliation as exemplified by Paul.

Lack of Ritual Use

Why, then, do so few people avail themselves of the joy and comfort that this rite of reconciliation offers in the Episcopal Church? Episcopalians have an expression about

²⁶ Ibid., 446.

²⁷ Ibid., 451.

this Rite of Reconciliation concerning private confession: “All may, some should, none must.” While this statement makes it clear that confession is never a mandatory action, it does also reflect the reality of how few times this rite is ever put into practice. Indeed, a poll of St. David’s clergy members with a combined ministry of over twenty-two years, they have only heard five private confessions. To take this even further, as stated previously, most congregants there are not even aware that the Rite even exists. Even if they were aware of it, there was little hope that they would voluntarily take part in it prior to this project. St. David’s, like many Episcopal Churches, has a very high percentage of ex-Roman Catholics who have found a home in the liturgically similar Anglican Church. Yet the first thing some say they never want to do again is mandatory private confession, associating it as they do with judgment, guilt, and abuse of power by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.

Again, the question remains, with the call from God to re-creative joy promised through reconciliation, why would people not want to benefit from the liturgical manifestation of this holy mystery? According to theologian Malcolm C. Young, the problem with not fully understanding Reconciliation (liturgical, spiritually or theologically) may actually have its roots in that brokenness which all humanity struggles with: sin. He writes:

At a basic level, we are confused about what sin is, and as a result how we ought to seek reconciliation. . . . We tend to mistakenly regard the violation [secularly and not Biblically defined] as primary and its effect on our relationship to God as secondary, as if we have done something wrong and this has damaged our relationship to God.²⁸

²⁸ Young, 44-45.

In other words, we tend to think of sin – especially the often-misunderstood concept of “original sin” – as a merit of things that we do, big and small, that keep us from the love of God.

The problem with this thinking is twofold: to begin with, there is nothing that can separate Christians from the love of God — least of all their actions as finite beings. And, secondly, to actually believe that there is something that can cause one’s self to separate from God is, in fact, an act of pride.

According to Paul in Romans 8:38-39, “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Thus, believing their actions are somehow more powerful than the love that God has shown them is actually an act of great pride which can prevent believers from seeking the knowledge that they are, and will always be, loved by God. Again, this is why a study of attainment theory which solely focuses on the cross and not the empty tomb is lacking – there is more to the story than just our sins and the false notion that they are merely the by product of an inherent original default in human nature.

That is not to say that there is no sin. Rather, sin exists as a “state of estrangement.” People are not just the products of individual brokenness, and yet they live in a world that chooses to ignore the grace of God and makes it hard to live as new creations that do not fall into the patterns of transgression. Karl Rahner describes this reality when he writes:

‘Original sin’ does not mean of course that the original, personal act of freedom [to make choices that will bring us closer in our relationship with God] at the very origin of history has been transmitted to subsequent generations in its moral quality. The notion that the personal deed of “Adam” or of the first group of

people is imputed to us in such a way that it has been transmitted on to us biologically, as it were, has absolutely nothing to do with the Christian dogma of original sin. We are people who must inevitably exercise our own freedom subjectively in a situation which is co-determined by objectifications of guilt, and indeed in such a way that this co-determination belongs to our situation permanently and inescapably.²⁹

In other words, original sin is not the reality that all people are born with something wrong with them that keeps them from experiencing any love of God, thanks to the singular actions of individuals. Rather, all are born into a world that is self-seeking rather than Christ-seeking, so it takes a concerted effort to keep from living in that estranged state and to seek relationship with God, neighbor, and self. Private confession can be a chief tool in that effort.

To believe that individual sins separate Christians from the love of God is to accept as truth that there is something about themselves that is inherently evil and wrong. If they start to suppose that this is our reality, than they might begin imagining their center as rooted in evil, or that they are born sinful and broken instead of having been given a core that is centered in God's grace. Thus, they sin because we are seeking direction apart from God:

Through sin, they lose our self or fail to be at unity with our self. We lack integrity, singleness of purpose, because sin leads naturally to conflicted motives. This loss of a 'determined center' means we experience the world as unreal and empty of holiness... Just as believers regard God as present in Christ, we experience blessedness when Christ in this same way becomes the center of our life.³⁰

Sin causes us to lose our "true north" in Jesus, and reconciliation helps us to recalibrate.

²⁹ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), 110.

³⁰ Young, 45.

The disconnect between corporate sin and individual sins has impacted people's perceptions and feelings about the liturgical rite of reconciliation. If, as proposed above, people are more likely to concentrate on their individual sins and feel doomed to repeat them again and again because of an inbred predisposition towards sin, then an individual confession will indeed seem terrifying, judgmental, and perhaps futile and pointless. In this mindset, corporate confession will also suffer as people fail to see the true danger in corporate sin. The general confession on Sunday becomes a way to just think — all too briefly — about the wrongs the individual may have done rather than the way they have participated in a broken system. Thus, I would propose that there is indeed something very beneficial in practicing both the general confession as a preparation for the Eucharistic act on Sundays, as well as the occasional private confession.

Concerns for the Modern Church

In his article dealing with the reasons to engage in personal confession, Young points to several factors that differentiate private from corporate confession, including a shift to our very public lifestyles, our familiarity with a therapeutic model of “feeling better’ ”, and our Christian understanding of Jesus as the incarnate word.³¹

Young's first point that “some features of modern life that may influence our perception of the Rite of Reconciliation include the decline of public space, the professionalization of what we now call entertainment and decreasing levels of civic engagement” truly strikes a chord with the technology and media-savvy congregants of

³¹ Ibid., 45-51.

St. David's.³² Membership in all forms of civic and main-line religious denominations has seen a sharp drop in membership over the last few decades. Many social scientists suggest that the emergence of social networking sites is paradoxically leading people to actually have a much more public face in the world, and yet simultaneously remain more isolated than ever before. For example:

For all their so-called friends of Facebook, most Americans have fewer close confidants now than they did a generation ago. Cornell University sociologists surveyed 2,000 adults and found that on average they had only two friends with whom they could discuss "important matters" — down from three in 1985.... A reduced network "makes us potentially more vulnerable," study author Matthew Brashears tells *livescience.com*, because talking our troubles over with a trusted pal provides "both emotional support and ideas for how to solve problems."³³

Such a demonstrated need for one-on-one conversation about the realities and pains of this world is something that the Church can offer via the Rite of Reconciliation. This is not to say that confession takes the place of deep friendships; rather, it is a unique opportunity to connect with another live human being, and through that relationship, form a deeper relationship with Christ that is clearly lacking in the modern world.

Young goes on to point to the modern person's familiarity with clinical psychotherapy as a reason to avoid private confession. While therapy is clearly a good and healthy thing for many, a passing familiarity with pop psychology has perhaps left the modern person to search out solely scientific solutions to what are actually spiritual pains. Thus the Church is left trying to play "armchair psychiatrist" — and doing a poor job of it rather than claiming their true authority as Ambassadors of Reconciliation. To this end Young writes:

³² *Ibid.*, 46.

³³ Jeanna Bryner, "Close Friends Less Common Today, Study Finds," *LiveScience.com*, <http://www.livescience.com/16879-close-friends-decrease-today.html> (accessed August 19, 2012).

Confession is like therapy in the way that we seek to resolve problems by articulating the struggles of our inner life. It differs from it in the way that it explicitly aims to re-situate two people in the story of God. In a world of dehumanizing images of human self-hood, the Rite of Reconciliation helps to remove distorted self-perceptions so that we can see ourselves as we are beings hungry for the blessedness that we experience in God's relationship to Jesus.³⁴

Reconciliation seeks to paint a fuller picture – a vision of new life for the individual in reconciliation. Forgiveness, which is larger than any therapeutic diagnosis, is offered to all as a gift of grace from God.

Speaking the Truth to Bring Forth Love, Peace, and New Creations

Finally, perhaps the most important gift that private reconciliation has to offer us is making peace and love manifest in our lives. The centrality of the incarnation – that the Word became flesh to live and died as one of us – to the Christian faith points to the importance of actually speaking aloud the need for reconciliation that happens in the confessional moment. Just as new life and peace have been given to us through the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, so to is new life made an embodied reality simply by giving voice to the “word” of reconciliation. To that end, L. Gregory Jones writes,

When the resurrected Christ returns to his frightened and bewildered disciples, he again says, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven. If you retain anyone’s sins, they are retained’ (John 20:21-23). There is thus an inextricable relation between receiving the Holy Spirit and engaging in practices of forgiveness. Indeed, the Spirit works both to turn and re-turn people to the power of Christ’s forgiveness and to embody that forgiveness in relations with others. One cannot be had without the other.³⁵

³⁴ Young, 48-49.

³⁵ L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 129.

In other words, when Christians take part in these actions by giving voice to them, they are joining God in his creative act of speaking the Word into the flesh. Conversely, when they hear the words of forgiveness uttered, the new creation of peace and love are made manifest in the realization of their new creation.

This giving voice to reconciliation is indeed one of the gifts of liturgical actions. In her studies in sacramental theology, Siobhan Garrigan points to this important creative nature of ritual: “seeing speech acts as *bringing about* an understanding (through ‘communicative action’) rather than presuming, or even necessarily arriving at the point of, understanding (‘communication’) leaves open the “possibility” for a shared reality with others. [sic.]³⁶ In other words, when they join with God in speaking the words of grace that he has given to us, Christians take part of the new creation of both being a people forgiven and being ambassadors who are helping God bring forth his continued grace. Reconciliation can make Christians into active listeners and sacred storytellers for Christ’s love. Through sin, “we have become strangers to the holy story that can draw us toward our freedom. The Rite of Reconciliation helps us make this promise real to us again.”³⁷ Thus, perhaps the single most important thing Christians can do as Ambassadors of Reconciliation is to listen to people’s stories of the pain that sin has caused in their life and then to speak to them the words of their new hope offered to them by Christ.

In my own life, I have experienced both the new-creation making possibilities within the Rite of Reconciliation and the pain that *not* having one’s story heard can cause.

³⁶ Siobhán Garrigan, *Beyond Ritual: Sacramental Theology After Habermas* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub Ltd, 2004), 78.

³⁷ Young, 49.

When I was young, I decided that I would like to try private confession since, as an Episcopalian unfamiliar with this rite, I had only experienced corporate confession on Sundays. Since my church did not overtly offer the rite, I decided to go to a local Catholic Church on an Ash Wednesday, as they were offering private confession to those who wanted to begin Lent free from the burden of their sin.

As I took my place in the surprisingly long line of penitents, I began to catalogue my sins. My trespasses and brokenness began to weigh heavily on my soul as I thought of more and more ways that I had “wronged God.” Clearly, I was living with the understanding of sin described above, which dwells in an individual’s perceived ability to separate themselves from God, thus causing a pain that traps people into thinking that they will never be whole or free from the perpetual wheel of sin. By the time I finally took my turn in the confessional, I was not only on the verge of tears, I was elated by being able to “get rid” of the sins that had tarnished my soul — or so I felt.

As I stepped into the confessional, I decided that I should not add to this list of sins by lying to the priest and told him right away that I was not a Roman Catholic. I told him that if he would be listen to my confession, that I would feel lighter and understand if he could not offer me absolution as an Episcopalian. He replied, “No. Please leave now.”

This refusal felt like a crushing blow: I was not even worth listening to. It was as if God himself was telling me that I was so bad that I he didn’t want to hear anything that I had to say, even if it was “I am sorry.” I left the church in tears and took a seat on a nearby park bench. After sobbing for a long time, I suddenly remembered all the times I had heard of God’s forgiveness and his care for us in my Episcopal church and decided

that perhaps the priest's reaction was more about *his* unwillingness to see me as a child of God than God's *own* willingness. So resolved, I made my confession to an Episcopalian priest soon after and experienced tremendous joy. I was heard, my story was treated as sacred, and I listened in turn to the story of God's forgiveness and love as pardon was given.

Sadly, I think that my story may precisely reflect the anxiety that so many people have regarding confession. It is very difficult to tell someone how you feel you have failed in detail. It becomes almost impossible if you think you will not be heard or loved in the process. Thus, to truly become a safe and embodied confessing community, St. David's would need to create a milieu where people feel able to speak the truth of their sacred stories and know they will be heard and loved.

In conclusion, it was my hope that with this project, the St. David's Community would be able to better model the Body of Christ by fully delving into the rich ministry of reconciliation to which Jesus has called all Christians — both in an increased awareness of the fullness of the new life it offers and the actual Rite of Reconciliation itself. The stories of transformation gathered at the end of the project, reflect that that hope was realized, at least for a select group. The participants grew to believe that reconciliation is not simply about identifying sins and then asking God for forgiveness. It is about peace, love, resurrected life, and offering the same to the world in Christ's name.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NARRATIVE OF OPPORTUNITY AND FELT NEED

The LAC, Research and the Pre-Project Phase

As part of the work of this project, a group of St. David's members were formed called the Lay Advisory Committee (LAC). This Committee would serve as advisors to the researcher; data collectors and interrupters; and co-project creators with the researcher. The work of the LAC was critical in examining the spiritual life of the congregation both before and after the project.

As mentioned previously, St. David's congregation's view of reconciliation — both as a theological concept and as a liturgical rite — is a complex one. The research that the LAC gathered in the exploratory phase found that most congregants did not know that the Book of Common Prayer, the central book of worship in the Episcopal tradition, included a form of private confession, and that most interviewees were not very inclined to want to participate in it after they were informed of its existence.¹ However, the agreement of answers as to *why* they would not engage in the Rite of Reconciliation seems to show a wide spectrum of different views of sin and the role of the church, as

¹ Appendix Seven Contains the LAC's initial interview findings.

well as some denominational and even economic tensions surrounding this sacramental rite. Universally, there existed a definite resistance to the concept of private confession being made mandatory, even among those who were in support of the Rite – not that anyone had ever proposed that the Rite be made mandatory. Ultimately, however, most everyone agreed that God is forgiving in nature and that forgiveness comes through him.²

For possible candidates for members of the laity team, it was decided that it might be worth trying to “reconcile” parts of St. David’s quiet “extraverted” spirituality by reaching out to its small, but highly involved, spiritual formation group. This group of dedicated lay people are indeed practicing what might be considered “quieter” forms of spirituality, such as centering prayer, scripture reading, and spiritual direction groups. However, much like the Rite of Reconciliation itself, not many people know that this group even exists at St. David’s. Some of St. David’s most prominent parishioners, such as our Vestry Senior Warden, were also asked to be a part of the group so they might learn more about each other and their ministries. If one of the goals of reconciliation is a fuller understanding of the nature of the loving God and to have an avenue to peace, then marrying the more “spiritual” side of the Church with its more “ambassadorial” side would be a perfect embodiment of that hope.

To create a project that would truly address the needs of the congregation, the committee sought to discern “the presences of God in [our] faith community....By carefully interviewing, studying, and dialogue with participants...to seek to ‘hear’ the whole story of the people of God, grasp the new living thing God may be doing in the life

² The role of the priest in that equation was subject to dispute, as will be outline later in this Chapter.

of this community, and reflect upon its implications for the future.”³ Indeed, this kind of holy listening and holy speaking are hallmarks of the reconciliation experience.

For example, in their description of narrative research, Carl Savage and William Presnell describe the two elements of the leadership role of such a project: being a “story broker”⁴ and assuming a “*kenotic* [or an open and receptive] position as a handler of people’s stories.”⁵ Priests both hear confessions — the stories of people’s need for reconciliation — and pronounce absolution — the story of God’s love for his people; thus, a priest must adopt both attitudes to achieve a safe space for a true confession. This kind of holy listening is essential to the work of a “reconciliation ambassador.” As such, a priest approaches hearing a confession by first asking God to use his or her as God’s vessel to then hear the sacred story of the penitent. Whether or not the priest personally thinks something is a sin or not does not matter in the moment because the person sharing their story *feels* it is and they think that God does, as well. Therefore, the confessor needs to hear it in the seriousness that it is presented. As a “story broker,” the priest will help them to tell their story and also help them to “sing out their new song” of being reconciled at the end of the Rite.⁶

The *kenotic* listening is especially important when it comes to the Rite of Reconciliation. A confessor must act as the ears of God by listening to the confession; at the end of the Rite, he or she must hand it over to God and never speak of it again. This

³ Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville, Kentucky: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 69.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶ *Ibid.*

sacred and confidential action is known as “the Seal” of Confession and must never be broken. In fact, when I am done hearing a confession, I will wash my hands in the Baptismal font as a symbol of “emptying myself of the preconceptions, paradigms of interpretation, or presumptions about the stories that emerge.”⁷ Clearly, the stories that are shared outside of the Rite of Reconciliation heard in conjunction with this project will not fall under such a crucible of confidentiality as stories told under the seal of the Rite, but it does help to root the article of study with the method.

This focus on *kenotic* story brokering was one that the LAC had to adopt, as well. The “select laity team who help[ed] identify the focuses of research, help[ed] plan, execute, and evaluate [the project], and [remained] in reflective theological dialogue,”⁸ helped to gather the initial stories and impressions that people had about reconciliation as both a theological concept and as a liturgical action. They also evaluated how those views were transformed after participating in this project. In this role, they each interviewed several members of the church to “construct meaningful stories [or viewpoints] out of the varied circumstances of their lives.... Such work creates a threshold of meeting between the sacred and the mundane that enables the Christian story [and in particular, St. David’s story,] to leave the pages of history and be reinscribed amidst contemporary event.”⁹ In other words, the LAC was asked to listen to these “sacred” stories and to weave a theological narrative out of them to help create a picture

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 77.

⁹ Elaine Graham, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM-Press, 2005), 47-48.

of St. David’s reconciliation history.¹⁰ This was no small task, and a great deal of time was devoted to crafting questions¹¹ and learning interviewing techniques to help with this process.

At the first meeting of the LAC, the group – a healthy cross-section of the St. David’s community including such varied demographics as members from ages 31-72; many kinds of professions; and a variety of roles within the church – was asked to tell their own stories of reconciliation to each other. Using such storytelling prompts as, “tell a story about a time when you experienced forgiveness,” they began to grow closer in fellowship. The group then employed a process of “sacred storytelling” and listening as laid out by the Fund for Theological Education; their LeaderCARE technique was created using the process of narrative theology to help groups “hear the emerging story of now and discern God’s call for the future.”¹² This process first requires a time of silence and then limits the time that each person has to tell their story as a distillation method.

From these narratives, the group created “word clouds” to find thoughts and themes of intersection — places where the stories seemed to be essentially the same. These themes were then used to create a set of questions¹³ that aided in

intentional interviews that provided a space for people to *notice and connect the storied meanings* that surface in their conversations and may not at first seem to have a connection....[These questions] encouraged people to speak [in such a way

¹⁰ Ibid., 49.

¹¹ For a full list of questions created by the LAC, see Appendix Two.

¹² The Fund for Theological Education, *VocationCare Approach: A Leaders’ Guide for Congregations and Young People Exploring Call Together* (Atlanta, GA: The Fund for Theological Education, 2012), 27.

¹³ Appendix One

that they] not only report experience, [but also] reveal the meanings which they have formed as people and the relationships they have with each other.¹⁴

In other words, by using this “circular form of inquiry,” the LAC was not only able to hear their own sacred stories, but to see where they all connected as a group.¹⁵ Taking that shared wisdom further through the questions they developed, they gathered other stories, seeing those connections grow and grow until they were able to detect a sacred story of St. David’s.

This initial work was of the utmost importance to understand how people were already living out their call to be “ambassadors for Christ” and what issues might have been holding them back. It was particularly important to the process to have lay people lead some of this questioning to help alleviate any residual fear of authority arising from perceptions about the judgmental nature of reconciliation.

Following the initial story gathering stage, lay group worked to uncover themes gathered in the sacred storytelling interviews to build a Lenten program – a series of workshops help people begin to truly see the all-encompassing nature of reconciliation in their whole lives. Again, we met in small groups to share some of the answers that we had heard and to find common themes and areas of possible growth. Over and over again, interviewees shared similar views and stories about reconciliation and confession; Six themes emerged and the Lenten program on reconciliation was designed around them:

1. the history and theology of sin and reconciliation
2. shame, guilt, and joy

¹⁴ Savage and Presnell, pg. 83.

¹⁵ Ibid.

3. forgiveness and *kenosis*
4. resurrection and incarnation
5. the growth that comes from reconciliation and forgiveness
6. experiencing reconciliation in worship

The Project Phase

Each week focused on one element of reconciliation theology explored through corporate and individual practices shown to help bring forth reconciliation in people's lives. These weekly gatherings included a ritual in an attempt to truly speak the words of faith that the group experienced in this new creation. The participants were then given meditative practices to use in the week between meetings.

The power of ritual often lies in its ability to allow groups of people to speak communally with one voice and to strengthen the individual's relationship with God. This program offered a balance of personal spiritual practices and corporate services inviting people to try both "styles" of spirituality. Having a combination of both the individual meditations as well as the rituals was very important in creating a church that manifests ambassadorial love. Theology and practice were thus inextricably joined in these sessions to help create a "reconciliation life blueprint."

For example, one week focused on the nature of sin; for that week, the almost thirty participants were asked to carry a rock with them everywhere to remember the heavy burden that sin is. The addition of a daily component helped the participants truly grasp just how reconciliation seeps into all parts of existence. As they gathered together

weekly for food and fellowship, participants were broken into groups of three to tell a story about how sin, and the awareness of it, affected them that week. At the end of each session, the group participated in a ritual of reconciliation crafted in conjunction with the identified topics that dealt not only with the forgiveness people all need, but also with the joy of the calling to be ambassadors of reconciliation for the world. Finally, at the end of the six weeks, all participants were invited to make a private confession with a priest and to as celebrate in a final service during Holy Week.

The Post-Project Phase of the LAC's Work

After an engaging and enriching Lent, LAC members once again interviewed the participants to see what transformations had occurred for them, both in their general understanding of reconciliation as both a Rite and a concept and in their lives. The LAC gathered data to examine the “marks” of transformation that come from living a reconciled life and willingness to live as an ambassador for Christ; these marks may include a greater sense of peace, an enhanced relationship with God and others, and a renewed spirit of equality for all people. However, it would be impossible to create a “tool” of some kind to gauge exactly what these “marks” may be, as they will vary as widely as the people themselves. Thus, the LAC team again engaged in active listening and interview to collect responses of transformation.

The LAC worked in collaboration on this project for months, producing not only a very good picture of where God has been working in the lives of members of St. David's, but also discerning what efforts might help the parish go further in the journey of

reconciliation. They gave of their time and also shared of themselves by being willing to use their own moments of reconciliation as grounds for further exploration and in doing so, they grew closer as a community. Moreover, they were all skilled at helping people open up to shared the stories of the congregation. Finally, they were able to search for marks of transformation in those same stories and look to the future for the life of the Church. In doing this work, the group unanimously agreed that they grew in their own faith and in closeness with each other as well as with those they interviewed. They were justifiably proud of their work and in awe of the transformations they witnessed in the lives of the Lenten Program participants vowing to be champions of this work at St. David's in the years to come.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LENTEN PROGRAM

Introduction

As mentioned in chapters two and three, the project itself was a class/workshop that was held over the six weeks of Lent. The class, entitled “Reconcile: All May, Some Should, None Must” was centered around the findings of the LAC and the call to be ambassadors of reconciliation as described by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. I personally lead each class, including time for personal and corporate reflection – often in the form of meditations or prayerful activities and closing with a group worship experience.¹ All of the classes were designed to focus on the themes that had emerged out of the LAC’S interviews. The form and progression of the classes as a whole mirrored the action of the Rite itself: we began with a true look of sin; moved into a deeper understanding of guilt and shame; practiced Christ-like emptying of those things which kept us out of union with God, neighbor, and self; discerned the call of new life; listened to God’s call of action as a new creation free from our burdens; and then gave thanks for his grace.

Along with this class, the participants and St. David’s entire congregation were invited to make a private confession with a priest every Friday night during the Lenten session. It is perhaps indicative of the parish’s hunger for this kind of work to note that

¹ See Appendix Six for the leaflets created for these classes.

though the LAC had expected to have between ten and twelve people sign up for this program, there were actually twenty-eight participants.²

Class One: The History and Theology of Sin and Reconciliation

The first common theme noted by the LAC amongst themselves and the members of the congregation was a distinct lack of knowledge about the Rite of Reconciliation. Again, most were not aware that Episcopalians even have a form of private confession, and in some cases, there was a distinctly negative reaction when participants was presented with this knowledge. Often, the biases were of an anti-Roman Catholic and/or an anti-clerical nature. For example, in response to the question, “Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can affect sin or do you believe that is only something God can remove?”, one participant previously unaware of the Rite answered: “No! Only God can do that!”³ In response to the same question, another participant answered,

No [I did not know what we have it]. What you mean, it’s not just a Catholic thing? I believe forgiveness/absolution is something only God can do. I am confident that working through any of our excellent priests would be beneficial through their guidance, caring and sharing of the service. That said — not all priests are good, let alone good at confession. Wasn’t God smart to allow us direct (daily, hourly, minute by minute access to him [without the need of an intermediary])?⁴

² Their reactions and marks of transformation will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter, but it is important to note here that several people left these sessions significantly changed and enriched—including myself.

³ Appendix Seven contains the responses gathered from the initial LAC interviews.

⁴ Appendix Eight contains answers from participant survey.

The answers to these and other similar questions reflected a significant lack of knowledge of what the Rite of Reconciliation actually is and what it hopes to achieve, as well as some strong stereotypes that are associated with it, a revelation which may not be surprising, given the background and make up of St. David's congregation. As with many Episcopal churches, many of our congregants came to us as converts from the Roman Catholic tradition; it is not uncommon to hear stories of people having left this denomination for reasons of dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the leadership and dogma as well as feelings of being burdened by the "Catholic guilt" that many associate with the penitential nature of confession. Clearly, this Rite seems to bring some of those negative associations to the surface. The fact that Episcopalians hold this Rite in common with the Roman Catholic Church does not come as welcome news. After a sermon on reconciliation, one woman remarked that she was happy that the liturgy on Sunday was so similar to the Catholic Church, but that mandatory confession was the very first thing that she was happy to give up upon joining the Episcopal Church.

Yet another area of bias against this Rite may actually be a socio-economic one. One long-time parishioner and fellow priest, the Rev. Dr. Alexander McCurdy, who has himself lived in the world of the "wealthy old-money Philadelphia" of which Wayne is a part, discussed the reality that for many people on the Main Line, the Roman Catholic Church was the "servant's church"; in other words, it was the Church of the working-class poor. In stark contrast, St. David's has historically been composed of some of the wealthiest members of the community, people unlikely to choose to go to the same churches as "the help." Thus, it could be surmised that St. David's staunchly Protestant character even today comes from shunning anything that might resemble Roman

Catholicism and the associated stigma of being lower class. Private confession, bearing as it does the strong association with the Roman Catholic tradition, may in fact be a casualty of this class division.

This lack of knowledge about the role that reconciliation plays in the life of the Episcopal Church as well as the biases that some people have maintain led the LAC to conclude that the very first class in this workshop series should focus on the Biblical and theological roots of the Episcopal sacramental Rite of Reconciliation. Participants were also encouraged to examine at their own personal beliefs about reconciliation, the sacrament, and what part it could play in their spiritual lives.

Beginning with the Biblical and theological foundations, the class explored many of the topics discussed in Chapter One, paying particular attention to the role of confession in the Episcopal Church. Each session had a specific workbook containing lesson notes, meditation instructions, and worship outlines; for example, in this first class, the background notes began with a brief account of the history of sin.⁵

Many of the views about Reconciliation of a Penitent have their roots in the understanding of the role of sin in our lives. Since the very beginning of time, humans have had a problem: sin. If there is one thing that appears time and time again in scripture – and, indeed, in the world around us – it is that people continually disrupt of the relationships between God, ourselves, and others that they should instead cherish, because they put their own wills and desires before the will of God. Not only does sin keep people from living full and peaceful lives in union with God, it also robs them of their freedom and capability to embody who we are truly called to be. Thus Christians celebrate the knowledge that they have been freed from this cycle of bondage and grief.

⁵ See Appendix Six for class leaflets.

This freedom comes from Jesus Christ who, as the Messiah, came to take the world's sins upon himself so that all might be completely liberated and restored into union with God. Through this atoning sacrifice made by Jesus on the Cross, they are reconciled.

How does this reconciliation work in the life of a Christian? And what does this have to do with the Rite of The Reconciliation of a Penitent? To answer these questions, the group had to first look at the Bible and the history of the sacrament to arrive at an Episcopalian view of this private form of confession.

The Hebrew understanding of sin and repentance begins in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. And we did not seem to ever learn our lesson after the experience of being cast out of the garden. Time and time again, God reaches out to redeem his people, including making covenants with them (which they break), handing down the law to guide them (which they disobey), and sending prophets who called them to repent (who they ignored). Yes, there were penitential practices of supplication, fasting, mourning, wearing sackcloth, and offering atoning sacrifices to try and offer God something of what they had taken in defiance, but these actions could never hope to fully repair the breach that humans continued to form between God and themselves. For that to happen, God would need to intervene on their behalf – so he sent Jesus, the Pascal Lamb, to be the full and perfect sacrifice for their sins. Jesus tells us in Luke 15:1-31, often called the “Parable of the Lost Sheep,” that since God has sent him into the world to save sinners, they can be assured that God wants them to be free from the burden of sin. Even for those guilty of “serious” sin, God remains the Father who will deny love to no one and has already extended joyful forgiveness to those who repents.

It is in the context of this New Testament understanding of all-encompassing forgiveness offered to those who are repentant that the Rite of Reconciliation was developed. James White briefly describes this Rite's history in the following way:

Guided by Jesus' words of "binding and loosening" in Matt. 16:19 and 18:18 as well as the "forgiving and retaining" of sins in John 20:23 the church, as early as the 3rd century, began to see the sins that we continued to perpetrate were offense not only against God, but also against the Body of Christ on earth, the Church. Thus, there need to be a way to bring those who had been put out of union (or excommunicated) with God and the Church back into right relationship.⁶

Interestingly, the Rite of Reconciliation continued to develop with the times and tracking those changes is to track the very changes in the Church's history. For example, before the Middle Ages, we know that penitence was preformed in public settings (such as a market place) and was very rigorous. Over times, the practice was used more and more frequently — where it might have been common to practice private confession once or twice in a lifetime, the usage grew to be weekly in most modern Roman Catholic churches. The Protestant Reformation led to further changes in the rite as reformers tended to downplay or do away with confession due to abuse in the "Roman Catholic tradition and the selling of Indulgences in favor of general corporate confession."⁷ There were also further changes in the Rite in the Anglican tradition:

In the Anglican tradition, the Reconciliation of a Penitent was recovered during the Oxford Movement of the 19th century and has been a part of our tradition ever since. Episcopalians are never forced to confess claiming that "all may, some should, and none must." Yet it is considered a pastoral sacrament and an invitation to healing and new life in Christ.⁸

⁶ James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship: 3rd Edition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 265-266.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

Clearly, then, we can see that reconciliation, both Biblically and Ecclesiastically has a varied history and this overview helped to set the tone for the lively discussion that followed. Participants were then invited to choose a pocket-sized river rock with a cross etched on the front of it. On the back, they were asked to draw or write a sin or a grief that they knew they were spiritually “carrying with them” for lack of asking forgiveness — either from God, another person, themselves, or any combination of those. They were asked to carry these stones with them everywhere for the entire week to be reminded of the constant weight of sin and to bring these stones back the following week for discussion. They were also filled out a self-questionnaire about their views on the topics covered that night.⁹ The class closed with the service of Compline.

Class Two: Shame, Guilt, and Joy

As mentioned previously, one of the impediments to seeking Reconciliation that the LAC and I discerned was the prevalence of guilt and shame that people feel because of their sins. Not surprisingly, people often seemed loath to share these embarrassing actions with anyone, let alone the clergy. Looking at some examples of responses collected, we encountered this phenomenon over and over again. In answer to the question, “Would you ever make a private confession? Why or why not?” many people answered “no” and described feelings of embarrassment, shame, and guilt as reasons why they would not want to confess to a priest.

In fact, in some cases, the more people knew and liked their priests, the less likely they felt comfortable in confessing sins that might diminish that priest’s opinion of them.

⁹ See Appendix Eight for example of the questionnaires and answers in the participants’ own handwriting.

For example, one typical answer was, “No [I have not made confession because] I didn’t want to go to a priest that was part of my congregation. I didn’t want it to have a negative impact on my standing with the priest.”¹⁰ This response illustrates that most people either did not know about or did not trust in the priest’s strict adherence to confidentiality and/or the priest’s ability to keep confessions separate from normal congregational interaction. That comment also demonstrates the weighty effect that shame and guilt can have in keeping people from being open and vulnerable with a confessor. Thus, it was clear that educating participants about the role of the priest as well as tackling the emotions of shame and guilt would be two central topics in the Lenten program.

With this framework in mind, Class Two begin with an examination of the psychological understanding of shame and guilt. The relatively young science of psychology, has given people a deeper understanding of the emotions of guilt and shame and the power that they can have over our lives, which is very helpful background since these emotions are both very powerful and yet are often easily confused. As Robert Karen puts it, “The same experience can arouse both guilt and shame, or guilt in one person and shame in another, based on their psychological and cultural makeup.”¹¹ The important distinction between the two, however, is that “guilt is about transgression and shame is about self. Guilt is about behavior that has harmed others; shame is about not being ‘good enough.’ To be ashamed is to expect rejection, not so much because of what

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Robert Karen, 1992, *Shame, Atlantic Monthly* 269, no. 2, February, 40.

one has done as because of what one is.”¹² In other words, guilt means that you have made a true mistake and your actions have wronged someone or something. Shame, on the other hand, means that you feel that you *are* a mistake. Guilt is not intrinsically a bad thing to feel in healthy amounts; it can help expose the actual sins that we have committed against God, others and ourselves. Indeed, only sociopaths do not feel guilt or shame for their actions believing that they are above all condemnation.¹³ However, shame can make us feel worthless. Both emotions can take on pathological dimensions and become destructive; there is even evidence that shows that when a person holds on to guilt and shame, they are affected in physiological ways, affecting bodily health as well as the mind and spirit.¹⁴ When people can purge themselves of this guilt and shame with God’s help, they can then lay them down and live as new creations, free from these burdens. This action, found in reconciliation, leads to joy.

Following that discussion, the class turned again to the Biblical understanding of guilt and shame. Feeling guilt for the true sins that one has committed is actually healthy and can motivate people to reconcile their lives back to God. Ironically, our modern familiarity with psychoanalysis treatments has led us to advanced rationalization of our sins; we have become deft at “talking out” the feelings of guilt and finding temporary relief in in therapy. This move towards improved mental health is a wonderful thing, but it misses the most important gift of the kind of healing that comes only from God: forgiveness. As reflected in such beloved stories as the “Prodigal Son” (Luke 15:11-32)

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Martha Stout, *The Sociopath Next Door: The Ruthless Versus the Rest of Us* (New York: Broadway Books, 2005), 6.

¹⁴ Thomas Fuchs, 2002, “The Phenomenology of Shame, Guilt and the Body in Body Dysmorphic Disorder and Depression”, *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 33, no. 2, 227.

and passages as 1 John 3:19-20 – “And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.” – God knows each person in every way and yet still loves them. He knows their guilt and shame and still offers us forgiveness of all these things — offers new life that is free from all that pain. God’s grace trumps shame because who a person *is* will always be loved by God who made us and not by error. God’s grace trumps guilt because, in Jesus, God has taken all our sins onto himself and set us free from that pain. While therapy can offer us a way to deal with the pain from guilt and shame, only God’s grace experienced in the reconciling action of Christ can offer us full healing and new life.

Following the teaching section of this workshop, participants were invited to join in a meditation combining an art therapy technique with a prayer exercise to balance and combine psychology and religion. In their workbooks they were given a blank copy of a heart to artistically divide into sections that represented things that they would like God to heal.¹⁵ On these hearts, they could express any number of feelings such as guilt or shame. They were asked to mindfully choose different colors and shapes they used to symbolize feelings and thoughts. For example, in art therapy, blue can indicate peacefulness.¹⁶ For their weekly meditation, participants were given a blank calendar and asked to draw a symbol or word for a healing grace that they had seen in their lives that day that took the place of shame or guilt. This activity helped the participants view their

¹⁵ Appendix Six.

¹⁶ Art Therapy Blog, “Color Meanings, Color Symbolism, Meaning of Colors,” Art Therapy Blog, <http://www.arttherapyblog.com/online/color-meanings-symbolism/#colormeans> (accessed November 2, 2013).

hearts as whole in God's hands. Finally, because psychology teaches that guilt and shame can take on physical manifestations in the body, the evening liturgy was a form of physical prayer adapted from a service taken from Roy DeLeaon's *Praying with the Body*.¹⁷ This beautiful service used the scripture focus for that evening – Psalm 51:10, “Create in me a clean heart, Oh God,” again calling upon the image of the heart in God's hands – and perscribed healing movements that reflected an open body and soul free from the pain of sin and guilt.

Class Three: Forgiveness and *Kenosis*

Another theme that arose in the pre-program research was the need of an understanding of forgiveness and *kenosis*. When interviewed, many people described guilt as being “heavy”. Conversely, forgiveness was described as an “emptying” or a feeling of “lightness” that arrived after the weight of the transgression was forgiven. For example, when asked the question, “How much does sin weigh?,” common responses were, “Sin weighs heavily...”¹⁸ and “[In my life], sin causes guilt, and sometimes, shame; which for me, transformed my life — inspired me to give my life to Christ.”¹⁹ This recurring theme lead the LAC to conclude that emptying one's self of sin in a form of Christ-like *kenosis* would be of the utmost importance in any look at reconciliation.

¹⁷ Roy DeLeon, *Praying with the Body: Bringing the Psalms to Life* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2004), 105-107.

¹⁸ See Appendix Eight for a sampling of the responses.

¹⁹ See Appendix Nine for a sampling of the responses.

This class's notes and opening discussion was dedicated to the *kenosis*, or emptying, that takes place for us in Jesus's sacrifice on the cross. The term *kenosis* derives from a Greek word found in Paul's Letter to the Philippians 2:5-11, where we read:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. □ And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, □ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, □ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

There has been much debate crossing denominational lines as to what Paul is trying to convey here about Jesus's nature when he took on human form. For our purposes, however, this mystery is an example of Jesus's extreme humility. As A. M. Allchin notes:

the passage [in Phil.] speaks of the humility and obedience of Christ, not in terms of incidents taken from the course of his life, or of speculations about his psychological motivation. What we have is an affirmation of more than temporal and local import. Christ freely and willingly exchanges equality with God for the form of a slave. He moves from the divine realm to the human, from the world of eternity, to the world of time, making himself open and vulnerable to death, death on the cross.²⁰

In other words, because Jesus was willing to live and die as a human and bore humanity's sins for their salvation, so, too, should all people empty themselves of pride and be made like him.

²⁰ A. M. Allchin, "Kenosis," in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought: Intellectual, Spiritual, and Moral Horizons of Christianity*, ed. Adrian Hastings, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 366-367.

This call to *kenosis* is indeed hard for humans to embrace. To paraphrase the great theologian Karl Barth, humanity's chief sin is always pride.²¹ We always try to put ourselves in control: in God's place. Yet, what we see in Christ is that God's way is to choose humility – he chose to put himself in our place. It is all well and good to say that Christians should be humble like Christ, but what does that truly mean? Is it even possible to join him in this holy action?

The true joy and mystery about Jesus's incarnation is that he transcends himself "in order to enter into his own creation, and in doing so, opens the possibility for his human creation to transcend itself, to go beyond itself, in a responsive movement of total self-giving."²² In other words, because Jesus came to us as both fully human and fully divine, he shows us the true measure of humanity — he shows us that *kenosis* is truly what being a human is all about as we are created in God's likeness. Thus, Christians empty themselves on behalf of God and on behalf of their true identities as his children, allowing people to love fully as God does.

Humility, for followers of Christ, must be seen then as a true understanding of who we are – finite and yet beloved of the infinite. As Thomas Merton describes it,

We have the choice of two identities: the external mask which seems to be real and which lives by a shadowy autonomy for the brief moment of earthy existence, and the hidden, inner person who sees to us to be nothing, but who can give himself eternally to the truth in whom he subsists. In this inner self that is taken up into the mystery of Christ, by His love, but the Holy Spirit, so that in secret we live 'in Christ.'²³

²¹ Karl Barth, *Prayer* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 28.

²² Allchin, 366.

²³ Thomas Merton, "New Seeds of Contemplation: The General Dance," in *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master*, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992), 255.

Thus, humility is the understanding that riding ourselves of the masks we wear when we chose sin will lead to embracing the true life with Christ.

Reconciliation of a Penitent offers us a way to practice that Christ-like *kenosis*. When they humble themselves and confess their sins and ask God to empty them of all their brokenness and pride, Christians are reminded of that true identity and will be able to be filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Following an exploration of the theological and Biblical roots of *kenosis*, the group pursued the pattern of discussion, reflection, and meditation. The meditation for this workshop was centered on the scripture verse of the evening – Philippians 2:5-11 – and invited the participants to delve further into the grace of *kenosis* by giving them an emptying implementation. The message of the evening was reinforced in the directions, which read:

The grace of *kenosis* is the way that it lets us empty ourselves of all the pride and sin that keeps us from being open to the filling power of the Holy Spirit and God's living water. Imagine being like a bowl that is filled to the brim with heavy rocks. If you were to try and pour water in that bowl, it would only be able to come in through the cracks between the stones. If you were to empty that bowl, how much more of that life giving water could you welcome in? Now imagine that there is a mirror on the bottom of that bowl that would let you see yourself as God truly sees you — as His beloved child. Yet, we cannot see this image fully when our bowls are being filled by distractions and sin.²⁴

Participants were then given a bowl to decorate with markers. On the bottom of their bowl, they were asked to draw an icon or a symbol of what they thought their true essences as a child of God looks like. – for example, they may have drawn a cross, a butterfly, or it may have been a self-portrait. Following that visualization, using strips of paper and their rocks from the first week's class, the participants were asked to write

²⁴ Appendix Six.

down the things that were separating them from fully seeing that self and place them in the bowl. . Written on these strips were all the things that needed to be reconciled back to God – the things that needed to be laid at his feet to experience the grace of Christ-like *kenosis* found in Reconciliation.

This week's take-home -- inspired by St. Ignatius of Loyola -- was an attempt to continue to examine their lives looking for the identity that God calls them to as well as the grace that he offers. To do this, participants were asked to join in the classic practice of the Daily Examine created by Ignatius. His belief in a God that offers Christians grace throughout their whole lives was strengthened by his call to "rummage" through our days to see where God's presence could be seen and where we can respond more and more to his love. This self-reflection is an important step in achieving a humble heart that is open and willing to follow the Lord. Participants were given a form containing the steps to The Examine²⁵ on it and were asked to take a time in their day --traditionally at noon or in the evening -- to walk through the steps in prayer with God again, looking for grace and his invitation to *kenosis* of those things that stop us from fully embracing him.²⁶

The worship experience for this week's session again focused on the theme of Christ-like *kenosis* by adapting a guided meditation supplied by the Fund for Theological Education called, "Letting Go."²⁷ This spiritual exercise led participants to practice beginning to let God open the hands of their spirits to be free to embrace God's will in

²⁵ See Appendix Six for the class leaflet containing the form of the Examine.

²⁶ Loyola Press, "The Daily Examine," Ignation Spirituality, <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/> (accessed November 2, 2013).

²⁷ The Fund for Theological Education, 68.

their lives, just as the Rite of Reconciliation does.²⁸ The FTE guidebook describes it as follows:

With a human nature that is often resistant to change, there is yet another discipline we need to practice — Letting Go [sic]. Letting go of old habits of the heart, mind, and will is necessary before we are really ready to let new ideas and inspirations fill us and move us into the future. This practice helps us to empty our “old wine skins” and make room for the “new wine.” Or the creativity and joy of Pentecost. (Luke 5:33-39, Matt 9:14-17 and Mark 2:18-22). Letting Go [sic] is an opportunity to suspend patterned ways of knowing that may be “stuck,” or that serve as a crutch that we no longer need. Letting Go [sic] is aimed at our tendency to exercise sole control over our lives [which is a mark of our pride].²⁹

This exercise served as a very good introduction to the feeling of *kenosis* found in reconciliation and to the renewing work of the Holy Spirit found in the Rite. Practicing this step in the reconciliation practice led the many of the participants to being to feel that emptying feeling that comes with forgiveness.

Class Four: Resurrection and Incarnation

The fourth workshop marked a shift in the arc of the Lenten program as the group moved past the broken parts of their lives and relationships into the “new creation” realm of reconciliation that Paul talks about in his 2nd Letter to the Corinthians. Drawing again upon the interview data, the LAC created a space to allow the group to contemplate the future that grows when our souls feel the power of reconciliation and forgiveness. Indeed, the answers we received pointed to a lack of tangibility and application in the minds of those who had not yet engaged in the Rite. This lack made it difficult to imagine the benefit from engaging in confession. In other words, for many people, the

²⁸ See Appendix Six for the full meditation.

²⁹ The Fund for Theological Education, 68.

Rite of Reconciliation did not seem to relate in any real way to their daily lives and thus left many with a “so what?” feeling. This lack of application was so important that this point informed the creation of both this session and the following one, Class Five.

For example, one interviewee stated that, “the act of making private confession would not in-and-of-itself bring about reconciliation or ‘healing.’ At most it could be seen as one step in a long, multi-phase and multi-step process.”³⁰ Similarly, another interviewee who was, “Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful, personal way in a service of worship make it easier?”: responded, “It is hard to acknowledge a personal shortcoming or failure. Also, the reaction of the person to whom I am asking forgiveness. Maybe they won’t forgive? Having a way to do this in a meaningful service of worship might be easier, but I think I would have to work up to that.”³¹ Clearly, the responses show a desire to *be* reconciled, but they did not yet see Reconciliation of a Penitent as a tool at their disposal to facilitate that.

Yet, reconciliation can be a gateway to life because it helps all to put sins down and walk in the opposite direction from them. There can be, perhaps, nothing more applicable and transformative to every day living than that. Thus, helping people mindfully create a future that has been made a new creation through the reconciling love of God was a critical step in understanding the power and benefit of the Rite of Reconciliation.

Taking that goal to task on the creation of the workshop, the fourth session began with a discussion of life as a new creation as described in scripture and with sin. Sin is primarily corrosive to the soul because it corrupts people’s relationships with themselves,

³⁰ See Appendix Eight for interview samplings.

³¹ Ibid.

with others, and with God. It also works to lead people away from their true identities as children of God who have joined Christ in his death and resurrection. Thus they take this union with Jesus in his sacrifice and ascension to glory as central to what it means to be a part of the Body of Christ here on earth. So central, in fact that Christians claim Baptism — the Rite in which they join in Christ’s death through the baptismal waters and then emerge from this watery grave having “put on Christ” — as the initiation into the faith. It is not, for example, enough to simply claim allegiance with Jesus’s ideals to be considered a Christian: one must be baptized first. Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, highlights this baptismal imperative:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.³²

In other words, in this new life with Christ that was opened at baptism, Christians find that their old selves – those selves that were weighed down by sin – have been made new creations and they are slaves of sin and death no more.

The amazing reality about this baptismal life that Paul is describing is that it makes resurrection a possibility for all — not just in the afterlife, but in this realm, as well. All are called, as Paul says in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians, to live as new creations NOW as well as in the future because they have been saved from the death of sin. As part of his treaty on reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 6:1-2, he writes: “For [God] says, ‘At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.’ See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!” In other

³² Romans 6:3-6.

words, Paul is reminding Christians that they cannot keep sinning as though they have not been resurrected from that deadly way of life and must now see these days as the days of salvation. When they sin, they are given the chance to be united to him again through the reconciliation, with which God has graced them and calls them to bring to the world as his “ambassadors of reconciliation.”

To make reconciliation a tangible expression of grace in the lives of the participants, the meditation was in two parts and flowed out of worship time. Reversing the arrangement from an active meditation followed by worship helped put the participants in the mindset of allowing a liturgical action – as the Rite of Reconciliation is – to motivate real change in their everyday lives. Worship time began with another guided meditation adapted from the FTE Leader’s Guide described, as “embodied” and then began crafting an icon of the future that they discerned God was calling them to through that visioning time.³³ The FTE guide describes the meditation in this way:

The exercise is intended to slow us down long enough for an encounter with God. It supports envisioning a glimpse of the future within us that is waiting to emerge, an echo from Luke’s Gospel that the ‘Kin-dom [sic] of God is within you.’ (Luke 17:21) Throughout the Christian story, we find ordinary people who have done extraordinary things because of their encounter with the Holy. We cannot enact what we have not first seen within us and among us. When we engage this meditation, we become more aware of the presence of God and more conscious of the deeper longings within us.”³⁴

In worship that night, participants asked God to open their hearts to the future that He was calling them to. The participants were called to sit with closed eyes and imagine walking through a doorway into their future — one that was free from the weight of sin that they were presently feeling. While standing in this future place, they were then

³³ The Fund for Theological Education, 76.

³⁴ Ibid.

instructed to turn around and look at the places they had come from. What steps had they had to take to get there? What people were involved with this journey? How had God supported them all the way through? Finally, they were called “back through the doorway” into the present, having been shown a vision vocational call past the realm of sin and fear. They began to recognize an image of the new creation that they are called to through their baptisms. With this vision in mind, participants were invited to create an icon of what that resurrected future looked like. This icon would be used again in the following week.

This session’s take-away spiritual practice was centered around a picture of a stone pathway. The participants were encouraged to continue this visioning process in their prayers asking for continued clarity and focus. On each stone, they were to write down a faithful next step each day that would aid in making their vision of the future vocation a reality.

Class Five: The Growth that Comes from Being Reconciled Back to God

In this final meeting, the group spent a great deal of time brainstorming and workshopping what these “newly-created” lives would look like, making a spiritual blueprint to make these action plans a reality. This part of the Lenten series made for some very interesting discussion and some deep reflection in the groups. Interestingly, most people felt that while they could understand that they were sinners and they believed that God wanted to forgive them, they nonetheless found it difficult to believe that there was actually “life after sin;” in other words, they seemed to think it was not possible to live as

a completely new creation, even with all the scriptural evidence they had encountered. To believe that they were perpetual sinners was somehow more realistic to them than the thought that they could free from their prisons, even through Jesus!

As mentioned above regarding Class Four, many people interviewed had a hard time conceptualizing the practical implementations of the theological principles of the Rite of Reconciliation. Participants asked questions in class such as, “Okay, sure I believe that God wants to forgive our sins, but that does not mean that they are ever *really* fully gone, right?!” and, “You have to think that maybe some people can break some habits, but basically, you will just go back to your old way of life, right?” The thought of living as a new creation seemed unobtainable, or at best, temporary.

Clearly, the problem with this kind of theology is that it seems to exaggerate the power of sin and death over the power of God’s resurrecting love. This viewpoint may arise from the way Episcopalians typically teach about the nature of sin and grace. For example, as a denomination, we “do” Lent really well; that is to say we spend the 40 days of the Lenten session being intentional about our fasting and pointing out the need for humility and repentance. St. David’s certainly follows this pattern and, in fact, these class offerings corresponded with that very phenomenon.

However, when Eastertide comes, St. David’s parishioners tend to keep it contained to Easter Sunday alone rather than extending the jubilation of Resurrection for its full 50 days. Just as they were unfamiliar with Reconciliation of a Penitent itself, most parishioners of St. David’s were not aware that Eastertide is actually a fifty-day feast. Thus, Easter joy and the power of the resurrection — our very instrument of new life in Christ — gets relegated to the realm of holiness alone, never crossing into our daily lives.

Yet, we see from the post-resurrection stories that Jesus is both very tangible – eating breakfast on the beach with his disciples – while still living as a new creation – being able to instantly appear in a room, for another example. So, too, are Christians to live even in this life having been reconciled to God through their very baptisms. It is important to note, however, that in Matthew 28:16-20, we do hear of disciples who were literally beholding the resurrected Jesus in their midst and still doubted – it would seem that this doubt is indeed prevalent. Yet, grace-filled actions like the Reconciliation of a Penitent can help people to grasp onto that hope as they live out its truth more and more in their lives.

In response to this doubt of the reality of this resurrected life, this session was designed to help put some very tangible action plans in place for the participants. In these last weeks, they had reflected and participated in the “arc” of reconciliation. They learned about the way sin has affected all of humanity and their place in salvation history. They had explored the balance between guilt and shame. They had practiced Christ-centered *kenosis* and meditated on where God might be calling them. This week, they would tie all these themes and graces together by brainstorming and work-shopping a blueprint of sorts for living out the resurrected future that is Christians’ gift and responsibility as “ambassadors of Christ” and “ministers of reconciliation,” as Paul writes.

As they had already discussed, the true gift of reconciliation is not simply the fact that Christians are set free from the prison that is sin, but that it resurrects their whole lives. As such, they have been given the gift of new and resurrected to life *now*, and not only in the life to come. As Paul exhorts, “now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of

salvation.” Thus, Christians have been invited to live a life that joins with God’s redemptive and creative work in the world responding in faith to where Jesus has led — daunting as that possibility may seem.

Thankfully, Christians have already been given guidance from Jesus, who gave them the Great Commission. Matthew 28:16-20 says,

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Here is the call to be ambassadors and ministers of reconciliation and what it entails. As people who have been resurrected to new life through Christ, Christians must tell other people about his love, having been given all authority – as His Ambassadors – and help them to be ushered into this new kind of life experienced at baptisms – i.e., the ministry of reconciliation. It is important to note that Jesus is giving this commission as part of his resurrected reality, having been raised from the dead and now living his life as a New Creation — the first fruits of the dead, according to scripture.

Since Christians have been commissioned by Jesus and given all authority through him to this ministry, they must actively identify how to answer this call in a way that is both mindful of the weight of responsibility as well as what an unsurpassing joy it is. Returning to the icons created in the previous classes’ “journey” into the possible future of resurrected life, participants were asked to join with their small group members for a time of corporate discernment with other parts of the body of Christ. They were

asked to describe what this life looked like, but also what steps it might have taken to get there.

In the Great Commission, Jesus says us that he will be with us always. Christians can take this to mean that he will not abandon them when we need guidance and clarity on how to live as his ambassadors in the world. Thus, they can have faith that their calls need not be shrouded in mystery and veiled to their knowledge. Hence, they are able to take faithful next steps toward this vision of resurrected life.

This last class's work – and, indeed, the work of all our lives – was to begin to explore ways Christians can specifically be attentive to their call. They are called to use their whole selves — body, mind, heart, and soul — in service and love of God, and as such, Christians must use all their gifts, imagination, and creativity to truly live as new creations. When they take all the graces they have been given through the reconciliation that God gives in Christ; when they empty ourselves of all the pride, which is not in service to God; and when they take steps to live as new creations, they will know the joy and fullness of life that God has always intended for them.

Following that important time of group reflection, participants were asked to refer to their workbooks for tips and action tools for creating such a blueprint for reconciled action. These tips, which also came from the FTE, included such though-provoking questions as:

- Who are the people who are part of your vision?
- Who will it engage or impact?
- What is God's goal working through you?
- What gifts do you possess that God might want you to use?
- What does the vision of reconciled life that God has given you look like?
- Is it relevant?
- Is it right?
- Is it revolutionary?

- Is it relationally effective?
- When will we begin to implement this part of our call? When will it end? Where/What location will you use?
- What season of the year or season in our life will we do this in? ‘
- How: What support and resources do we need?³⁵

These questions laid the groundwork for participants to actually write down the next action plans they would take to grow in God’s plans for them. Some responses included: joining a Bible study, moving out of a current living situation that was not sustainable, and spiritually preparing to become a parent.

The evening liturgy was adapted from a Commissioning service found in *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*.³⁶ Following the scriptural theme of the Great Commission for the night, it seemed appropriate to bless the roles of Ambassadors of Reconciliation that the group was ready to adopt as their vocation. They literally had an action plan in hand to go out and “make disciples of all the nations” and help spread God reconciling love to all the world. Thus, the liturgical action mirrored the scriptural action of Jesus’s blessing and sending as a mark of resurrected and reconciled life.

Class Six: Reconciliation Worship

This final session took place on the Tuesday of Holy Week. As discussed in Chapter One, one of the most important things Christians can do as created beings of God is to come together to worship Him. Having a chance to worship together as a class was

³⁵ Ibid., 111.

³⁶ Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, et al., *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 559.

especially important, given the liturgical nature of the Rite of Reconciliation. It invites people to be in honest conversation with themselves and with God, trusting in the goodness of his mercy.

Remarkably, this hope was realized. Participants' full responses to this service appear in later chapters, but it is important to note that most people reported feeling intense peace and joy during this session. The doubt that many people had that they could actually be freed from their bonds seemed to melt away as the night went on. The worship was indeed a pathway of reconciling the hope and the belief of the resurrection in the hearts of those who joined.

The service for this night was specially designed by myself and a small sub-committee of the LAC. Other members of the congregation who were otherwise not part of this project volunteered to help make the night a success, including several members of the choir who sang Taize chants during the whole service – Taize, itself, being a community dedicated to Reconciliation. There were six worship stations set up around the large Fellowship Hall that participants were invited to move through as they felt called. It was the hope that these stations served as “confessional-style” places of reconciliation, and yet gave new expression to that standard paradigm of the Rite. Each one was designed to focus on the topics that had been explored in each class.

Station Descriptions

Each table had a daffodil in the center, as the daffodil is a symbol of St. David. In the center of the room was placed a beautiful bowl of water filled with doves and lit from below, to remind participants of their baptismal vows. Each was invited to take a dove with them. We used this font as our corporate gathering space.



Figure 1. Bowl of water filled with doves.

Each station was unique, with its own description and direction:

Station #1 Journal Station

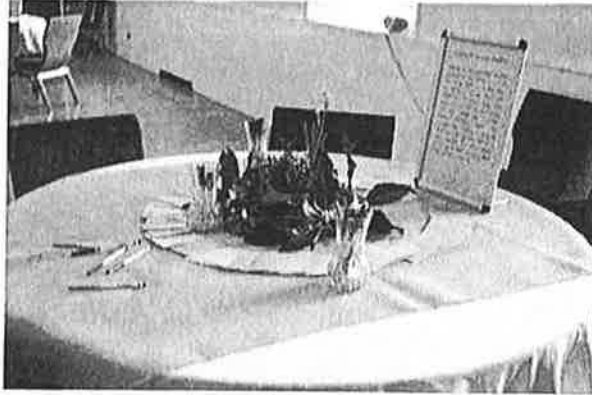


Figure 2. Journal station.

Taking the woven paper journal in front of you, write down all the things that you would like to tell God. Perhaps there are moments of grace that you experienced during this Lent and you would like to offer thanks. Perhaps there are burdens that need to be put down in order for you to live life as a new creation. Use this journal to lift up to God anything that you need him to know.³⁷

³⁷ The woven nature of this journal allowed for people to keep their thoughts private if they so wished.

Station #2 Wailing Cross



Figure 3: Wailing cross with prayers.

At this station, you will find a cross covered in wire. Using the strips of paper provided, write down the names of people you are concerned about or things that are troubling you. Roll these prayers up, and stick them in the wire much like people place prayers on the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem.³⁸

³⁸ This was the most popular station. The cross used in Holy Week was then used by the children in the Church to “Flower the Cross” by placing flowers all over it as a mark of the resurrection on Easter. It seemed to many that these flowers grew out of the prayers “planted” here this night. Also, the prayers left here that night were taken by the clergy and burned —unread— in the Pascal Fire at the Easter Vigil.

Station #3 Rock Art

Taking the rocks provided, wrap them in the malleable copper wire to make a wire stand to hold pictures that can hold a symbol of resurrection (like a flower, butterfly, cross, etc.). This will be a marker of new life arising out of brokenness.³⁹

Station #4 Heart Collage

Taking the tri-fold heart and using the collage materials provided, fill your heart with all the things that are on your soul. Where are you feeling guilt and shame? Where are you feeling joy and resurrection? What can this heart tell you about your soul?⁴⁰

³⁹ One of the male participants noted later that this station surprised him. He felt that it was “manly” in its tangibility and truly spoke to him in the use of such “raw” materials as metal and rock.

⁴⁰ This heart exercise was very similar to the one that we engaged in during Class Two.

Station #5 Healing Movement



Figure 4. Leading healing movement.

Studies have shown that grief and shame can manifest themselves in physical ways. This healing prayer will be using gentle movements that can be done sitting or standing to help ask God to free us of the physical pain of these emotions. Simply follow the leader as they silently move through these movements.⁴¹

⁴¹ Personally, I was stunned at how leading this one felt. I have to say that it would not have been my first choice if I had been a participant as it requires a lot of “letting go” to move this much in public. However, I found it to be very freeing and was amazed by how many people came and stayed in this station. The movements were all enacted to create such postures as surrender (arms open), humility (arms crossed over chest and head bowed), and reverence (standing), for examples.

Station #6 Reconciliation of a Penitent

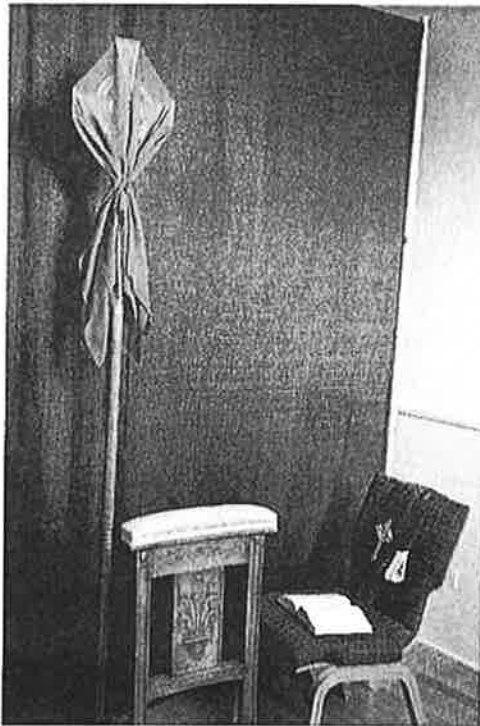


Figure 5. Confessional booth.

Set up privately in the back of the room, there will be a “confessional booth” where a member of the clergy will be available to hear private confessions. Keeping in mind that, “all may, some should, none must” when it comes to this liturgical action, this rite stands for us as an invitation to forgiveness and reconciled living.⁴²

Worship time together began with a group prayer. From there, everyone was welcomed to flow from one station to another, as they felt called. Again, as people

⁴² Without breaking the seal of confession, I will simply note that two private confessions were heard that night, which was considered a healthy response. Also, it should be said that great care was used in designing the “booth” to insure that privacy and confidentiality were maintained.

moved around the room, the choir was singing at times and letting the silence hang in the air at other times. At the end of worship time, a bell was rung to call everyone back to order and the group closed in prayer together. Interestingly, many people asked to keep the worship going, and it was continued for another hour! In all these motions, participants were called to remember that God guides their lives and calls them to live free from all brokenness and sin and to live as new creations. This was a time to grow in the love and freedom that comes to us through Christ as God's grace surrounded us.

CHAPTER FIVE

EVIDENCE OF TRANSFORMATION

Narrative Theology Revisited: LAC Interviews and Meetings

After this remarkably rich series of Lenten classes, it was clear that for most participants, this event had been very meaningful. However, it was important to perceive the extent of this transformation in their lives as well as to evaluate the response of the congregation as a whole. Had there been a shift in the way St. David's members viewed reconciliation, and would this change bear fruit in the future? To answer those questions, we examined interview data as well as other events and marks of transformation that took place in the life of the parish during the project. The following chapter will look to the future at St. David's and see what implications, if any, this small study might have for the Episcopal denomination as a whole.

Participants' Transformations

The opinions and views of the participants were again solicited at the close of the project's six-week timeframe.¹ Three responses stood out as being fairly typical and

¹ To see the facsimiles of the surveys and interviews that were gathered in full, please see Appendix Eleven.

representative of the variety of experiences reported by the participants. Of course, since the Rite of Reconciliation has with it the guarantee of absolute confidentiality, I will not be divulging whether or not they made a private confession.²

Michael

Michael's responses indicate that he is an excellent model of a "typical" participant of this class, in that he came in not knowing that there was such a thing as private confession in the Episcopalian tradition, and he left with a greater appreciation and depth in his relationship with God and the church.

In class, Michael shared that he had been told in a prior Bible study over and over again that he was a sinner and that his brokenness had led to the need for Jesus to die. "After years of hearing that, I get it and I hope there is more to it!" he emphatically told the group. When classes three thru five covered the change of life offered in reconciliation, he was very moved and excited to know that his sins were not the only thing that might define him. In his words, he felt that, "it means to become fully free as a Christian; my reconciliation has brought me new life!"³

This "new life" that he described extended for him beyond Holy Week, into a transformed Eastertide. Following the class, Michael understood the connections between the need to confess sins; the invitation from God for a transformed life free from the death that sin brings; and an Easter joy that will fuel his actions in the world as an

² These stories carry the marks of reconciliation even without the full disclosure of participation in the Rite itself. However, they have given their full permission to have their stories shared here.

³ Michael, interview by author and LAC, Wayne, PA, April 21, 2013.

ambassador of that reconciliation. He was so moved by the conversion of heart that he spoke of meeting Easter morning with a feeling of grace that he had never felt before: “I ended up weeping during the singing of “I Will Raise them Up” a hymn about the resurrection sung at the Easter Sunday Service,” said Michael.⁴ Clearly, his heart was touched by this knowledge of reconciling grace, and he was changed.

Solveig

Solveig came to class with a central issue on her heart: her relationship with a mother, long since passed, who had caused her to feel much shame. Solveig had a very difficult relationship with her mother growing up and into adulthood; her mother shamed her for countless things and that shame indeed hindered Solveig’s willingness to be open and seek reconciliation. Before the class began, she told the interviewer that she had never made a private confession because she was “too shy to open old wounds...”.⁵ Clearly, these “old wounds”, inflicted by a trusted loved one, made her feel “unworthy of love” and had far-reaching ramifications in her ability to be open with others for fear of the same kind of treatment.⁶ As one might expect, the class on guilt and shame was especially powerful for her in her growing understanding of new life that reconciliation offers — one free from the pain of shame-fueled rejection. Following that class, there were several follow-up meetings to talk about the sadness of her past as well as the possibility of reconciling with someone who was no longer alive to engage in any kind of

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Solveig, interview by author and LAC, Wayne, PA April 21, 2013.

⁶ Ibid.

rebuilding process with. Solveig found comfort in knowing that there was a hope in reconciliation that God will mend all wounds — even the ones that stretch beyond the grave.

It was at the worship service that Solveig was able to come to a place of deep peace with this wound. She described the experience in this manner:

I was drawn to the bowl of light with the doves and water that was in the middle of the space. It was so calm and peaceful that I almost dared not touch it, but felt compelled to nonetheless. It was a moment of grace when I touched the water. The ripples that were on the surface of the water radiated outward like the love of God in the world. That is what it is like to do something for God.⁷

Indeed, Solveig looked awed and transfigured during the service, saying her own prayer of thanksgiving and offering hugs. The sense of peace has stayed with her since there has been a notable change in her level of joy and openness. Months later, Solveig still talks about this life-changing experience, saying, “the whole concept of *kenosis* has become a part of my worship, praying, living and thinking.”⁸

Ben

Ben’s experience is very important in the context of this study precisely because of how different he was from the average St. David’s parishioner due to his high level of sophistication and liturgical knowledge of the Rite before the program in addition to being a member of the LAC class design team. Again, most people came to this topic “cold” and uninstructed in the Rite of Reconciliation. However, Ben, who is himself a doctoral candidate in philosophy, not only knew of the Rite, but had clearly spent time

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Solveig, e-mail message to author, October 24, 2013.

studying and contemplating the different theological and liturgical aspects of it. For example, when asked the question, “what is your view of Reconciliation as private confession?” Ben answered:

I am not sure why private confession with a priest is particularly efficacious in bringing about our reconciliation to God. In some sense, Christ’s death and resurrection, these very actions or passions, were sufficiently efficacious in themselves to bring about our reconciliation with God. I assume that the Catholic view of private confession is based on the hierarchical notion that the priest, either by dint of his theological training, his gift of grace from God, or his holiness, is in some way able to mediate between the sinner and God more effectively than the sinner by himself. If one denies this aspect of the priesthood and believes instead in the “priesthood of all believers,” then it becomes less clear what particular purpose the act of private confession serves. Perhaps private confession causes one to have to articulate and literally pronounce the words that express one’s guilt and that this act has a powerful psychological effect. If it is through conversation with others that our powers of reason come into being in the first place, we might think that some of our best insights about ourselves also come to light through conversation with others dialogically. Perhaps, as Aristotle thought, dialogical engagement with others is a better route to self-knowledge than exclusively monological reflection and introspection. This raises an interesting question about the differences between talking with other persons and “talking” with God in prayer.⁹

Most participants answered with one or two simple sentences, while Ben’s sophisticated and nuanced response reflects a very different mindful, and intellectual engagement on the topic. Also in contrast, to other participants, Ben was also not approaching this sacramental rite as an invitation to a change of heart.

Not only did he have a high level of familiarity with this topic, but he was also a member of the LAC team that designed the program; consequently, one could imagine that, his “behind-the-scenes” experience might have dampened his openness to a transformative moment compared to someone who had the novelty of an “awakening” moment might have. Yet, it was his story, in my opinion, the story that reflected the greatest mark of transformation.

⁹ Benjamin, interview by author and LAC, Wayne, PA April 21, 2013.

The LAC was able to hear Ben's story in his own words when he talked about participating in the five-week class and fully engaging in all of the offerings at the reconciliation service on the sixth night of the course and what it had meant to him. To paraphrase his experiences, he recounted that:

When I left the worship, I found myself thinking over the next few days that, maybe [this experience] had been something important. Before this class, I knew that reconciliation was a way of confessing sins and it didn't have to just be something on par with murder to be confessed. More than that, I thought of [the Rite] as a piece of what it meant to be a practical agent in the world [for God] — a way to represent Christ in the world. But the part about love — to love God as your neighbor and self — what if you or your neighbor were somehow ugly [in a spiritual way]? How could we be called to love anything as we love God when the finite could never be on par with God — never worthy of that kind of love? It was as though I was looking at the world as though it were that optical illusion — the kind where if you look at the image one way, you see a duck's head, but the other way reveals the head of a rabbit. Then one day, I was looking at a picture of the Pope holding a small child and the whole thing looked of grace and the love of God. I cried for two hours. I had only been seeing the duck. Suddenly, I saw the rabbit.¹⁰

What Ben had described was a truly revelatory insight. Before this venture into reconciliation, Ben had only been able to see the brokenness of the world and people's inability to ever be worthy of fully loving each other or ourselves, let alone ever be worthy of God's love. After his exploration, he saw the world differently: he saw it as the creation that God loved so much that he was willing to die for it and bring it back to himself — ugliness and all.

¹⁰ Ibid.

LAC Transformation

One of the greatest joys of this project was working with the LAC and seeing the transformation in this group. The group was intentionally composed of people who were all very active in the church, yet very few of them were especially close to one another; in a parish as large as St. David's, it is easy to have acquaintances, but harder to create very close connections. However, the group bonded over their conversations and exploration of reconciliation in the life of the church. By the end of our time together, they were speaking in much deeper theological terms and were themselves able to talk about the Rite of Reconciliation with confidence. On top of that, they grew closer with the people they interviewed, several of them relating that they shared stories that they would have never heard without given this opportunity.

Another form of transformation in the group came in the increased ownership and excitement for the project itself. As mentioned before, St. David's is located in the Main Line area of the Philadelphia's suburbs, where there is a premium on social protocols, norms and expectation. Normally, it might be considered rude to ask someone questions of such a personal nature, so the LAC was perhaps initially understandably uneasy when faced with the task of asking other people to share stories of that type with them. While they all did, indeed, conduct their interviews and were thus able to produce such a strong program that truly met the needs of people of St. David's, it is indicative of their concern for the area's social norms that they did not produce copious written notes on said

interviews.¹¹ Perhaps demonstrating the feeling that taking notes during their conversations with their interviewees would have been a breach of social protocol.

Yet, as the project went on, there was a definite level of increased enthusiasm from the group. They were active in asking participants how the class was going and in responding to the weekly updates. By the time the second round of interviews came around, they were much more prepared to engage in the conversations; they were clearly proud of their work and were personally affected by the stories of transformation they heard from their interviewees. For example, one member -- our governing body's leader know as the vestry's Rector's Warden -- said, "My second interview was very insightful and they had clearly absorbed a lot. They told me that they were changed and that the celebration at the end had been important. Now I want to do the program myself!"¹² Indeed, interest in taking part in the class if were it to be offered again was echoed by many members of the LAC. In fact, when told that another offering to the congregation would require substantial help from them, on member replied, "Well, you now have a whole committee of reconciliation believers! We will tell everyone to come!"

From this circle of deepening connections between the committee and the participants, one can clearly see how reconciliation can be a reciprocal process — the LAC started as Ambassadors for reconciliation by listening to deep sacred stories of those they interviewed and created a space for reconciliation to happen. The participants, in turn, felt the joy of reconciliation and became Ambassadors of it, themselves. And then such, they ignited the call for reconciliation right back to the original Ambassadors!

¹¹ As reflected in Appendix Seven.

¹² Joe, interview by author and LAC, Wayne, PA April 21, 2013.

Congregational Transformation

While it is more challenging to make a formal exploration into the marks of transformation on the parish as a whole, there are some indicators of change that point to a new force being brought forth in the life of this parish. What excites me most as one of the pastors to this vibrant community is how these marks of transformation came not only the leadership of the parish – especially the clergy — but also from the congregants responding to the call to reconciliation that they heard during this time.

Increases in Number of Private Confessions and Priestly Transformation

Perhaps the most obvious mark of transformation came from the number of private confessions heard by the clergy. As mentioned previously, a poll of my fellow clergy members who have a combined ministry at St. David's of over twenty-two years, cited only five private confessions heard; even by Episcopalian standards, that is a low number. To help lift up the grace that can be found through private confession, the Rite was offered every Friday night in Lent for several hours to accommodate a variety of schedules. A list of the clergy who would be hearing confession was posted publically and a priest from a different congregation on one night expressly to accommodate those who had expressed discomfort in confessing to priests they knew so well. St. David's also published a pamphlet with an explanation of the Rite along with the service so that people would be able to familiarize themselves with it. Several of the clergy preached

and wrote on the subject.¹³ Even with this increase of visibility for the Rite, the clergy did not have very high hopes that people would avail themselves of it. Indeed, they only expected to hear, perhaps three, confessions, at most.

As it turned out, clergy heard six confessions over the course of Lent – and have heard several more since then – which, considering the previous average, was actually quite an increase, while perhaps not an overwhelming one. Seemingly, at least for those people who made a confession during Lent, the invitation from the leadership was necessary to make the attempt. The Rector remarked on the transition that he noticed in this way:

The Reconciliation project at St. David's this past year was a remarkable learning experience for many, but especially for those who are life-long Episcopalians and those brought up in more Protestant denominations. First, I think it brought to the fore the power of confession and forgiveness in all its forms. The learning and the conversation around reconciliation reminded many that that is part of our primary work as followers of Jesus – reconciling all people to God and to one another. Second, it seems to me it heightened the awareness of the reality that the confession we make communally is an important part of our liturgy and not merely a pass-through in the worship. That is, people realized confessing to God in private, confessing with a mediator, and confessing publicly are critical aspects of our spiritual lives. And though few took advantage of clergy offering the sacramental rite of confession on Friday afternoons, enough did that the congregation was made more aware and some have come forward since to meet with a priest to confess and be reconciled. Another learning that interested me as Rector was the unveiling of some nascent anti-Roman Catholicism that sometimes rises up in our community, even though many of our members are former Roman Catholics and our tradition stems from that tradition. The project unveiled it and was an opportunity for conversation and, I believe, some healing of memories and people's attitudes toward Roman Catholicism.¹⁴

A fellow Associate Rector of mine, The Rev. Thomas Pumphrey, who helped to lead the final service, also added his remarks about this transformation thusly:

¹³ Appendix Two and Three.

¹⁴ The Rev. W. Frank Allen, e-mail message to author, November 6, 2013.

Before the reconciliation service, I had limited experience with the rite of reconciliation itself, and limited training. I was a penitent in the rite twice earlier in life, and a confessor once. The service gave ample room for people to engage the theology and practice of reconciliation in so many different ways, and left the rite as one of the options, hopefully giving room for people to consider participating in the rite without too much or too little focus on the rite. It was some time before someone came to seek the rite. Before the end of the service, two people came seeking reconciliation. In one case, there was curiosity about the rite itself as a novelty. But in both cases, there was a sincere wrestling with sin in both actions and motivations. I spoke briefly with each penitent, in part to clarify and understand, then to name and acknowledge both the reality of the sin and the reality of God's mercy and grace. It was a profoundly intimate and sacred experience to be a witness for and a witness to God's grace moving in a person's life.

Participating in the rite of reconciliation as a confessor put me in mind of the weight of sin and the power of God's mercy and grace, which overcomes that sin. This rite is a gift to the penitent and a gift to me as a priest—an active way to participate in the reality of the salvation of Jesus Christ and the joy of a renewed life, reconciled with God and with each other.

This program was an excellent way to raise the visibility, not only of a liturgical practice available to all, but more especially, to the importance of reconciliation in the Christian life. People were challenged positively to go beyond “forgive & forget” toward the reconciliation at the heart of the Gospel, both with God and with people.¹⁵

Clearly, St. David's the leadership noticed a change in the congregation as well.

It is also interesting to note that each member of the full-time clergy staff heard at least one confession that Lent, and each reported that they found it to be a deeply profound and meaningful experience. For one of my colleagues, this was his first confession heard in his ordained ministry. Another mentioned after hearing the confession of a penitent that he was very grateful. Again, as with the LAC members, it would seem that being an Ambassador of Reconciliation is a circular process touching the lives of both confessor and penitent.

¹⁵ The. Rev. Thomas Pumphry, e-mail message to author, November 20, 2013.

Transformation in Lent

A less tangible mark of transformation came in the character of the Lenten observance at St. David's this year. Many people – including clergy – told me that this had been the “deepest” Lent that they had ever experienced at the church and while that comment is perhaps vague, a great deal of changes seemed to stem from the project's effects.

For example, the level of preaching on sin and the nature of reconciliation was heightened with three sermons on the subject, including from myself, as well as one from the Rector on the first Sunday in Lent.¹⁶ The Rector also wrote as part of his weekly e-message, about the project and the theological importance of the Rite which was sent to an audience of nearly 600 people.

The project had unexpected results in several of the adult educational offerings, as well. For example, the members of Fr. Duffy's Sunday morning class, which centers around the instruction of the faith, “hijacked” (in his own words) his class to ask him to teach about private confession.¹⁷ He jokingly said that it took him two classes to get them back on track. Similar conversations happened in the Women's Bible Study and the Wednesday Afternoon Bible Study groups after one sermon — neither of which were centered on reconciliation as the theme of the day. People were obviously curious about this Rite, and their hunger for information was a sign that the clergy did not expect.

¹⁶ Appendix Two.

¹⁷ See his lesson plan in Appendix Five.

Transformation in Artistic and Meditative Offerings

There were also artistic and meditative offerings created by inspired parishioner as a result of the project. For example, member Amy Dolan is one of St. David's Spiritual Directors and is also a certified yoga instructor who teaches a weekly yoga class at church. As part of her work, she writes a weekly e-message called "Yoga Thoughts," one of which focused on the power of reconciliation in our lives and how it can relate to a yoga and spiritual practice following my sermon on the Rite.¹⁸ Another congregant, Paula Murry, was moved to create pieces of art for each day of Lent centered around St. David's annual Lenten meditation booklet. She explained that part of the inspiration for the idea came from our vestry retreat, but was it was solidified for her when she created an image of reconciliation that inspired her son to reconcile with his best friend who had betrayed him earlier that year. Those pieces were hung at church and were so popular that they were the subject of an adult forum post-Lent and inspired a class on meditative art for the next programmatical year.

Transformation in Discipleship Education

Finally, as a discipleship offering, the program seems to have made a lasting impression. The Discipleship Committee has decided to make it an offering again next Lent at the request of congregants who took it and also by some who heard of it and want to take part in it. Another Episcopal church in Reading, Pennsylvania, has also requested instruction in the course for Lent 2014.

¹⁸ See Appendix Four for newsletter.

Personal Transformation

Clearly, there were marks of transformation and increased “Ambassador of Reconciliation-ship” in the corporate life of St. David’s, but perhaps I am the Ambassador who was most impacted. As I described earlier, there is a circular nature to this Ambassadorship that fosters new growth for those who receive the good news of reconciliation and for those who proclaim it, alike. That was certainly true for me as I found myself strengthened — professionally, pastorally, and personally — through the work of this project.

To begin with, it had the immediate effect of bringing me closer with a great many members of the congregation. At the time of this project’s implementation, I had not yet been at St. David’s for a year. Yet through working with the LAC and the participants of the Lenten class, I grew in love and closeness with a large cross-section of the parish being privy as I was to their sacred stories of Reconciliation. It was also gratifying to work closely with my clergy colleagues and the staff who showed a great deal of interest and support.

Indeed, working with the LAC was a delight even beyond what I had hoped. To be honest, I assumed that working with a committee would slow down the process of crafting a program, since so much education would need to be done to help the LAC understand the project itself. Happily, those worries were unfounded. While it was true that the coordination of the LAC’s work did take time, it was well worth it to have their full and fresh views on the topic as well as their help in spotting holes in my argument. For example, at one point during the class design phase, a committee member voiced the

concern that I was being too “positive” about the nature of sin, that surely there had to be some “serious consequences for sinful behavior.” That comment helped me see that sin and penitence would need to be addressed even from the first class. Prior to that critique, I might have waited until later in the course. The experience has convinced me that the best ministerial efforts are done *with* the congregation, and not simply *for* them.

As to the class itself, I believe that my skills as a teacher, curriculum and meditation creator, workshop facilitator, presider and liturgist were all tested and strengthened as I worked each week to help the class draw into deeper relationship with themselves and with God. The positive feedback that I received was helpful in that it helped me to see that I might have some strengths in these areas beyond what I suspected, and I have been energized in thinking about how these gifts can be employed in ministry and to the glory of God.

Finally, the major mark of transformation for me was how this project has deepened my feeling of calling and my faith in the supportive nature of the Holy Spirit. I have been a priest only five years, but in that short time, I have never had the benefit of such concentrated and structured feedback on any one aspect of my ministry. Since the program calls for several levels of evaluation and mandated feedback, I was able to look at my ministry through the eyes of others. I had never had such an opportunity to ask about my ministry — honestly, I think I would have been too fearful to ask. However, I was overwhelmed by the reactions that the project, and my contributions to it, elicited. People told me that their lives had been changed and by letting God work through me, I had something to do with that; I would have not known that if I had not asked. For me, it reconciled the beliefs that God can use anyone to help him touch the hearts and minds of

his children with the understanding that that might actually include me, as well. It was a fruit of the Holy Spirit that I had not yet tasted in my ministry. Thus, Christ's reconciling love that has brought me such passion and joy over my life –especially when I have been able to be an Ambassador of that love – came full circle and my own heart was overwhelmed. I can only be thankful and awed-filled for that mark of transformation.

CHAPTER SIX

RECONCILING ALL THINGS- THE GIFT OF BEING AN AMBASSADOR OF RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation, both as a theological concept and as a liturgical rite, has far-reaching consequences for our lives with God, ourselves, and with others. The work of this thesis has been to examine the call to be reconciled with God as described by St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, where he describes the arc of reconciliation — through Christ humanity has been called to life as a new creation, and in turn, they get the privilege of being Ambassadors of this reconciliation to the world. This gift from God is joy and life itself, and Christians have an opportunity to have this grace extended to them through the Rite of Reconciliation. Yet, the sad truth is that they so rarely take God up on this offer. Why, and what would their lives look like if they did?

Shame, Vulnerability, and the Joy of Love

This project has shown that once people were made aware that the Rite of Reconciliation was an option offered to them, there were essentially two reasons people gave for not seeking out the grace of the Rite of Reconciliation:

1. they did not feel that their sins were worthy of seeing such a profound healing;
and

2. they were embarrassed to share their sins with anyone else — even a priest.

These two reasons have one thing in common — a lack of vulnerability. Brene Brown defines vulnerability as “uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure” — all things that people might reasonably associate with doing something as honest and revealing as a private confession.¹ After all, when one speaks the truth about one’s life and actions, one must be prepared to face the realities and depth of brokenness in a life. Thus, private confession has a reputation of being scary, uncomfortable, and an invitation to feeling shamed. This emotional reality is especially true for those who have come from traditions where confession has been used in a way that increases feelings of shame. In those cases, the ritual actually causes trauma.

The irony of this reputation is that while there is a need for emotional exposure, there is actually no uncertainty or shame to be found in the Rite of Reconciliation. In his death, Jesus took upon himself all death — that means that he took all people’s sin, he took their shame, and he took the death that comes with those poisons. He also took with him any doubt or uncertainty of the unending love that he has for humanity and his desire to reconcile them to himself. He was willing to give even his life to bring Christians in right relationship and that invitation to repentance and resurrected life is a sure promise. Thus, Christians can be certain that when they come to God with an earnest desire to know his love and to return to him, they will be welcomed by him. There is no other relationship, covenant, bond, or institution in creation that can offer such a certainty. Hence, the risk to be found in private confession is not in the worry

¹ Brene Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Penguin Group, 2012), 34.

that God will reject them; rather, they only risk themselves when they fail to trust this certainty and live in the pain of their sins.

Moreover, Reconciliation of a Penitent gives Christians a gateway to that kind of joy by joining them with God and with each other through the sacred storytelling that it calls for. Again, the irony of shame is that “it derives its power from being unspeakable....If we cultivate enough awareness about shame to name it and speak to it, we’ve basically cut it off at the knees. Shame hates having words wrapped around it. If we speak shame, it begins to wither.”² Thus, if Christians speak their shame, as they are called to do in the Rite, we take away the power of shame in their lives. Yet, it is that very shame that keeps so many from speaking in the first place.

Reconciliation of a Penitent offers the ultimate safe space to bring shame to its knees. In this service, participants are invited to speak the truth about sin and likewise called to leave the burden of those sins there in that moment. Once they have repented and, with God’s help, are resolved to walk away from that sin and back to him, all are given the words of ultimate acceptance. They are forgiven. And they are then able to bring others to this joy that they have found as Ambassadors of that Reconciliation. On top of that, the priest hears these sacred stories and then hands them over to God — vowing to never break the bond of confidentiality that comes with such a sacred responsibility. In the same liturgical action, Christians are reconciled with God, The Church as the Body of Christ and all its members, and their true identities as Children of God. They are given all this AND they are given their vocation and purpose in life as Ambassadors of Reconciliation. There is just nothing else that can offer such freedom, joy, and purpose of life.

² Ibid, 60.

The Responsibility for Churches

If the ministry of reconciliation was given through Christ's atoning action on the cross, and the Church is Christ's Body on earth, it stands to wonder: why is the Church not the ultimate Ambassadors of Reconciliation for the world? If we have a pathway to freedom from shame, fear, sin and death through the ministry of reconciliation — why are they letting it be our best-kept secret? If, as one can hear all too often from heralds of the church's demise, the church is diminishing in relevancy, would not this gateway to peace and God be more relevant now than ever? As evidenced in this project, people who were simply taught about the Rite of Reconciliation – let alone those who actually experienced it – had their lives changed. Yet, before that, they had never even heard of its existence.

So what is stopping Christians from claiming this ministry and grace for God and for his children? Perhaps it is the same thing that was keeping so many of St. David's congregants away from seeing reconciliation: shame — the shame of corporate sin, in this case. The modern church has, in many ways, become crippled by its deference to secular institutions such as the psychological sciences. Psychology can be very life giving, but it cannot offer the full pardon of God's mercy – only – God can do that. Yet priests including myself, are often quick to send people out of our offices to seek “professional help” rather than offer Reconciliation of a Penitent. Admittedly, there are

times when that is the absolute correct response since healing of the soul cannot easily happen when the mind and body are suffering. However, sometimes this is not the case, and the Rite would be a perfectly well-suited pastoral offering.

Again, what is it that keeps so many from being the Ambassadors of Reconciliation that we are called to be? What are we ashamed of? That we are not worthy to hear other's confessions since our sins of indifference, intolerance and injustice loom so large that admitting them would make us too vulnerable?

We Christians are Christ's Body — called to be vulnerable on behalf of the world just as he was made lowly and vulnerable on the cross on their behalf. They need not fear, because in that very vulnerability, he has shown just how certain his love is — love for those who come to the church looking for forgiveness, and for the Church, Herself. So proclaim mercy and pardon we must if we hope to remain true to the call to extend the ministry of reconciliation.

Conclusion

In this project, St. David's Church was given an opportunity to grown in the calling to be minister of Reconciliation and Ambassadors for Christ as described by St. Paul in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians. In the six weeks of the project, participants were exposed to key aspects of the grace that God extends through the Rite of Reconciliation of a Penitent. They looked at the power and history of sin and salvation, the problems of shame and guilt, the need for humility and Christ-like *kenosis*, and the call to offer this

reconciliation to others. Most importantly, they called upon God to help them accept his life-giving invitation to become a new creation.

This endeavor revealed a remarkable discovery: the goodness of knowing that God was waiting to help and guide humanity along every step of the way. He wants Christians to be reconciled to himself and to know freedom. And when we let our sin and shame keep us from that gift and grace, we are not living as the people we were created and saved to be. Since this project produced very real fruits of the Spirit, it is the hope of the author to publish the workshop and liturgical guides to help the wider Church not keep the healing and joyful reality of the Rite as its best-kept secret.

The Rite of Reconciliation of a Penitent offers a place where sacred stories can be heard, sins forgiven, pardon pronounced, and life's purpose given. Yet, the Church has not proclaimed the virtues of this important liturgical action, leaving her members unaware that it even exists. The work of this project provides a glimpse into what the Church and her members might look like if it were not that way. So many looked like the new creation that Christ's love makes for all in his life, death, and resurrection — people restored, renewed and ready to share that joy. If we are to fully answer the call to be ministers of Reconciliation and Ambassadors of Christ we must be willing to be reconciled back to him who is ready to welcome us back with love and joy.

Appendix One

Lay Advisory Committee Initial Interview Questions

What follows are the questions that the Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) developed in their initial interviews of members of the parish. The questions and answers highlighted areas that needed to be addressed in the Lenten class on reconciliation. This set of questions, as described in the text, were created out of the LAC's own exploration into the Rite of Reconciliation.

LAC Interview Questions

How long have you been a member of St. David's?

Did you come from a different denominational background before becoming an Episcopalian? If yes, what?

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

What spiritual seasons have you experienced?

Do you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession called "Reconciliation of a Penitent" in our Book of Common Prayer?

What is your understanding/hope of confession?

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can affect sin, or that is something only God can remove?

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not?

What does "reconciliation" mean to you?

Have you had an experience of feeling guilty and having that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful, personal way in a worship service make it easier?

What would you think it would be like if St. David's used private confession?

How much does sin weigh?

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

Tell a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person.

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness?

How do you "spiritually exfoliate?"

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

Appendix Two

Sermons Preached at St. David's on Topics of Reconciliation

This appendix contains all of the sermons preached at St. David's Episcopal Church, conjunction with this project by The Rev. W. Frank Allen (Rector) and The Rev. Hillary Raining on the topics of sin and reconciliation during 2013. -

St. David's Episcopal Church

The Rev. Hillary Raining

February 3, 2013

The Fourth Sunday of the Epiphany

Jer. 1:4-10 |Psalm 71:1-6 |1 Cor. 13:1-13 |Luke 4:21-30

Reconciliation

There were 2 major events in history that were all memorialized yesterday on February 2—The first was the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the temple. It is also called Candelmass. This is the Holy day that is dedicated to the coming of Mary and Joseph with the infant Jesus to the Temple at Jerusalem to offer sacrifice, both on behalf of Mary and on behalf of Jesus as a first-born male. As they did so, they were greeted by the aged Simeon and the prophetess Anna who heralded this Jesus as the Messiah.

But of course, the most serious of all the holidays that was honored and held in highest esteem would be that most auspicious of all days—Groundhog day. The day totally devoted to old-time, rodent based weather forecasting. “Will there be an early spring??!!” “Will there be six more long months of grueling winter?!” These are the dark questions of the souls that only Punxsutawney Phil—that most wise and wonderful of all groundhogs (who are, of course, the most cunning and brilliant of all animals) can answer for us. And each year, we bow to the vision that Phil receives from his shadow. Where I grew up in the North Eastern Appalachian part of this great State of Pennsylvania, Groundhog day was a big deal. I remember creating groundhog based arts-and-crafts and learning “The Pennsylvania Polka” (which is sung every groundhog day for some

reason—must be the German pa Dutch tie in—) to be sung at school assemblies through the month of February—(and if you are really nice to me I will sing you a verse after the service.) I remember people taking bets on whether or not Phil would see his shadow and I have this really poignant memory of once watching a live feed of the groundhog's prediction and seeing my teacher pull out her pocket size "Farmer's Almanac" and make note of what the outcome was.

Now, believe it or not both of these events are linked by the prophet Jeremiah and the passing of time and seasons. And, believe it or not, they also have something to do with the Rite of Reconciliation (or personal confession) that I am currently investigating for my doctoral thesis (but more on that in a minute. Let's start with Groundhog day and the feast of the presentation (again, also known as Candlemass). These two celebrations are related to the end of the dark cold winter. These celebrations take place exactly between the winter and spring equinoxes and thus give us hope that there will be an end to the barren and frozen landscapes that make up these long winter months.

As you might have guessed, these holidays would have been of even greater importance to the generations before us who lived in agrarian societies. This time of year could be the hardest—the supplies that had been harvested many months ago in the summer would be dwindling. Things were dark. The nights were long.

And yet, Candlemas and Groundhog Day are reminders that life will not always be like this. There will be a time again to "build and plant" as God tells Jeremiah to preach in our

reading from today. Yes, throughout history, people have looked for signs that the light and warmth of the sun will again foster growth and life. Candelmas speaks to that light, and the prophet who meets the holy family in the temple reminds us of that by declaring Jesus to be “a light to the Gentiles and to be the glory of the peoples Israel.” And, even though it may be silly — the groundhog points us to the hope that we will not be left here in this cold wasteland forever. Ultimately, these traditions are conquering the fears of darkness and coldness and death that surround us this time of year.

The passage from the prophet Jeremiah talks to us about the kind of fear that can come from the winters of our life. Here is Jeremiah, standing before God and being told that he has to be a prophet to the nations and, after starting to refuse his holy charge, he is told by God not to be afraid — the most frequent commandment in the Bible — who then touches his mouth and put his message on Jeremiah’s lips. And God’s message?: “See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to over throw, to build and to plant.”

It is of course natural for Jeremiah to be afraid — he is talking to God after all. And we to can sometimes fear the call that God has for us. Indeed, the call that God has for us that he sends through Jeremiah can be scary in and of itself — that there will be a time to pluck up and to pull down — a time to destroy and to overthrow — all BEFORE the time to build and to plant.

It is a call that reaches us right where we are sitting any time of year, but especially so in

this time of the year — a time of winter. It is also a time before the holy season of Lent — the time when we are called to do what God is telling us to do — it is the time to look at our hearts and see what needs to be plucked up and pull down before the spring time of the soul can enter in.

That indeed can be frightening. And so we have a decision to make. We can avoid looking at those things within us that are sinful, that are harmful, that are prideful and selfish. Yet that fear can stop us from having those things be eradicated from our lives and being freed from the prisons they become. And so we sit — we sit with coldness of hearts weighted down.

Ah, but we are in luck, my dear sisters and brothers. Or should I say we are in grace? Because we have a God who wants to thaw our hearts, wants us to feel growth, to feel life completely. Wants us to build and plant. Wants us to answer his call as Jeremiah did.

Now, there are many ways to answer God's call to springtime, but the one I want to talk about in particular is Confession. As I mentioned earlier, I am working on my doctoral thesis which is looking at the Rite of Reconciliation of a Penitent or *private confession*.

Talk about being afraid!

Now, most people do not know this, but we have a service of private confession in the Episcopal Tradition — in fact it is in your very Prayer Book (pg. 447) that may be in

your hand at this very moment! Believe me, I know that personal confession does not exactly sound like spring time, or cute groundhogs, or polkas (Pennsylvania or otherwise). I know that there is fear associated with telling another person (let alone God) all of your sins. I know this because of the preliminary data that has all ready been gathered here at St. David's where most people answered the "Would you ever consider making a private confession?" question with a resounding, "What?? We aren't going to start doing that here are we?" or "As a former Roman Catholic, that was one of the things I was happy to never do again."

Now don't worry — no one will ever be forced to make a private confession in the Episcopal Church. In fact, we have an expression about confession that goes something like "all may, some should, but none must."

But I would bring us back, for a moment to that need that we have as humans to look toward a spring time—the need that is displayed in the celebrations of Candelmas and groundhog day. We need to look past the fear of the winters of our life—both the winter that leaves the land barren, and the winters of our souls, when we feel empty and without growth. Confession offers us an opportunity to change, an opportunity to face our fears and to let God pluck up and pull down those things in our hearts and souls which hold us back from being all God calls us to be. Confession is a call that we answer that allows us to move past our fears and live more fully into the life that God offers us. When we confess our sins, we lay down the heavy burdens that they are. We pull down the pride, the hypocrisy, we pluck out the barriers that we have erected between God and others and

ourselves. We eradicate the sins that threaten to destroy and overcome us. Our hearts, hardened by the ice-cold winter of sin will thaw and become fertile. A place full of life. When we answer God's call to open up to him, to lay all our burdens on him, we are given the gift of a full life — we are given the change to step past all that we are afraid of and to enter the spring and summer — the time when we can build and plant. Again, making a private confession may seem fearful — I know this personally since I will be making one of my own next week in New York. Just getting my courage up is the hardest part. But having done it before, and knowing that at the end, I will hear those live affirming words of “you are forgiven, God love you” uttered, I know that it will be renewing. And we will all have an opportunity this Lent to explore this grace—both with my class that will be running during Eat, Pray, Learn on the Rite as well as having confession offered with a priest every Friday night.

So as we join together today as Jeremiah did to listen for the call of God — let us remember that we are called to truly look at our lives, we are truly called to look for the shadows, to look for the places that need the light of Christ. We are called to look for spring to step through our fears and open our hearts to live as people who believe that no matter what needs to be plucked up, pulled down, destroyed or overthrown in our lives to fully answer God's call to us—trusting that no matter what he will be there ready to help us in love to tell us to fear not and know that he means it.

Amen.

Sermon for Ash Wednesday

Rev. Hillary Raining

2/13/13

Isaiah 58:1-12

Psalm 51

2 Cor. 5:20b-6:10

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Sin vs. Sins

Today is Ash Wednesday, a day set aside to reflect on many things — a few of the cherry subjects that the crafters of our lectionary and ancient rituals would have us dwell on are such door-busters as:

SIN!

DEATH!

FINITUDE!

CONTRITION AND LAMENTATION!

Whoo!

Everyone's favorite topics. It is certainly a long cry from the Easter comforts that we are a far 40 days away from. No, we may not like the topics, and yet, the prophet Isaiah today tells us that we have to look at these things for the realities that they are. In fact he tells us to "shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet!" And what is all that shouting supposed to call our attentions to? "The people's rebellion...their sins!"

Alright then — lets talk about sin. I don't think I will be shouting about it (I am just not that kind of a preacher), but let's at least talk about it.

So, just what is "sin" anyway? We tend to get caught up in the outward signs of sin — the sins or the actions of sin. We tend to think of it as making a nasty gesture to the driver who cuts us off, or stealing, or lying and the like.

However, those sins are not — in there own right — sin. They are the effect in a cause and effect scenario. Sin — true sin— is (according to the Catechism) "the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation."

I'll say that again. "Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationships with God, with other people and with all creation."

Thus, the sins that we perpetrate – the many wrongs that we inflict on others or ourselves, the obstacles that we put in anyone's way — are not the whole predicament. They are merely the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual problem.

Let me offer a personal example: The house that I grew up in the snowy cold Endless Mountains was heated by a coal stove. For those of you who are not familiar with this kind of stove, there are several difficult manual tasks that have to be done to keep it running and for most of my young life, they had been the duties of my father. Twice a

day, he would have to empty at least two large buckets of coal (maybe more if it was really cold and we had the furnace up) into the back of the stove and then walk all the way up a set of stairs to the back of our garage to get two more buckets of coal to replace the ones he just used. After that, he would have to put on large fire-proof gloves and take out the large, cumbersome, and heavy bucket of steaming ash to empty at the back of our property. It was a long, cold, traitorous process that he had to endure twice a day to keep the family warm. My job in all this was to help him shovel the coal, to walk ahead of him, to open the doors for him and to make sure that his path was as free from ice as it could be — especially on the stairs.

Now, I am the oldest daughter and as such these slight responsibilities were given to me. I performed them diligently enough, but as each year went by and the winters dragged on, something was growing inside of me — festering. I started to get really resentful, envious, and angry with my little sister who was free from this hard work. In fact, it seemed to me that she was free from all such chores! The more I thought about it, the more I saw injustice everywhere — in my mind, I was the only one doing any chores, the only one pulling my weight.

And so the sin grew — being stoked like the fire in that very coal stove that became the symbol of all the wrongs I imagined were being heaped upon me.

One day, I had had enough. I walked out to the coal bin started shoveling out the coal and then threw down my shovel and gave my poor father a piece of my mind. All the

anger and envy that I had been harboring came out sideways at him, and he felt the full brunt of my sins — my harsh words, my neglect of duties, my ingratitude for his much harder and more constant contributions to the family life. All those sins which were markers of the sin I had let make a home in my heart. I stormed off leaving him to finish all the duties by himself.

Well, he shoveled the coal, he brought in two more buckets and he started off the path to bring out the ash. The very path that, in my little hissy fit, I had neglected to clear for ice.

I watched him start out from our sliding-glass door and then gasped in terror as I saw him slip. His feet went right out from under him — and that steaming ash went everywhere all over him and around the ground where he fell flat on his back.

I was stunned for a moment — and then raced to his side to see if he was all right. It was a sobering sight to see him lying there in the snow covered in the ash of my sin. Covered in the consequence that came from my own envy, and pride, and anger.

“Dad?! Are you alright?!”

“No.” he said.

And neither was I.

His body wasn't majorly hurt, thank God, but I had definitely done something damaging to our relationship.

I took over the full coal stove duties that winter and then split it with Dad for all the years that followed — such was my shame — and he and I and my sister reconciled. But for the rest of that winter, every that trip out to the ash pile took me past that scene of my father's fall of spilled ash — that outward and visible sign of my inward and spiritual problem. It took me past the reminder of the ways I had let the seeking of my own will instead of the will of God, distort my relationships with God and with other members of my family.

So too do we gather here today to don the ash that stand for us as a marker of all the things that we are repentant of. Not just the sinful actions that we perpetrate that cause pain and hurt ourselves, others, and God. But the true sin that causes us to choose our own will over the will of God's. That is the sin that we mourn over.

And yet, even in this mourning, there is a hope — for we do not don these ashes only as a marker of sin. Although ashes are not a technical sacrament, we don them for sacramental reasons — we put on ashes not only to “shout out” our sins, we also wear them to proclaim to the world that there is something greater than sin. We wear them as markers of belief that in Christ, we have been given an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. We wear these ashes because we know that our sin is greater

than even the myriad of sins that we commit in a lifetime — yes. But also to shout out, to lift up our voice of believe like a trumpet that we have a Lord who will answer our cry for help — who, when we repent of our sin and turn unto him will say, “here I am.” They stand as a marker of the belief in a God who, despite all the ways we have sinned will still guide, strengthen, satisfy, rebuild, and raise us up.

A God who sees past that inward spiritual problem and offers us grace in return.

Today as you don the ash on your head, and all through Lent, shout out, do not hold back, lift up your voice like a trumpet— and show the world the God who calls you past the death of sin into new life.

**St. David's Episcopal Church (Radnor) The Rev. W. Frank Allen The First Sunday
of Lent | February 17, 2013**

Facing Up to Temptation, Becoming Children of God

Introduction: Knowing Temptation

Years ago, in my former life in the construction industry, I was delivering a proposal for a major hospital expansion. The Director of Facilities was out of his office, but his assistant told me he'd be right back, to have a seat. There on his desk were the proposals from the other three companies. I walked over to the desk and put my hand on the first one to open it and see how our proposal matched up to theirs and adjust ours as needed. I was tempted to open it and look, but sat back down instead.

Driving down I-95 in Maryland a few months ago, I was going the speed limit, and then passed a series of state troopers, six of them, each giving out tickets or warnings to other drivers. The guy in the car next to me smiled and sped up as they drifted out of our sight, I thought what he thought, "that's got to be all the troopers for miles." And like him, I sped up, thinking I could get to my appointment early. When I looked at the odometer as it was pushing 75, I saw that the car next to me continued to accelerate, and was tempted to press on well past the safe speed, but I slowed down.

I was speaking recently with some parents who had been planning a long weekend to get away from their busy lives, to take a healthy break from parenting in someplace warm

and sunny, but they told me they decided not to go because they'd have to leave their teenage children home alone. They trusted their children in most things, but with the party scene and the stories they'd heard about what can take place when parents are out of town, they felt like they couldn't place them in the path of that kind of temptation, and stayed home.

Several years ago the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition arrived at our house and went directly into the paper recycling bag, much to the dismay of some of the male members of our household interested solely in seeing what swimsuit styles might be in this summer. One of our sons asked me later, in private, if I was going to retrieve it from the recycling, "I don't know, I'm tempted:" I said.

Most of us think that if there's one thing we know about in this life, it's temptation. If there's one "church word" that doesn't need to be rescued for our modern ears, that connects firmly and clearly to our everyday experience, "temptation" may be that one church word. We may not know about grace and mercy or a "peace that passes understanding" we may need some explanation about trespassing and atonement; but temptation – that, we know. We face temptations all the time, and in this season of Lent, when we've gone out of our way to give something up or to take something on to try to lead a more committed, Christian life, it almost feels like we're tempting temptation, itself.

St. Paul writes that he didn't know about sin until he read the law. To put it in our terms, he didn't know all the sinful things he could do until the scriptures told him they were not allowed. Temptations can grow. We're tempted to break our Lenten disciplines if we haven't already — to break our diets, to cheat on our taxes, to gossip about a friend, to lie our way out of difficulties. We're constantly being tempted to do what we shouldn't do. Most of us don't need any instruction about temptation — temptation, we know. But do we, really?

Twenty years ago, Robert Fulghum, had a best-seller book entitled, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, and in this very popular book, he argued that the deepest wisdom he knows came from the kindergarten classroom and the sandbox. Wisdom like sharing, playing fair, cleaning up your own mess, don't hit people, hold hands and stick together. So, if Fulghum's theory about wisdom holds true, then maybe we should go back to Sunday School to learn what temptation is.

Truthfully, I don't remember too many specifics about what I learned in Sunday School, beyond Jesus loves me. But I do remember most of the people who taught us, and one of these teachers said something that has always stuck in my mind. And that is that the best measure of a person is what they would do if no one else were around, is what they would do if there was no one there to reward or to punish them.

It strikes me now that this is more conventional wisdom than Christian wisdom. But it's pretty close; Because we Christians believe that what we do in life as Christians Comes

not from a sense of reward or fear of punishment, But out of who we understand ourselves to be And the kinds of persons we are becoming.

In that light, we probably have too shallow a view of temptation. In our minds we think temptation is the urge to do something. What we would really like to do, but shouldn't do – one more piece of cake, one more juicy rumor, one more Sunday morning in bed. But the deepest level of temptation is not this urge to misbehave, but the temptation to be less than who we are called to be as God's children. The temptation to not become who we are, but someone else.

Gospel: Jesus' Temptations, Our Temptations

And that's the issue at stake in this Gospel reading from Luke. The devil is not tempting Jesus to misbehave, he's not tempting Jesus to break his fast or steal a piece of candy, or cheat on his taxes or pick a fight with his neighbor. It's much deeper than that. The devil is tempting Jesus to deny who He is, tempting Jesus to forget His baptism, to set aside the truth that He is the child of His Father in heaven, who has been sent to restore humankind through the cross.

You see, it's significant that Jesus is tempted, immediately after his baptism, right after the skies opened and the dove descends and the voice proclaims, "You are my beloved Son, the one with whom I am well pleased." You are the one I am sending down to reveal my heart of love, of grace, of forgiveness. You're the One who will restore people to faith and to life with me. You're the One who will walk the long, painful road to Jerusalem. You are the one who must endure the cross to save the world.

It is here, then, right after His baptism, when Jesus' vocation and identity are most clear That He comes to this time of tempting in the wilderness. And it's Jesus' identity that the devil seeks to destroy. That's what temptation is really about.

The three temptations—to turn stones into bread, use all the powers this world to shortcut God's plan; to throw himself down from the temple as some kind of circus trick — are not temptations to do bad things necessarily; Any of these actions provide an opportunity for people to know about Jesus; And perhaps even speed the process of gaining followers.

But they are, at their very core, the temptation to be somebody else. The temptation to live some life other than the life of the beloved Son of God, to deny who He has been called to be and to be someone else.

But Jesus remembers and knows who He is. And He chooses to be the person He is called to be and follow God's plan, the plan that will require Him to accept the cross. With every temptation of the devil, Jesus chooses God's way and remains who He is, the beloved Son of God. Because Jesus resists the temptation to be someone else, you and I have been freed from our sins and know for all time that God loves us.

Tempted to be less than children of God

Now, because we belong to Jesus by nature of our baptisms, because we have been called to be the children of God in the world in our own day, we, too, have been given a life to live, a role to play, an important part in God's plan of salvation. We who have been

marked as Christ's own forever, marked as the children of God Have been called to bring peace where there is strife, called to offer love in the presence of hatred, called to stir hope where there is despair, and to embrace faith where there is fear.

And because we have been called to this way of life, we are also tempted; Tempted to live out another story, a different plan, Tempted to be someone other than who we have been called to be.

There's a moment in Tolkien's *Lord of the Ring* series when one of the Elf Queens is offered the ring of power. The temptation is that she would wield the ring well and for good. She is tempted, but after considering all the possibilities, she lets the temptation pass and decides to be who she is instead.

You see, to give in to temptation is far more serious than misbehaving. To give in to temptation is to say, I am not a child of God, I will not take my part in God's plan of salvation, I will not seek to know Christ and to make Christ known; I will be someone other than who I am.

And so in this season of Lent, when many of us are paying closer attention to our spiritual lives and giving up those habits that push God away, taking on habits that open the way for God to enter in, I invite you to remember who you are and to remember whose you are, to remember that you are the beloved children of God, that you belong to God.

Success or failure in a spiritual or physical habit is not the end goal we worship a God who forgives, even when we break our promise to live a certain way. No, those attempts on our part to change our habits are for a change of heart, a change of heart so that we

can remember who we are and get about becoming the persons God created us to be.

That's what the season of Lent is all about.

And when the tempter whispers in your ear to be someone else, invite the power and presence of Christ to work in you all the more. Say no thanks and become who you really are, God's child.

Amen.

The Rev. Hillary D. Raining

Sermon for 3/9/13

The Fourth Sunday in Lent

Josuha 5:9-12

Psalm 32

2 Cor. 5:16-21

Luke 15:1-3,11b-32

This week I had the pleasure of a visit from one of my seminary buddies, Jennifer, who I hadn't seen in several years. As part of her visit we went to the Philadelphia Flower show, which was a first for both of us.

Our favorite part was the expert flower arranger competition where three competitors square off with all the same supplies and flowers to create their own unique arrangements. While they are working, the commentator took us through the different elements of design and the techniques that they were employing to create their works of art. Of all the facts we learned, the one that seemed most amazing to me was the way he described the importance of texture in an arrangement.

He said that there was a time in the florist world when people would come into flower shops and the first thing they would do would be to smell the flowers.

However, we are now so far removed from an agrarian life style that people now approach the flowers first to touch them—to know what they even feel like.

It is as though we have become like a baby who needs to learn everything by touching it first because we need to figure out if what we are seeing matches our expectation. We spend so little time touching earth and creation that we actually have to learn what it even feels like.

Since I was with another theology dork at the moment, I turned to Jen and said, “think of the implications of that for sin! What happens when we don’t take the time to touch the creator? Do we reach out like Adam and Eve in the garden trying to receive knowledge even if it is forbidden? Do we, like them, try to reach past our God given identities forgetting all the creator had given them and try to touch something that is contrary to God?”

Well, I will save you the boring details of the conversation that followed, but suffice it to say that I was intrigued.

In Paul’s 2nd Letter to the Corinthians, Paul seems to be likewise intrigued by what he sees as our own forgetting of creation — and in this case, it is the new creation that we are made through Christ that Paul is referring to.

Paul tells us, “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!... That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.” What Paul is saying in this very dense and complex little blurb

— is that God, through the death and resurrection of Jesus and through our baptisms that joins us to Jesus' death and resurrection — that through those saving actions of God, we have been pulled out of all that sin and death that enters into our lives when we reach for things that are not God.

Paul is suggesting, both here and in his letter to the Romans, that when we do this, when we reach out to touch those things that are sinful, then we are acting as one who is forgetting their true identity. That we forget that we are living as a people that are a new creation—that we have been forgiven of our sins that threaten to keep us chained to our old habits, our old ways of life, to death. That we revert to a baby like state and chose our own desires over our loving parent's desire for our life.

The youngest son in the parable today knows what Paul is talking about. He seems to forget his true identity for a time while he goes reaching for all the things in the world that he would like to touch — money, women, food, drink — the possibilities of how one might chose to live “dissolutely—as the Gospel says—might be endless. But the son's money was not. You will remember that the son's money — which was not really his yet to begin with — this money was raised by asking his father to give him the property that he would inherit. Important for our purposes is to note that in this ancient culture, the lands that a family worked were ancestral lands. People believed that landownership was a mark of family.

This ancestral geography also bore the mark of the religious belief that these land-holds were God's gift to their personal families as well as the Jewish people as a whole (and we heard a bit of that belief of a God given land in the reading from Joshua this morning). So, to ask to sell this land was to deny his identity as a beloved son to his father, to deny his identity as a as a member of the promises that God gave to Israel and to deny his identity as being truly human (as we can see when he becomes envious of the swine his is feeding).

He denies his identity by wanting to reach out and touch sin rather than the creator.

And guess what happens when you trade your God given identity and reach out for something less?

Well, as the story tells us, we are left wanting, we are left starving, we are left broken.

Yet, when he finally "comes to himself" as the scripture tells us, and goes home, he finds — not a father who would be unwilling to welcome a son who had caused him so much shame, as would have been the typical reaction in that time and place.

Rather, he finds a father who runs to embrace him, who was waiting for him—looking and watching for him puts his arms around him, kissed him, honored him.

Loved him: not counting his trespasses against him as Paul would say.

This demonstration of love shows us that our God reaches out for us in the same way—that even though we have reached out to know things that are sinful, things that lead us away from who we are, that God ALWAYS reaches out for us in love. He desires to hold nothing but the creation he loves so dear.

But let's return to the flower show again for a moment. The expert florist that we were watching make these new creations were not like those of us who stumble into flower-shops trying to touch everything we see just to learn what they are like. No, these florists were deft and quick in their choices. They knew which flowers would be pliable, which ones would draw in the eye and which ones should be placed in the arrangement to achieve just the right combination of fragrance, beauty and space. These were people who had clearly spent time touching the goodness of this part of God's creation.

This is exactly the kind of relationship with God that Paul describes in his letter 2nd letter to the Corinthians.

This kind of intimate knowledge of God that we are called to reach for. In response to a love that reaches out for us, we must reach back and spend time with this God of love. We must spend time in prayer, in worship, and in service of this God so that we finally stop reaching out for things that lead us away from him. We must not be so far removed from a knowledge and love of God that we forget what being in relationship with him feels like.

So, as we journey through these last weeks of Lent, let us remember that we are called to remember ourselves.

We are called to reach out for God. We are called to go home and be embraced by the God who wants to welcome us. Who waits for us and who will never stop reaching out his loving hands to us.

Appendix Three

Rector's E-Message

This appendix contains an e-message written by the Rector of St. David's the Rev. W. Frank Allen. These messages go out weekly to the congregation and to countless people on the distribution list all over the world. In this message, he gives a call to Reconciliation to the congregation at the beginning of Lent as well as an invitation to private confession. The reader will note that Rev. Allen cites the work of this project as the inspiration for the weekly Lenten Confessional offerings which were discussed in the body of the thesis.

St. David's Episcopal Church | The Rev. W. Frank Allen | FEBRUARY 7, 2013

A Reconciling Love

“But if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us.” 1 John 1:9

Dear People of St. David's,

I pray that you are well. I am looking forward to entering into the holy season of Lent with you, beginning on Ash Wednesday next week. I say I am looking forward to entering this season with you, not because I particularly enjoy fasting or giving up habits I apparently love. I am looking forward to the season because it is a time when each of us can be a little more reflective about the quality of our lives and the health of our souls. And, even though this is not always the lightest work we can take on, it is the path that leads to light and joy and the power of God's forgiveness.

For most of us, confession is a difficult moment. Most of us prefer not to face our failings or the ways we fall short. Better to keep a blind eye to our foibles and failures and just move along, trying to forget what we've done. The problem, of course, is that at some

level we are not able to forget fully and we need to choose a different way of dealing with our sin.

Left to our own devices, we rarely ask another person to forgive us. And if you're like me, you simply read along with the Confession of Sin without a whole lot of self-reflection or honesty, when said during Sunday worship. But if we confess, as St. John writes in his first letter, then we will be forgiven. We know this truth in our close relationships with others, as confession followed by forgiveness reconciles or reunites us to the other person. It may be a partially broken reconciliation because all our deeds have consequences, but in almost every case, the confession and forgiveness actually deepens the love and bond we have with the other person.

And so it is with God. When we confess, God forgives us and we are drawn closer to God's heart, and God is drawn closer to ours. And when I say confess, I'm not talking about the comedian George Carlin's caricature of his confessions. I'm speaking of being honest with God and speaking the truth about your life and, once spoken, receiving God's forgiveness so that you may set your fears aside and know only God's love for you. That's the power of confession when we freely submit our lives to God.

This Lent, inspired by The Rev. Hillary Raining's doctoral work on reconciliation and the class she will be teaching on Tuesdays in Lent, St. David's will be offering the Rite of Reconciliation (personal confession) on Friday afternoons and Friday evenings. It is not a requirement for any of us. It will not be everyone's "cup of tea." But for those of us who

would like to see whether this might be a gift for us from God to lead us closer to God, come and see. For when we confess and receive forgiveness from one another or from God, then our fears will grow small and our faith and confidence in the life before us can only grow.

Grace and Peace,

The Rev. W. Frank Allen

Appendix Four

“Yoga Thoughts” E-Message

The following is a weekly e-message that was produced by Amy Dolan. Amy is a St. David’s parishioner, one of the congregation’s Spiritual Directors, a member of the LAC and a yoga instructor. Every week she writes a very deep meditation for her audience of “secular” yoga students who are not necessarily religious in any way. This particular meditation was written in response to the sermon I gave on Reconciliation (found in Appendix Three entitled “Reconciliation”).

Yoga Thoughts by Amy Nobles Dolan

"For every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven."

This past Saturday was Groundhog Day, a celebration taken most seriously in my home state. You see, Pennsylvania is home to the world's most famous groundhog of all, Punxsutawney Phil, proud prognosticator of pending seasonal change.

Not being a native of Pennsylvania, this holiday has always seemed a little odd to me. While I don't want to rain on anyone's parade, I'll confess. After all, we're all aware that Phil is a rodent, right? Given that, he probably has a less developed sense of elapsed time than my dog, who, while he can be eerily precise in letting me know when dinner time has arrived, could no more think ahead to bedtime than he could to winter's end. We're also all aware that shadows are caused when sunlight does not reach the ground because it is blocked by an object, in this case, Phil, himself, right? It follows, then, that an overcast day will not yield a shadow, while a sunny one will. And, (just to bring the argument home), we can't possibly think that one cloudy day (or moment!) in early February could possibly determine the arrival of spring, right?

Leave it to my friend, Hillary (not only a native of Pennsylvania, but of the very region of our fine state that Phil calls home!), to show me the light. While she concedes that a groundhog's ability to forecast the weather is dubious at best, she points out that Phil's day has its roots in an ancient, meaningful seasonal celebration called Candlemas. Both

Christian and secular traditions center around Candlemas. In the church, it is a relatively minor feast day memorializing the presentation of the infant Jesus at the temple by Mary and Joseph. For some folks, this is the day for removing their Christmas greens. For others, it is a lovely bees-wax-candle-filled, celebration of the Virgin Mary.

But Candlemas (and Groundhog day) also marks the astronomical midpoint of the year. In other words, it falls halfway between the winter and summer equinoxes. It has historically been a time of looking forward to winter's end, a sort of "cheer up!" moment in the midst of the coldest and darkest month of all. I can imagine villagers, their winter stores noticeably depleted, using this day to bolster their spirits- "We're almost there! We're gonna make it to spring!" Depending on the century and the country, the animal who peeks out of his cozy winter bed to foresee winter's end has changed. In ancient Britain and Italy, bears and wolves were the chosen beasts. In Scotland, folklore gives the job to a serpent. And here, in good ol' Pennsylvania, we have given the groundhog the honor.

While, thanks to modern grocery stores, most of us no longer face the hunger and worry that an extra-long winter meant to our forebears. Winter, however, is still a long, cold season. While hunkering down can feel cozy and peaceful in the early weeks of the season, speaking personally, by the time I've reach the halfway point, I'm yearning to feel sunlight on my face. I'm also yearning for my toes to thaw enough that I can feel them again, too! A lighthearted moment like Groundhog Day is exactly what the doctor ordered - a morning to look up and notice that spring is on the horizon. It's coming. This

reminder is enough to give us the gas to see winter through to its end. Knowing that this cold, dark time is but a season, with a beginning and an end like all others, helps us regain a sense of peace with where we are. This mid-winter celebration helps us settle back, content to wait for spring's eventual arrival.

Seasons are not limited to the spinning of the earth around the sun, to cold and warm months, to fallow and fertile fields. Albeit somewhat less predictable, we experience seasons in many areas of our lives. In our careers, our marriages, our friendships, our faiths and even the span of our lives. The impact of these seasons on our inner landscape is quite similar to the impact of the seasons of the year. We experience seasons bursting with growth and change. We experience rich feeling seasons where we're reaping the harvest of mountains of hard work and the investment of emotional, mental and physical energy. And we have quiet seasons where we feel like nothing is happening, where our energy is sleepy, sluggish and slow. Seasons where we feel a little dead, numb or cold.

There are also seasons on our yoga mats. We will go through times in our practice where our body is changing dramatically, where tight muscles are letting go, where we're opening into new *asana* in quick succession. We will also go through times in our practice where our body feels like it's contracting. We will experience times when our practices are deep and focused. And we will experience times where we could not be more scattered if we tried. There will be times (sometimes weeks and weeks) when our practice feels onerous and heavy. And other times when we cannot wait to unroll our mats to return to the joy of moving and breathing.

As my practice has matured (as I have matured!), I spend less time trying to figure out why I find myself in a particular “season” on my mat. I find that I am more willing to accept that seasons come and seasons go in my practice as they do in the world around me each year. Even better, I have developed a deep faith that each season brings a gift of its own. The famous words from Ecclesiastes 3:1 or The Byrds, depending on your preference support this faith: *“To every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to reap; a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break down and a time to build up; a time to laugh and a time to weep; a time to mourn and a time to dance; ... a time to get and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to cast away....”*

As we watch our bodies change and our practices ebb and flow on our mats, we develop an abiding certainty that the same is true in life. When we find ourselves in a dark, cold time in life, when our careers are in crisis, a relationship is fading, or we’ve lost a loved one, we can return to the certainty that this time, too, shall pass. We rest in the knowledge that even the darkest times, as they challenge us and stretch us, offer gifts of growth that will yield an added richness to our lives.

This is the faith that Punxsutawney Phil bolsters. And, if this is the gift that little groundhog brings to the world around him, I’m willing to set aside all reason and logic to receive it.

A belated Happy Groundhog Day to each of you,

Amy

Appendix Five

Outline for The Rev. William Duffey's Adult Education Class

The following class outline was produced by The Rev. William Duffey for his Adult Education Class. This class meets every Sunday during the educational hour to discuss matters of faith. Fr. Duffey had not intended on having a class on reconciliation/confession until much later in the year, but due to the questions that were being raised in the congregation through the work of this project the students requested a class on the topic. This was the first time they had ever asked for a specific teaching on a topic. As the reader will note, Fr. Duffey had expected that the teaching and discussion might conclude with enough time to move onto another topic. However, he reported that they “would not stop talking about it” and they ended up needing two class periods.

RECONCILIATION/CONFESSION

Adult Education Class

Lesson Plan for February 17, 2013

Discuss the **Sacrament of Reconciliation**

The goal of the lesson: to feel comfortable with the concept or reconciliation

My personal experience with the sacrament—as a discipline

Review what “sin” is

A. Opportunity; Including the sacrament of reconciliation in your Lenten discipline

B. Anglicanism’s tree was to celebrate the sacrament

1. As a part of one’s private prayer

e.g. As a part of one’s devotions examining one’s conscience at the end of the day.

2. In the corporate general confession included in the liturgy

Prepared by an “examination of conscience” preferably before the liturgy

3. Auricular confession

Formal in a confessional “box” and informal in a comfortable private setting,

e.g. in a priest’s office

[invite former Roman Catholics to share their experience of what one does]

C. Terms to know: confessor, penitent, absolution, examination of conscience

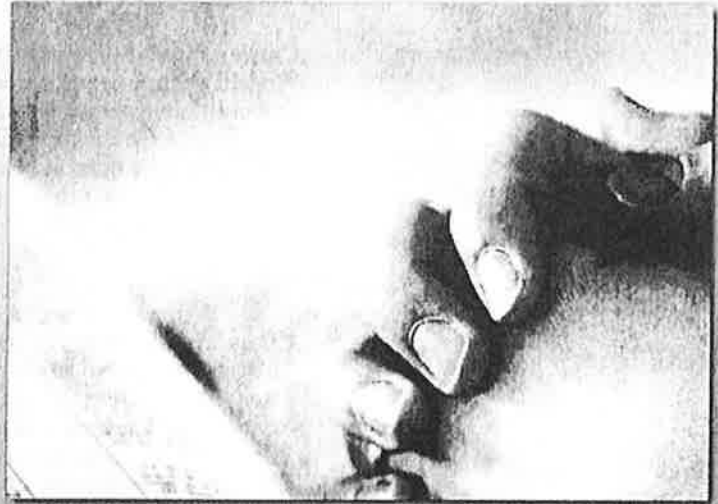
D. What is required to receive absolution: sorrow and amendment of life

E. The confessor’s “mind set”; the confessor does not, as a rule, even remember what

is said by a penitent

Appendix Six
Class and Service Leaflets

This Appendix contains all of the class and service leaflets created for the St. David's Lenten Class on Reconciliation. The Rev. Hillary Raining, using the LAC's data created these leaflets to be a guide for each week's workshops and take home meditations.



Reconcile

All Can, Some Should, None Must



Class 1: The History & Theology of Sin & Reconciliation

Our first session explores the Biblical and theological roots of the Episcopal sacrament, and the correlation between the Rite and 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. We begin with a self-inventory to gauge our personal beliefs about reconciliation, the sacrament and what part it plays in our current spiritual practices.



Class Two: Shame, Guilt & Joy

We will examine the psychological and spiritual effects that shame and guilt have on our lives. We will explore the way a modern familiarity with the psychological sciences has both aided and diminished the need for confession as well as identify places in our own life where shame and guilt have stood in the way of the Joy God would have us know.



Class Three: Forgiveness & Kenosis

This session is dedicated to the kenosis (or emptying) that takes place for us in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. By emptying himself for us in his sacrifice, Jesus gives us an example of true humility. Reconciliation helps us to empty ourselves of all those things that are standing in the way of a deep union with God so that we can know how to live as he calls us to.



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We will again look at Paul's ministry of reconciliation as found in 2 Cor. 5:17-21 to discern what the resurrected life that God is calling us to as he makes us a "new creation." We will be contemplating the future that grows when our souls feel the power of reconciliation and how we can truly live into this new life.



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This session will be spent brainstorming and work-shopping a "newly created" life which will guide us to make tangible the spiritual gifts that we have realized in our times together with God's guidance.



Class Six: Reconciliation Worship

This last session will be dedicated to worshipping the God who calls us from the bondage of sin into newness of life. Participants will be invited to journey through several prayer stations dedicated to Christ's redeeming work in our lives.



Almost since the beginning of time, we humans have had a problem: sin. If there is one thing that we see time and time again in scripture and, indeed, in the world around us, it is the disruption of the relationships between God, ourselves, and others. We should cherish those connections, but we put our own wills and desires before the will of God. And not only does sin keep us from living full and peaceful lives in union with God, it also robs us of our capability to embody who we are truly called to be. As Christians, we celebrate the knowledge that we have been freed from this cycle of bondage and grief by Jesus Christ who, as the Messiah, came to take our sins upon himself so that we might be completely liberated and restored into union with God. Through this atoning sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross, we are reconciled.

But how does this work? And what does this have to do with the Rite of the Reconciliation of a Penitent? To answer these questions we must look at the Bible and the history of the sacrament to arrive at an Episcopalian view of this private form of confession.

Biblical Roots: The Hebrew Testament understanding of sin and repentance begins in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve disobey God. Throughout the Bible, time and time again, God reaches out to redeem his people, including making covenants with them (which we break), handing down the law to guide us (which we disobey), and sending prophets who called us to repent (whom we ignored). Yes, there were penitential practices of supplication, fasting, mourning, wearing sackcloth and sacrificing to try and offer God something of what we had taken in defiance. Yet, these actions could never hope to fully repair the breach that humans continued to form between ourselves and God. To heal the relationship, God would need to intervene on our behalf. So, God sent Jesus, the Pascal Lamb, to be the full and perfect sacrifice for our sins. Jesus tells us in Luke 15:1-31 that since God has sent him into the world to save sinners, that there are now no unforgivable sins. Even for those guilty of "serious" sin, God remains the Father who will deny love to no one and has already extended joyful forgiveness to the one who repents.

Historical Rite: It is against this New Testament understanding of all-encompassing forgiveness offered to those who are repentant that the Rite of Reconciliation Develops. Guided by Jesus' words of "binding and loosening" in Matt. 16:19 and 18:18 as well as the

"forgiving and retaining" of sins in John 20:23 the church, as early as the 3rd century, began to see the sins that we continued to perpetrate were offenses not only against God, but also against the Body of Christ on earth, the Church. Thus, there needed to be a way to bring those who had been put out of union (or excommunicated) with God and the Church. Penitence might include rigorous public discipline of daily deprivation for those guilty of great sins and they could not take communion until Easter morning as a way of healing the community. The Middle Ages saw dramatic changes in the rite and it changed from a public confession to a private one; from being practiced once or twice in a life time, to yearly to at least weekly in modern times. The Celtic Christian traditions brought about the spread of prescribed penalties (or penance) as ecclesial changes disseminated through Europe. In the reformation, there was yet another shift with the onset of Protestant denominations that tended to underplay or do away entirely with private confession in response to abuses in the Roman Catholic tradition and the selling of Indulgences in favor of general corporate confessions. In the Anglican tradition, the Reconciliation of a Penitent was recovered during the Oxford Movement of the 19th century and has been a part of our tradition ever since. Episcopalians are never forced to confess, claiming that "all may, some should, and none must." Yet it is considered a pastoral sacrament and an invitation to healing and new life in Christ.

(Reference: *Introduction to Christian Worship: 3rd Edition* by James F. White)



GATHERING PRAYER

Leader The Lord Almighty grant us a peaceful night
and a perfect end. *Amen.*

Leader Our help is in the Name of the Lord;
People The maker of heaven and earth.

Leader Let us confess our sins to God.

Silence may be kept.

Leader and People

Almighty God, our heavenly Father:
We have sinned against you,
through our own fault,
in thought, and word, and deed,
and in what we have left undone.
For the sake of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ,
forgive us all our offenses;
and grant that we may serve you
in newness of life,
to the glory of your Name. *Amen.*

Leader May the Almighty God grant us forgiveness of all our sins, and the grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

People O God, make speed to save us.
O Lord, make haste to help us.

Leader and People

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

PSALM

In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame: *
deliver me in your righteousness.

Incline your ear to me; *
make haste to deliver me.

Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe,
for you are my crag and my stronghold; *
for the sake of your Name, lead me and guide me.

Take me out of the net that they have secretly set
for me, *
for you are my tower of strength.

Into your hands I commend my spirit, *
for you have redeemed me,
O Lord, O God of truth.

All Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and
to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the
beginning, is now, and will be for ever.
Amen.

Leader Lord, you are in the midst of us, and we
are called by your Name: Do not forsake
us, O Lord our God. Jeremiah 14:9,22

People Thanks be to God.

A hymn suitable for the evening may be sung.

V. Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit;
R. For you have redeemed me, O Lord, O God of
truth.

V. Keep us, O Lord, as the apple of your eye;
R. Hide us under the shadow of your wings.

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

All Our Father

Leader Lord, hear our prayer;
People And let our cry come to you.
Leader Let us pray.

Leader

Be our light in the darkness, O Lord, and in
your great mercy defend us from all perils
and dangers of this night; for the love of
your only Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

O God, your unfailing providence sustains
the world we live in and the life we live:
Watch over those, both night and day, who
work while others sleep, and grant that we
may never
forget that our common life depends upon
each other's toil; through Jesus Christ our
Lord. Amen.

Silence may be kept, and free intercessions
and thanksgivings may be offered.

SENDING PRAYER

All Guide us waking, O Lord, and guard us
sleeping; that awake we may watch with
Christ, and asleep we may rest in peace.

Reconciliation Questionnaire

Please remove this questionnaire and return it to Rev. Hillary Raining before the next session. The data used in these answers will be used to look for transformation and awareness changes as you will be asked the same questions at the end of our time together. Although the data will be used to inform the research, the information will be kept anonymous and confidential.

How long have you been a member of St. David's?

Did you come from a different denomination before becoming Episcopalian? If yes, where?

Before this class, did you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession?

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not?

What does Reconciliation mean to you?

What is your understanding or hope of confession?

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can affect sin or do you believe that is only something God can remove?

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful, personal way in a service of worship make it easier?

How much does sin weigh?

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

Recount a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person.

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness?

How do you spiritually exfoliate?

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

...for our sake he made him to be sin who
did not know sin, so that in him we might become the
righteousness of God.

2 Cor. 5:21-21

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As we began to explore last week, part of our human condition is wrapped up in the way we deal with our sin and the way it has put us in wrong relationship with God, others and ourselves. Biblically, theologically and liturgically, we know that there is offered to us, through Jesus, new life and that we are reconciled back to God only through him. Yet, in our modern times, as we have become more accustomed to psycho therapeutic treatments that help us to deal with the shame and guilt that can arise from our continuing to sin, the Sacrament of Reconciliation has, perhaps, become less relevant. We have become very sophisticated in dealing with sin—or so we may be tempted to think. In truth, there is still a need to look at our own actions in a healthy way and to investigate our own responsibility for our actions. Ironically, in doing so and confessing these things to God, we are actually invited to live free from all the pain and suffering that these feelings cause and live in joy.

Shame & Guilt: Understandings from Psychology:

With the onset of the science of psychology, we have been given the gift of a deeper understanding of the emotions of guilt and shame and the power that they can have over our lives. This is very helpful since these emotions are both very powerful and yet are often easily confused. As Robert Karen puts it, "The same experience can arouse both guilt and shame, or guilt in one person and shame in another, based on their psychological and cultural makeup."* The important distinction between the two, however, is that "guilt is about transgression and shame is about self. Guilt is about behavior that has harmed others; shame is about not being 'good enough'. To be ashamed is to expect rejection, not so much because of what one has done as because of what one is." In other words, guilt means that you have made a true mistake and your actions have wronged someone or something. Shame, on the other hand, means to feel that you *are* a mistake. Guilt is not all together a bad thing for us to feel in healthy amounts. It can help us see the actual sins that we have committed against God, others and ourselves. Indeed, only sociopaths do not feel guilt for their actions believing that they are above all condemnation. However, shame can make us feel worthless and is all about the way we perceive ourselves. Both emotions can take on pathological dimensions and can become destructive. There is even evidence that shows that when a person holds on to guilt and shame, they are affected in physiological ways, effecting bodily health as well as the mind and spirit. When we can purge ourselves of this guilt and shame with God's help, we are able to lay them down and live and new creations, free from these burdens. This action, found in reconciliation, leads to joy.

Biblical and Modern Day Views: As we can see, feeling guilt for the true sins that we have committed is actually healthy and can motivate us reconcile our live back to God. And as we have already seen, psychology can be a useful tool in exploring those truths and emotions. Yet, ironically, our modern familiarity with psychoanalytic treatments has lead us to a point in society of advanced rationalization of our sins. We have become deft at "talking-out" the feelings of shame (that may be confused with guilt) and finding relief in the good work that can occur in therapy for its side effects. This move towards health is a wonderful thing, but it misses the most important gift of the kind of healing that comes only from God: forgiveness. As we see in such beloved stories as the Prodigal Son and passages as 1 John 3:19-20 (which states: "And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.") that God knows us in every way and yet still loves us. He knows our guilt and shame and still offers us forgiveness of all these things—offers us a new life that is free from all that pain. God's grace trumps shame because who you are will all ways be loved by God who made you and not by error. God's grace trumps guilt because, in Jesus, God has taken all our sins onto himself and set us free from that pain. While therapy can offer us a way to deal with the pain from unfounded guilt and shame, only God's grace experienced in the reconciling action of Christ can offer us full healing and new life.

(*Reference: Robert Karen, "Shame" in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Feb., 1992, pg. 4.)



This evening's liturgy is taken from "Praying with the Body" by Roy DeLeon. Since guilt and shame can be physically manifest in our lives, let us join in this time of prayer to ask God to free us from this burden—mind, body and soul.

Leader: Into your hands, O Lord, I commit my spirit.

All: Glory to you, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier. Now and Forever. Amen.

Holy Reading

Psalm 51:1,4,6,10,15-17

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.

You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt-offering, you would not be pleased.

The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Silent Reflection

How does being forgiven for your mistakes or offenses make you feel?

How does it feel in your heart in your energy level, in the way you carry yourself?

How can you ask God to purify your heart of all shame and guilt?

Praying with the Body, Heart, And Soul



Hear me, O Merciful One.
Inhale: Quietly express your prayer with your body, heart, and soul



Clear my conscience in your love.
Exhale: Breathe out guilt, regrets, shame, and blame.



Your truth permeates my whole being.
Inhale: With an open heart, inhale God's truth.



Your wisdom fills my heart.
Exhale: Blowing down, thank God for the wisdom to know love from fear.



Fill me with your loving Spirit;
Inhale: Be inspired, renewed, and revitalized as you inhale.



Cleanse my heart of wrath, greed, and gluttony.
Exhale: Feel lightened, emptied, and open for God's love.



Rid my lips of lies and deceit, O God.
Inhale: Lift your chin, soften your lips, open your mouth to receive goodness, truth and beauty.



Let them instead declare your love.
Exhale: Bow your head to the love that never fails.



Accept and heal my broken spirit;
Inhale: Look up and offer your soul for comfort and healing.



Teach me to be humble of heart.
Exhale: Be the child of God that you are: loved, loving, and lovable.

Sitting with the Divine Presence

Sitting in silence, mindfully observe your breathing in and breathing out. Stay aware of the Divine Presence. Now visualize your heart as God's garden. Spring has come and it's time to attend to the garden. See the Gardener with a wide hat on, long sleeves, and gloves. Hear the Gardener talk to blossoms coming forth from bulbs and seeds long ago planted and sown. But with the blooming plants, some weeds come up also. So the Gardener bends down, and patiently pulls each weeds and anything harmful from his garden, your heart. As you sit and breath, witness and allow the cleansing actions of God in your heart. Give thanks to the Gardener.

Silent Prayer

Contemporary Psalm

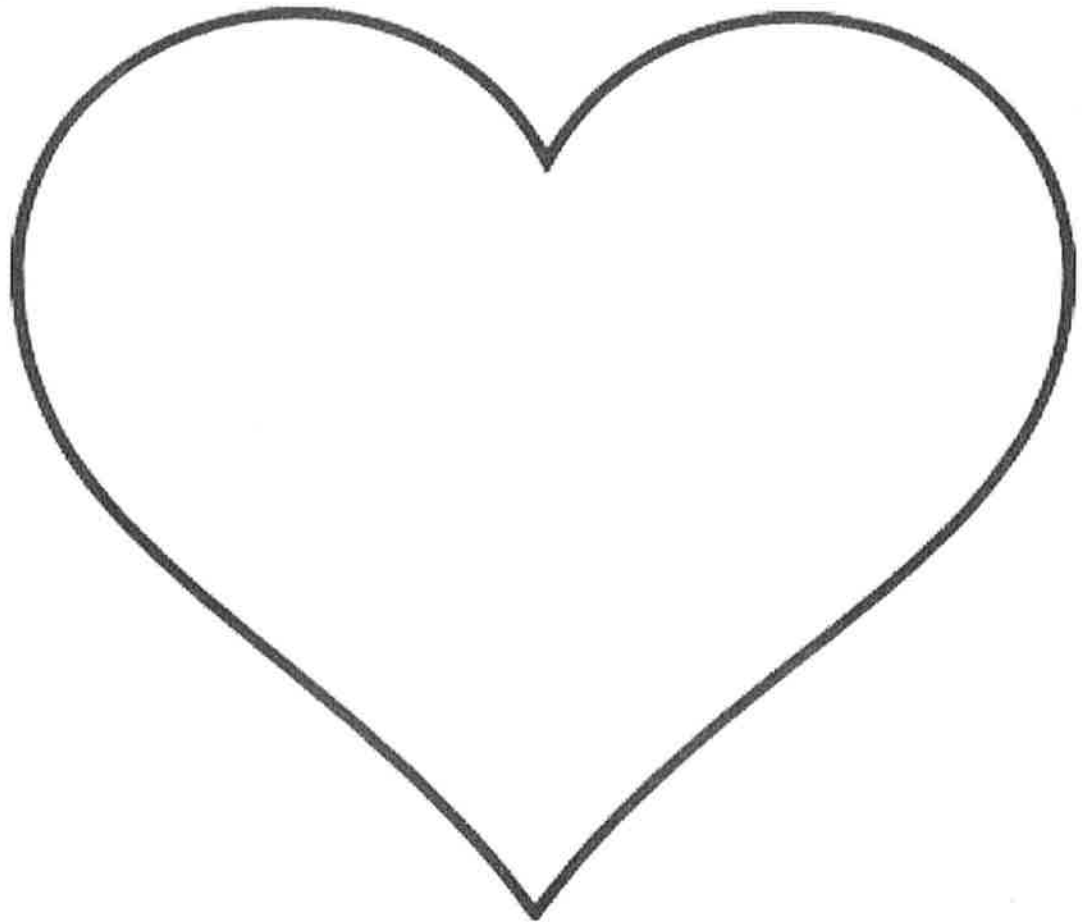
O most compassionate Heart,
Forgive my faults and offense,
Forgive my misguided trips into darkness.
Puffed up by pride and vanity,
I declined your life-giving counsel.
Teach me obedience and humility, Oh God,
Help me see and change my unkind ways.
Cleanse my heart and restore my soul.
A wounded spirit and a broken heart—
That's all I can offer you, my God.

Closing Prayer

Bring your palms flat onto your chest. Then looking up with soft eyes, say, "Lord, please heal me, if you wish. Forgiveness and healing come only from you." Amen.

Create in me a Pure Heart, O God!

In this meditation, we will combine an art therapy technique to enrich our prayers. In the space below, divide your heart up into sections that represent things that you would like to have God heal. Perhaps there are things that you are feeling legitimately guilty about, or there are things that you have been made to feel shameful for. Perhaps there are areas of brokenness caused by your own wrong-doings or ways in which you have been harmed. Feel free to use many different colors and shapes to create the heart that you would like to offer to God for healing and wholeness.



Weekly Meditation:

In this meditation, we will again combine an art therapy technique to enrich our prayers. In the blank calendar below, draw or write a symbol or word for the healing grace that you have seen in your life today instead of shame.

WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY
SATURDAY	FRIDAY
SUNDAY	
MONDAY	TUESDAY

...and we will be made righteous through the gift of God's grace. We are made righteous through the gift of God's grace, not through our own works. We are made righteous through the gift of God's grace, not through our own works. We are made righteous through the gift of God's grace, not through our own works.

2 Cor. 5:17-21

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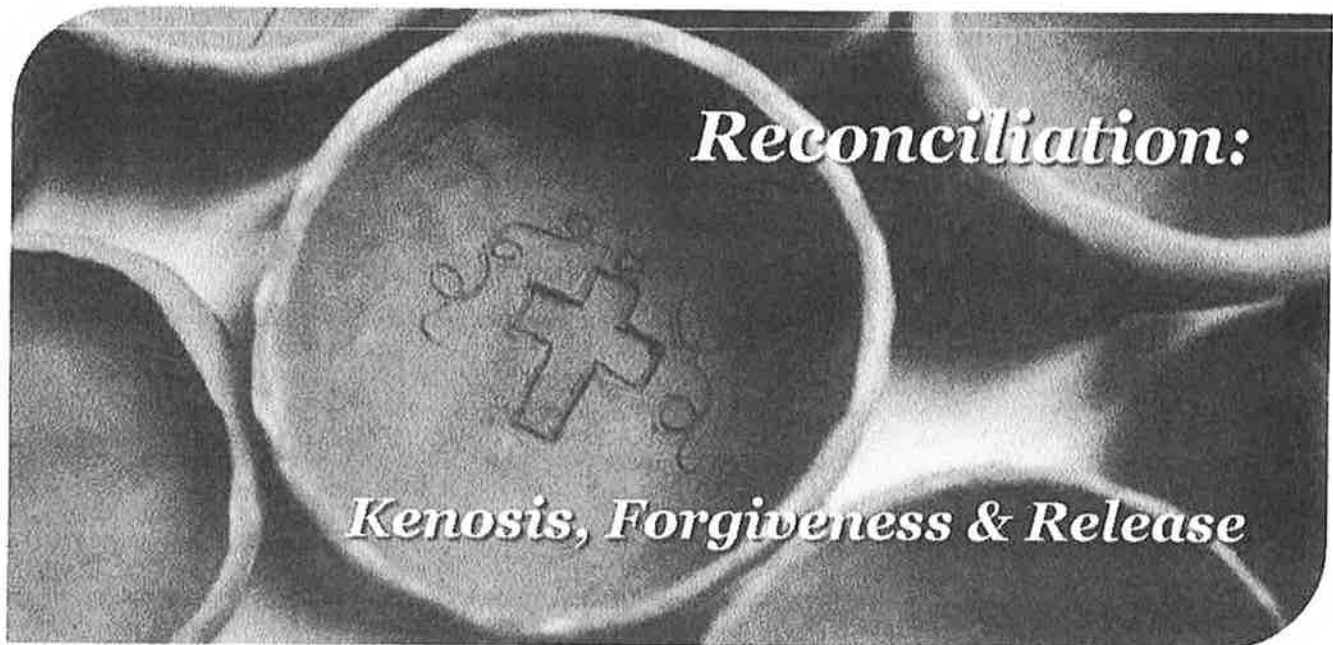
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Reconciliation:

Kenosis, Forgiveness & Release

Over the past few sessions, we have begun to explore the delicate balance between sin and reconciliation. In our first session, we learned about the history of Reconciliation as a liturgical Rite and a theological concept established out of the desire of God to be reconciled with his children. In our second session, we explored the difference between guilt and shame and how private confession can be a graced-filled invitation to holistic living in body, mind, and soul. This week will help us begin to truly grasp how to leave this brokenness behind us by following Jesus' expression of true humility and "kenosis" or emptying.

Kenosis as a Biblical Concept:

The term "kenosis" (or emptying) derives from a Greek word found in Paul's Letter to the Philippians 2:5-11 where we read: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross." There has been much debate crossing denominational lines as to what Paul is trying to say here about Jesus' nature when he took on human form. For our purposes, however, we will view this mystery as an example of Jesus' extreme humility. As A.M. Allchin notes, "the passage [in Phil.] speaks of the humility and obedience of Christ, not in terms of incidents taken from the course of his life, or of speculations about his psychological motivation. What we have is an affirmation of more than temporal and local import. Christ freely and willingly exchanges equality with God for the form of a slave. He moves from the divine realm to the human, from the world of eternity, to the world of time, making himself open and vulnerable to death, death on the cross."* In other words, because Jesus was willing to live and die as one of us and bore our sins, so to should we empty ourselves of all of our pride and be made like him.

This call to kenosis is indeed hard for us as humans to embrace. To paraphrase the great theological Karl Barth, humanity's chief sin is always pride. We always try to put ourselves in control: in God's place. Yet, what we see in

Christ is that God's way is to chose humility. He chose to put himself in our place.

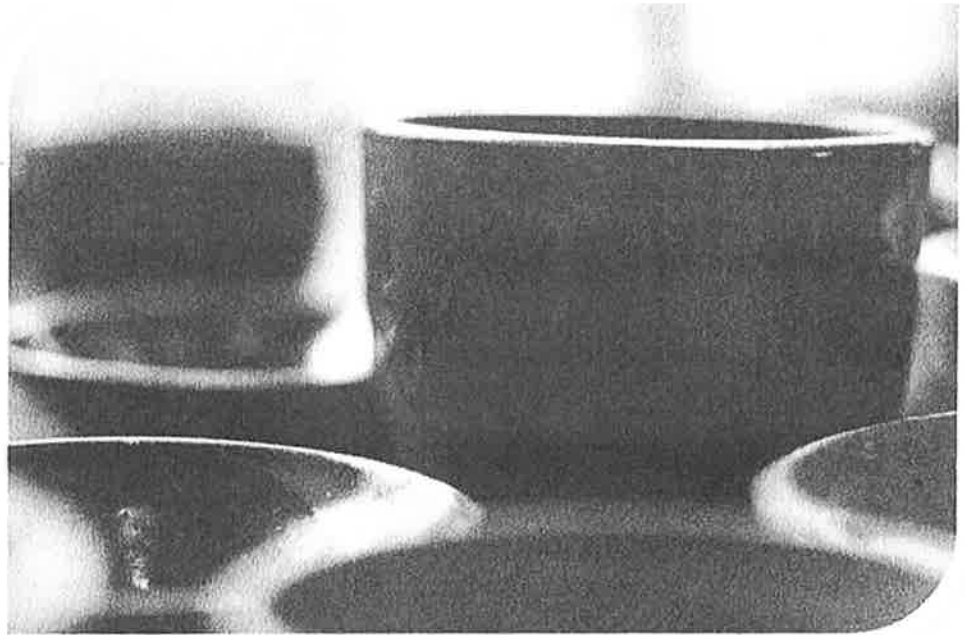
How does this kenosis work?

It is all well and good to say that we should be humble like Christ, but what does that truly mean? Is it even possible for us to join him in this holy action?

The true joy and mysterious about Jesus' incarnation is that he transcends himself "in order to enter into his own creation, and in doing so, opens the possibility for his human creation to transcend itself, to go beyond itself, in a responsive movement of total self-giving."* In other words, because Jesus came to us as both fully human and fully divine, he shows us the true measure of humanity—he shows us that kenosis is truly what being a human is all about as we are created in God's likeness. Thus, we empty ourselves on behalf of God and on behalf of our true identities as his children. This will allow us to love fully as God does.

Reconciliation of a Penitent offers us a way to practice that Christ-like kenosis. When we humble ourselves and confess our sins and ask God to empty us of all our brokenness and pride, we are reminded of that true identity and will be able to be filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit.

(*Reference: A.M. Allchin, "Kenosis" in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, 2000, pg. 366-367.)



This evening's liturgy is adapted from The Fund for Theological Educations' Guide to VocationCARE. Since kenosis is all about emptying ourselves of our pride following Jesus' example, we will participate in a meditation that will help us beginning to let God open the hands of our spirit so that we are free to embrace his will in our lives. To quote the FTE guide: "With a human nature that is often resistant to change, there is yet another discipline we need to practice—Letting Go. Letting go of old habits of the heart, mind and will is necessary before we are really ready to let new ideas and inspirations fill us and move us into the future. This practice helps us to empty our "old wine skins" and make room for the "new wine." Or the creativity and joy of Pentecost (Luke 5:33-39, Matt 9:14-17 and Mark 2:18-22)

Letting Go is an opportunity to suspend pattered ways of knowing that may be "stuck," or that serve as a crutch that we no longer need." Letting Go is aimed at our tendency to exercise sole control over our lives [which is a mark of pride]. This exercise is an invitation to the renewing work of the Holy Spirit—which holds our lives, both the good and the bad, and offers transformation and reconciliation.

Holy Reading:

Philippians 2:5-11: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Praying with the Body, Heart, And Soul

Leader: Let us ask God to enter into our Body, Mind and Soul.

People follow the prompts

- Seated in a chair, take a moment to center yourself. Take a few deep breaths, in and out. Get yourself ready to be present to this moment.
- Close your eyes.
- Find a place on your seat that you can grip with your hands. Imagine that there is zero gravity in the room and the only way you can stay in your chair is to hold onto it for dear life. Imagine that if you let go you would float away.
- Don't stop holding the chair. Close your eyes and begin to imagine a negative belief you have about yourself or something you are ashamed of. Now holding your chair even more tightly, imagine that you are holding on to this negative belief. Hold it tightly for eight seconds—as if your very life depended on it.
- Now, as you release your grip on the chair, also release this negative belief. Experience the belief floating away, up away from your body, over your head, through the ceiling and into the sky. Let it go. untether it. Feel yourself being untied from it.

Continue following the audio prompts from the Leader as we move further into this exercise...

Sitting with the Divine Presence

Sitting in silence, mindfully observe your breathing in and breathing out. Ask God to fill you up with the Holy Spirit.

Holy Reading:

Mark 2:18-22; "Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, 'Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?' Jesus said to them, 'The wedding-guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.'

Closing Prayer For Freedom

As a bird soars high
In the free holding of the wind,
Clear of the certainty of ground,
Opening the imagination of wings
Into the grace of emptiness
To fulfill new voyages,
May your life awaken
To the call of its freedom.

As the ocean absolves itself
Of the expectation of land,
Approaching only
In the form of waves
That fill pleat and fall
With such gradual elegance
As to make of the limit
A sonorous threshold
Whose music echoes back along
The give and strain of memory,
Thus may your heart know the patience
That can draw infinity from limitation.

As the embrace of the earth
Welcomes all we call death,
Taking deep into itself
The tight solitude of a seed,
Allowing it time
To shed the grip of former form
And give way to a deeper generosity
That will one day send it forth,
A tree into springtime,
May all that holds you
Fall from its hungry ledge
Into the fecund surge of your heart.

Amen

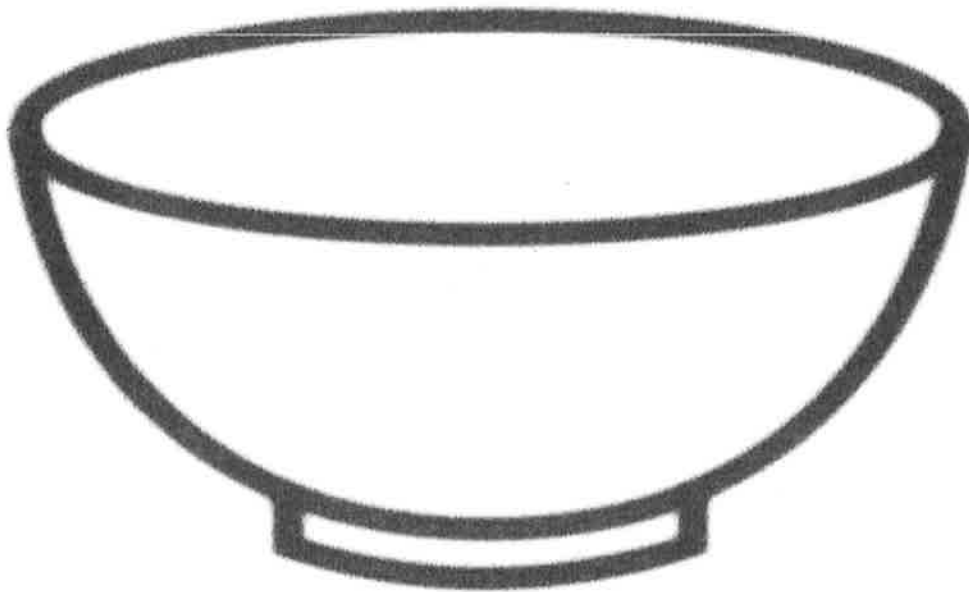
(Blessing taken from "To Bless the Space Between Us" By John O'Donohue)



Weekly Meditation

In this week's meditation, we will continue to examine our lives looking for the identity that God calls us to as well as the grace that he offers us. To do this, we will join in the classic practice of the Daily Examine from St. Ignatius of Loyola. His belief in a God that offers us grace throughout our days was strengthened by his call to "rummage" through our days to see where God's presence could be seen and where we can respond more and more to his love. Following the form below, take a time of your day (traditionally at noon or in the evening) to walk through the steps in prayer with God to look for grace and His invitation to kenosis of those things that stopped us from fully embracing him. (Form taken from <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/>)

- 1. Become aware of God's presence.**
- 2. Review the day with gratitude.**
- 3. Pay attention to your emotions.**
- 4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.**
- 5. Look toward tomorrow.**



“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Kenosis:

The grace of kenosis is the way that lets us empty ourselves of all the pride and sin that keeps us from being open to the filling power of the Holy Spirit and being filled by the Living Water. Imagine being like a bowl that is filled to the brim with heavy rocks. If you were to try and pour water in that bowl, it would only be able to come in through the cracks between the stones. If you were to empty that bowl, how much more of that life giving water could you welcome in?

How imagine that there is a mirror on the bottom of that bowl that would let you see yourself as God truly sees you—as His beloved child. Yet, we cannot see this image fully when our bowls are being filled by distractions and sin.

You will be given a bowl to decorate with markers. On the bottom of your bowl, draw an icon or a symbol of what you think your true essences as a child of God looks like. For example, it may be a cross, it may be a butterfly, or it may be a self-portrait. Anything that represents you as you truly are. Following that, use the stripes of paper and your rock from the first week's class, write down the things that are separating you from fully seeing that self. Place them in the bowl. These are the things that need to be reconciled back to God. These are the things that need to be laid at his feet to experience the grace of Christ-like kenosis.

...and he made himself obedient to death, even death on a cross, because of our disobedience, so that we might be reconciled to God through his blood. He was made sin for us, though he himself knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

—2 Cor. 5:19-21

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Class 1: The History & Theology of Sin & Reconciliation

Our first session explores the biblical and theological roots of the Episcopal sacrament, and the correlation between the Rite and 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. We begin with a self-inventory to gauge our personal beliefs about reconciliation, the sacrament and what part it plays in our current spiritual practices.

Class Two: Shame, Guilt & Joy

We will examine the psychological and spiritual effects that shame and guilt have on our lives. We will explore the way a modern familiarity with the psychological sciences has both aided and diminished the need for confession as well as identify places in our lives where shame and guilt have stood in the way of the joy God would have us know.

Class Three: Forgiveness & Kenosis

This session is dedicated to the kenosis (or emptying) that takes place for us in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. By emptying himself for us in his sacrifice, Jesus gives us an example of true humility. Reconciliation helps us to empty ourselves of all those things that are standing in the way of a deep union with God so that we can know how to live as he calls us to.

Class Four: Resurrection and Incarnation

We will again look at Paul's ministry of reconciliation as found in 2 Cor. 5:17-21 to discern what the resurrected life that God is calling us to as he makes us a "new creation." We will be contemplating the future that grows when our souls feel the power of reconciliation and how we can truly live into this new life.

Class Five: The Growth that Comes from Forgiveness
This session will be spent brainstorming and working through a "model prayer" life which will guide us to make tangible the spiritual gifts that we have realized in our times together with God's guidance.

Class Six: Reconciliation Worship

This last session will be dedicated to worshipping the God who calls us from the bondage of sin into awareness of life. Participants will be invited to journey through several prayer stations dedicated to Christ's redeeming work in our lives.



New Creation Meditation:

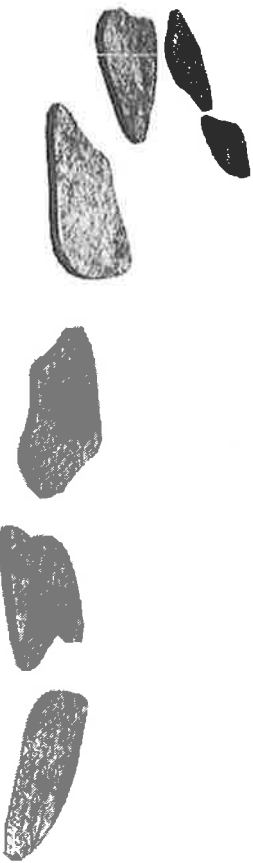
2 Cor. 5:17-21: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us, we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, 'At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.' See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!"

Tonight, following our journey into the future, we will be creating an icon of what that resurrected future looked like. Using the paper and art supplies, create an image, picture, or symbol of that you discerned.



Weekly Meditation:

As we continue on this journey, use the path below to help discern the next steps we you should take. Each day, write down a new faithful step that will aid in making the vision of the future a reality asking God to guide you.



During the last three classes, we have gone deeper into the call of reconciliation that God extends to us. We have looked at the history of sin and confession, we have examined the difference between guilt and shame, and we have spent some time following Jesus' example of kenosis. Today marks a shift for us as we will move past the broken parts of our lives and relationships into the "new creation" realm that Paul talks about in his 2 Letter to the Corinthians. What does it mean to live as a new creation and how can we embrace this resurrected promise even in this life time?

New Creation as a Biblical & Liturgical Concept:

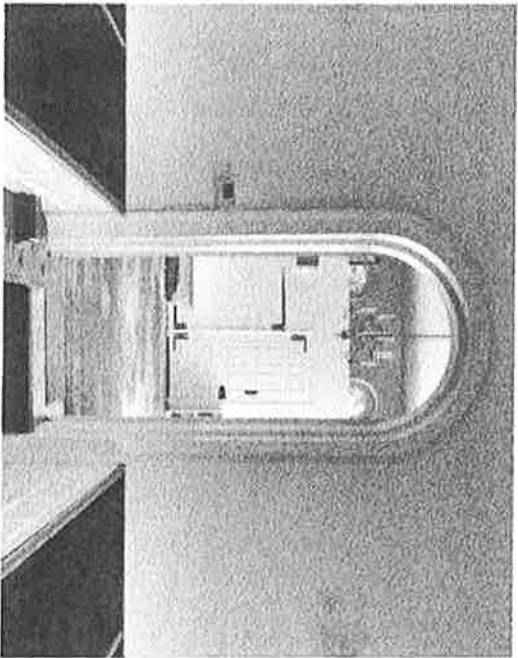
As we have already discussed, sin is corrosive to the soul because it corrupts our relationships with ourselves, others and God. We have also seen how it works to lead us away from our true identities as Children of God who have joined Christ in his death and resurrection. As Christians, we take this union with Jesus in his sacrifice and rise to glory as central to what it means to be a part of the Body of Christ here on earth. So central, in fact that we claim Baptism—the Rite in which we join in Christ's death through the baptismal waters and then emerge from this watery grave having "put on Christ"—as the initiation into the faith. It is not, for example, enough to simply claim allegiance with Jesus' ideals to be considered a Christian. One has to be baptized first. Paul, in his letter to the Romans highlights this baptismal imperative when he writes in 6:3-6, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin." In other words, in this new life with Christ that was opened to us at our baptism, we find that our old self (the self that was weighed down by sin) has been made a new creation and we are slaves of sin and death no more.

How does this resurrection work in our life?

The amazing reality about this baptismal life that Paul is describing is that it makes resurrection a possibility for us—not just in the afterlife, but in this realm as well. We are called, as Paul says in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians, to live as new creations NOW as well as in the future because we have been saved from the death of sin. He writes:

"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away, see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, 'I am acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.' See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!" 2 Cor. 5:17-6:2

In other words, Paul is reminding us that we cannot keep sinning as though we have not been resurrected from that deadly way of life and must now see these days as the days of salvation. When we sin, we are given the grace to be reconciled to him again through the Reconciliation, which God has granted us with and calls us to bring to the world as his ambassadors of reconciliation.



Holy Readings:

2 Cor. 5:17-6:2. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

Praying with the Body, Heart, And Soul

Let us ask God to enter into our Body, Mind and Soul.

- Find a comfortable place and position.
- Close your eyes.
- Take a few deep breaths. Release.
- Free your mind of your worry, concern, questions, excitement or enthusiasm. Open your mind, heart and will.
- Now journey down from your head into your heart. Try to become in tune with you feelings and surroundings.
- Imagine standing at a doorway of a possible future where you are caring for your relationships between yourself, others and God. Imagine a future where you are responding to a call to be ambassadors for reconciliation.
- Take one step forward. What do you see past that doorway into the future?
- Step through the threshold of the doorway into the future.
- Continue following the audio props from the Officiate as we move further into this exercise...

Sitting with the Divine Presence

Sitting in silence, mindfully observe your breathing in and breaking out. Ask God to fill you up with the Holy Spirit.

Holy Readings:

Luke 17:20-21: Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you."

Icon Creation

Following the directions on the activity page, we will use this time to create an icon of the vision of the future God has given us.

Closing Prayer For Trust in God's Work

"Above All, Trust in the Slow Work of God"

Above all, trust in the slow work of God. We are quiet naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

Yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stage of instability and that may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you. Your ideas mature gradually. Let them grow. Let them shape themselves without undue haste. Do not try to force them on, as though you could be today what time—that is to say, grace—and circumstances acting on your own good will will make you tomorrow.

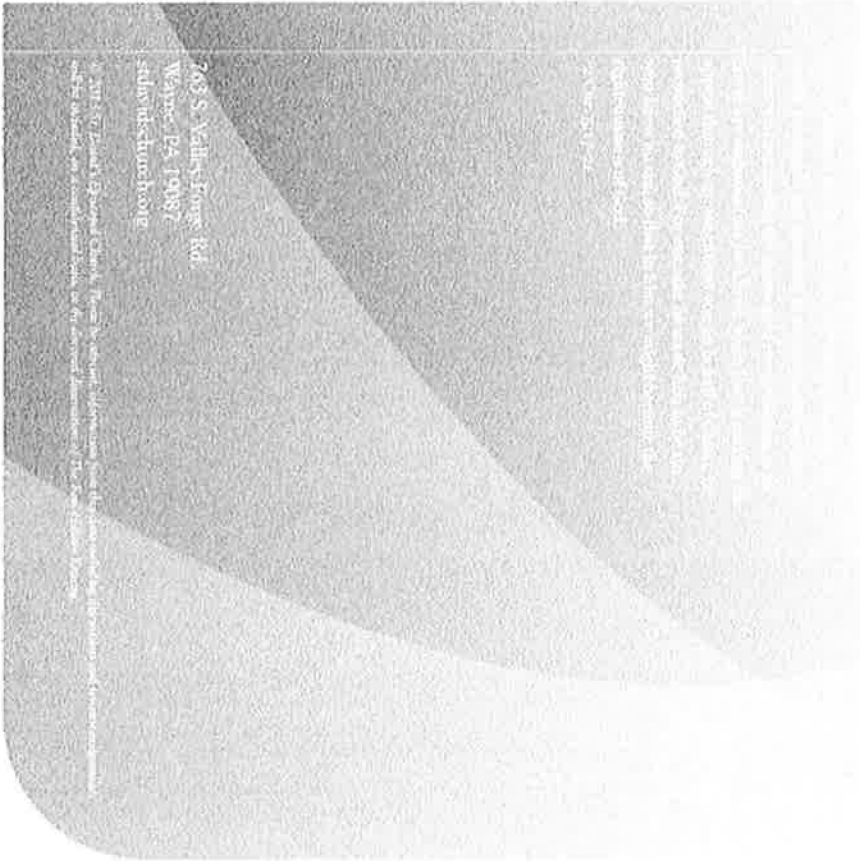
Only God could say what this new Spirit Gradually forming in you will be.

Illustration taken from "The Making of the Mind: Lessons from a Soldier's Prayer" By Piers Tolhurst de Crespigny

This evening's liturgy is adapted from *The Fund for Theological Education's* Guide to VocationCARE. They describe this meditation as "embodied. The exercise is intended to slow us down long enough for an encounter with God. It supports envisioning a glimpse of the future within us that is waiting to emerge, an echo from Luke's Gospel that the Kingdom of God is within you. (Luke 17:21).

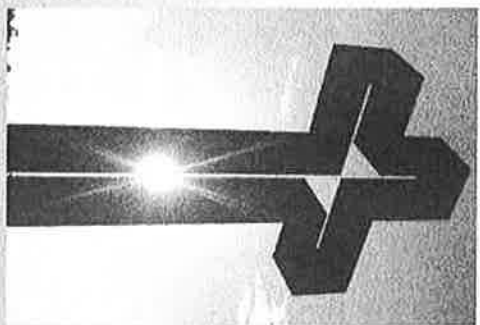
Throughout the Christian story, we find ordinary people who have done extraordinary things because of their encounter with the Holy. We cannot enact what we have not first seen within us and among us. When we engage this meditation, we become more aware of the presence of God and more conscious of the deeper longings within us."

While we worship this night, we will be asking God to open our hearts to the future that He is calling us to. With the help of the Holy Spirit we will be discerning the new creation that we are called to through our Baptisms. As we meditate on our lives with God, let us rejoice that we have joined with Jesus in his resurrection.



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Reconcile

All Can. Some Should. None Must



Class 1: The History & Theology of Sin & Reconciliation

Our first session explores the biblical and theological roots of the Episcopal sacrament, and the correlation between the Rite and 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. We begin with a self-inventory to gauge our personal beliefs about reconciliation, the sacrament and what part it plays in our current spiritual practices.

What would you think it would be like if St. David's used private confession?

How much does sin weigh?

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life



Class Two: Shame, Guilt & Joy

We will examine the psychological and spiritual effects that shame and guilt have on our lives. We will explore the way a modern familiarity with the psychological sciences has both aided and diminished the need for confession as well as identify places in our own life where shame and guilt have stood in the way of the joy God would have us know.

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness?

Tell a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person.



Class Three: Forgiveness & Kenosis

This session is dedicated to the kenosis (or emptying) that takes place for us in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. By emptying himself for us in his sacrifice, Jesus gives us an example of true humility. Reconciliation helps us to empty ourselves of all those things that are standing in the way of a deep union with God so that we can know how to live as he calls us to.

How do you spiritually exultate?

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?



Class Four: Resurrection and Incarnation

We will again look at Paul's ministry of reconciliation as found in 2 Cor. 5:17-21 to discern what the resurrected life that God is calling us to as he makes us a "new creation." We will be contemplating the future that grows when our souls feel the power of reconciliation and how we can truly live into this new life.

Did this class/workshop lead to any new transformation in your understanding of Reconciliation?

What will you take away from this experience?



Class Five: The Growth that Comes from Forgiveness
This session will be spent transforming and work-shedding a "newly created" life which will guide us to make tangible the spiritual gifts that we have realized in our times together with God's guidance.

Any final thoughts or comments?



Class Six: Reconciliation Worship

This last session will be dedicated to worshipping the God who calls us from the bondage of sin into newness of life. Participants will be invited to journey through several prayer stations dedicated to Christ's redeeming work in our lives.

Final Class Questions

As you remember from our first class, this questionnaire should be filled out and returned to the Rev. Hillary Rainey as soon as possible. You will be asked many of the same questions as in the previously questionnaire to help us measure any transformation that may have occurred as a part of this class. Although the data will be used to inform research, the information will be kept anonymous and confidential.

How long have you been a member of St. David's?

Did you come from a different denominational background before becoming an Episcopalian? If yes, what?

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

What spiritual seasons have you experienced?

Do you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession called "Reconciliation of a Penitent" in our Book of Common Prayer?

What is your understanding/hope of confession?

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can effect sin or that is something only God can remove?

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not? Has participating in this class changed your answer?

What does "Reconciliation" mean to you?

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful personal way in a service of worship make it easier?



In these last weeks, we have reflected and participated in the "arch" of reconciliation. We have learned about the way sin has effected all of humanity and our place in salvation history. We have explored the balance between guilt and shame. We have practiced Christ-centered kenosis and we meditated on where God might be calling us. This week we will the all these themes and graces together by brainstorming and work shopping a blue-print of sorts for living out the resurrected future that is our gift and responsibility as "ambassadors of Christ" and "ministers of reconciliation" as Paul writes.

The Great Commission:

As we discussed last session, the true gift of reconciliation is not simply the fact that we are set free from the prison that is sin, but that it resurrects our whole life. As such, we have been given the gift of new and resurrected to live now and not only in the life to come. As Paul tells us, "now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation." Thus we have been invited to live a life that joins with God in his redemptive and creative work in the world responding in faith to where Jesus has led.

Yet, this invitation to a full and holy life may seem a little daunting since God is asking us to be his ambassadors and ministers to the world in his name. How on earth are we supposed to know what to do with that awesome responsibility? Thankfully, we have already been given guidance from Jesus who gave us the Great Commission. In Matthew 28:16-20 we read, "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'" Here we find our call to be ambassadors and ministers of reconciliation and what it entails. As people who have been resurrected to new life through Christ, we must go and tell other people about his love having been given all authority (as his ambassadors) and help them to be ushered into this new kind of life experienced at baptisms (i.e. the ministry of reconciliation). It is important to note that Jesus is giving this Commission as part of his Resurrected reality having been raised from the dead and now living his life as a New Creation—the first fruits of the dead.

How do we live into this Commissioning?:

Since we have been commissioned by Jesus and given all authority through him to this ministry, we must ardently discern how to answer this call in a way that is both mindful of the weight responsibility it is as well as what an unsurpassing joy it is.

In our last session, we "journeyed" into the possible future of what resurrected life—on that is freed to live as God intends for us to live. We were given a vision of not only what it might look like, but also what steps it might have taken to get there. This is the work of discernment. In the Great Commission, Jesus tells us that he will be with us always. We can take this to mean that he will not abandon us when we need guidance and clarity on how to live as his ambassadors in the world. Thus, we can have faith that our calls need not be shrouded in mystery and veiled to our knowledge.

Thus, we are able to take faithful next steps toward this vision of resurrected life we have been given. Tonight's work (and indeed the work of our life) will be to explore ways we can specifically be attentive to our call. We are called to use all of our whole self—body, mind, and soul—in service and love of God and as such we must use all our gifts, imagination, and creativity to truly live as new creations. We are called to put flesh on that "thing" that you have been given to do by God.

When we take all the graces that we have been given through the reconciliation that God gives us in Christ, when we empty ourselves of all the pride which is not in service to God, and when we take steps to live as new creations we will know the joy and fullness of life that God has always intended for us!

This evening's liturgy is taken from "Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals"

From Psalm 51

Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your holy spirit from me. Give me the joy of your saving help again, and sustain me with your boundless spirit. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Leader: In the name of the Divine Trinity, let us pray.
God, you have called us into being through love. You have joined us to one another in love. How good and pleasant it is when your people dwell together in unity.

Holy Reading

Matthew 28:16-20: "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

Silent prayer

The Lord's Prayer

Commissioning

Shine your light upon your people that we can see the glory of eternal life.

Grant all those who are gathered here

the strength to carry your blessing from this place to the world.

May they be at home in any land,

for all the earth is yours.

And, which their hopes set on your coming glory in the world,

live also as alien in all lands.

May the lamp of your word

guide their feet on the unsteady paths of life.

Our lives are but a breath,

but our breaths are drawn from your divine Spirit.

You have created us as walking paradoxes.

Specks of dust and divine image bearers.

We are constantly restless until we rest in you.

Grant these people a deeper fullness be being and spirit,

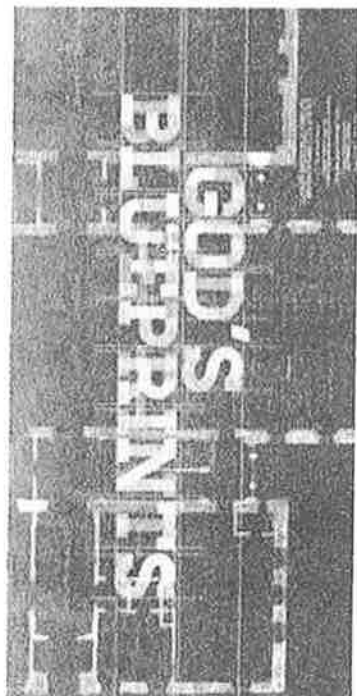
by carrying your vision with them in the coming journey.

May their face be filled in glory and joy, now bearing a new shape,

as our faces transform and supplement one another.

Go in the peace of Christ to love and serve the Lord

All: Thanks be to God!



Brainstorming and Creating a Blueprint for Action

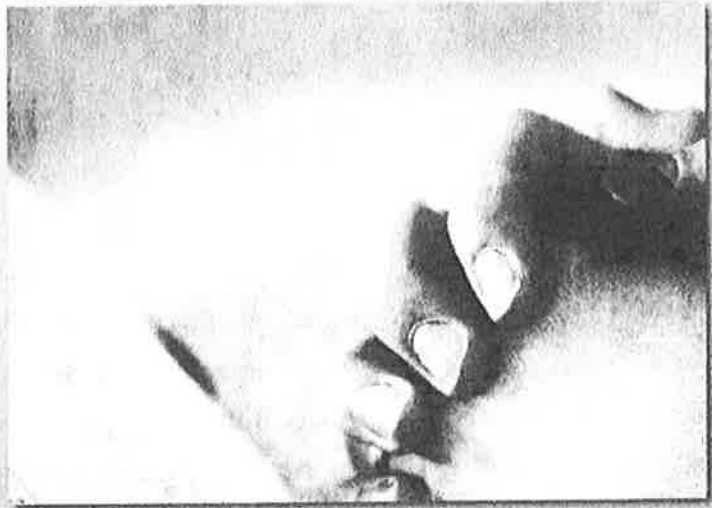
In the call to resurrected life we are invited to participate in God's New Creation. However to know how to fully live into this call, we need to do some discernment work. Asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we will be using the brainstorming and designing tips from The Fund for Theological Education to help us flesh out our faithful next steps towards a resurrected life.

Types for Brainstorming:

1. **Defer judgment:** There are no bad ideas at this point.
2. **Encourage wild ideas:** It's the wild ideas that often create real innovation.
3. **Build on the ideas of others:** Think in terms of "and" instead of "but." If you dislike someone's idea, challenge yourself to build in it and make it better.
4. **Stay focused on the topic:** You will get better output if everyone is disciplined.
5. **Be visual:** Try to engage the logical and the creative side of your brain.
6. **One conversation at a time:** Allow ideas to be heard and built upon.
7. **Let ideas flow quickly:** Let your ideas come quickly and naturally and remember there is no need to make a lengthy case for your idea since no one is judging.

Creating a Blueprint for Action:

- Who are the people who are part of your vision? Who will it engage or impact?
- What is God's goal working through you?
- What gifts do you possess that God might want you to use?
- What does the vision of reconciled life that God has given you look like?
 - Is it relevant?
 - Is it right?
 - Is it revolutionary?
 - Is it relationally effective?
- When will we begin to implement this part of our call? When will it end?
- Where/What location will you use? What season of the year or season in our life will we do this in?
- How? What support and resources do we need?



Reconcile

All Can, Some Should, None Must

Description of Stations

Station #1 Journal Station

Taking the woven paper journal in front of you, write down all the things that you would like to tell him. Perhaps there are moments of grace that you experienced during this Lent and you would like to offer thanks. Perhaps there are burdens that need to be placed down in order to live life as a new creation. Use this journal to life up to God anything that you need him to know.

Station #2 Wailing Cross

At this station, you will find a cross covered in wire. Using the stripes of paper that are provided, write down the names of people you are concerned about or things that are troubling you. Rolling these prayers up, stick them in the wire much like people places prayers on the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem.

Station #3

Taking the rocks that are provided, wrap them in the copper wire that can be adjusted. This will make a wire stand to hold pictures which can hold a symbol of resurrection (like a flower, butterfly, cross, etc.). This will be a marker of new life arising out of brokenness.

Station #4 Heart Collage

Taking the tri-fold heart and using the collage materials provided, fill you heart with all the things that are on your soul as well. Where are you feeling guilt and shame? Where are you feeling joy and resurrection? What can this heart tell you about your soul?

Station #5 Healing Movement

Studies have shown that grief and shame can manifest themselves in physical ways. This healing prayer will be using gentle movements (which can be done sitting or standing) to help ask God to free us of the physical pain of these emotions. Simply follow the leader as they silently move through these movement.

Station #6- Reconciliation of a Penitent

Set up privately in the back of the room, there will be a "confessional booth" where a member of the clergy will be available to hear confidential confessions. Keeping in mind that, "all may, some should, but none must" when it comes to this liturgical action, this rite stands for us as an invitation to forgiveness and reconciled living.

Appendix Seven

The LAC's Initial Interview Answers.

A sample of initial interview answers.

Report—Interview #1

Interviewed B at her home on 11/12/14. We talked for the better part of two hours and touched on a wide variety of themes and subjects related to reconciliation, forgiveness and healing.

B did not know that there was a rite of private confession in the Episcopal liturgy. She said she did not feel that she would use it because she does not have a “huge trust” in the church. B said that church is where she goes to learn the gospel and she follows the church’s lead when it draws her toward the love of Christ. But she said that her hope is in God, and it is her belief that healing only comes through grace.

She went on to say that when she feels the need to confess, she believes this feeling is planted in her heart by the Holy Spirit. When she feels this need, she said, she cries it out to God. This cry could take the form of private prayer (Help, Lord, it’s eating me alive) or professional Christian counseling.

In the course of conversation, we spent a lot of time trying to parse the meaning of some of the terminology around this topic. According to B, an apology is something that you make to another living person. She feels that she has spent a lot of time living from a place of apology so as to try not to hurt or offend anyone around her. She feels that she must show vulnerability in acknowledging her mistakes, because this creates freedom. Freedom, in this context and according to B, is defined as room to grow.

Apology is different, B said, from confession which comes from a deeper place of uneasiness. It is in this deeper place of uneasiness that you can find your own brokenness. Knowledge of your own brokenness may lead you to a humble place (“Here I am, Lord. I am a wreck.”) where God can begin his healing work.

Having said all this, B conceded that that confession might be good because it could open pathways to a new relationship with God, and through this can bring renewed human relationships. Because the only way that true forgiveness can happen is through the grace of God.

B says that when she finds herself walking towards forgiveness, she is afraid she is going to “get squished” and is terrified. So she prays that God will show her that he is greater than the offense or the offender. She also prays that God will be bigger than her fear. These prayers are part of preparing her heart. Praying them is her way of “being willing to be willing” to let the Holy Spirit do its work, which she sees as a form of surrender (“Thy will be done”) and prerequisite to healing.

To be in a state of unforgiveness, according to B, is to be in a state of sin. Usually, she says, you come to a place of forgiveness when you realize that unforgiveness is robbing you of life.

B offered this story of a time when she asked for forgiveness. Her daughter was an adolescent and they were (and had been) at each other's throats. One day her daughter collapsed on the kitchen floor in tears of rage, and B saw her opportunity to "beat her into submission." Not physically, but with harsh verbal domination. It was at this moment, she said, that she felt something around her throat, something quite literally cutting off her vocal chords. This, she believes, was the Holy Spirit, and the sensation lasted long enough for her to step back and actually see her daughter's need. B said at that point she dropped to the floor and told her daughter that she was precious just as she was. She apologized for her outrage, and she said that by this act, her relationship with her daughter was transformed. B said it's not a "perfect relationship," but it is based on trust and acceptance so it can thrive.

We realized by the end of our conversation that B had sketched out a fairly lengthy, step by step process that runs from brokenness to healing. These steps are:

- being willing to be willing
- surrender, which is to allow God and/or the Holy Spirit to move your heart
- forgiveness
- reconciliation
- healing

Healing, said B, when arrived at in this way, is granted by God for her good and His Glory.

Bottom Line:

It seems to me that what B was saying was that the act of making a private confession would not in and of itself bring about reconciliation or "healing," to use her word. At most it could be seen as one step in a long, multi-phase and multi-step process.

Finally, I will close a reflection B shared with me, not because it is especially germane to this topic (although I suppose it could be) but because I think it is beautiful in its simplicity: God is in all our obstacles and all our provisions.

Interview Report #2

I interviewed S at a coffee shop in Wayne on 11/16/12. We spoke for about an hour.

S is not only familiar with the rite of Reconciliation of the Penitent, but has actually made a private confession. She learned about the rite on a Cursillo retreat weekend in 1991 and experienced its beauty and its power at that time. Nevertheless, she never felt the need to make a private confession until a number of years ago in the aftermath of her mother's death.

The circumstances of her mother's death were such that S felt that she "had had a hand" in her mother's dying. She felt burdened, bound and restricted by an oppressive guilt that was affecting her prayer life, her relationship with God, and her human relationships. She was also having nightmares.

She asked for a rite of Reconciliation. She prepared for it by writing out everything that she wanted to say. The priest listened actively, offered the absolution and said the blessing. S believes that the priest was a vessel for the Holy Spirit, which was active from the beginning to the end of this session. S also said that by the end of session she did feel a release. In her opinion, it is a very powerful service and important way to live out her Christian life.

S went on to say that she can be a bit obsessive, and that before this rite all of her energy was focused on, "Oh, my God. I killed my mom." This brought about depression and isolation, and so the release from the tremendous weight of guilt allowed her live again. Also, she believes now that when she is reunited with her mom, whatever that looks like, her mom is not going to restart their relationship by telling her what a terrible person she is, etc... This was said with some wry humor.

S believes that the general confession is good for the small stuff, but sometimes it is necessary, as in the situation with her mother, to have something more personal and specific.

S said that she thought that the reason confession works is because she has experienced over and over again that when people start talking about what is on their hearts and minds, there is a lightening. Even if the priest or the counselor can do nothing "to help," the one doing the confessing feels that there is someone to walk along side her, to lift her and hold her.

S said that she thought that if private confession were more widely known and practiced and St. David's, the community could be changed for the better. This is because, she said, guilt can lead to all manner of pulling away from the community, and it is only when you release this burden that you can re-engage with the community. When she feels forgiven, she feels freer to do the work that God has given her to do, and she feels that part of that work is in her church community.

She said that she thought part of the reason why the rite was not more commonly practiced in the Episcopal church was probably left-over stigma related to its being considered “a Catholic thing to do.” In addition, she said, she believes that people might be afraid to make a private confession out of fear—fear of being judged, of being misunderstood, of being labeled or of not being good enough. She said that she thought the Cursillo model of educating people about the rite and its purpose is very helpful. People would need this education, as well as strong bonds of trust with the priest they make confession to. She has encountered both remarkable, trustworthy priests and untrustworthy priests.

S also said that people would need to know that private confession can be “part of a prescription for healing. It is not the whole heal.” But she said once she felt that rush of forgiveness, she could bring that back into the community. For her, it is all about healthy relationships—with God and with the community—and forgiveness is essential to these. This, for her, is the bottom line.

Witthoeft [REDACTED]
The Rev. Hillary Raining
Confession
11/25/12

LAC INTERVIEW ON CONFESSION/FORGIVENESS

1. How long have you been a member at St. Davids? 30 years.
2. Did you come from a different denominational background before becoming an Episcopalian? Catholic.
3. What Bible study story makes you think of forgiveness/confession? "The raising of Lazarus... the story of Zacchaeus too. Men of faith can confess -- know my story... confessions with other Christians to set me free -- I believe in order to break the power of the devil in some conditions of the soul... need to confess to God in the presence of another person... conditions of the soul are especially those that are in the category of hidden or secret sins. As we progress spiritually the nature of the secrets sins changes. At first they are things we know to be willfully out of step with God; as we grow more spiritually, they became more subtle, hence they need for spiritual directors.... for me confessing gives me the Love of Christ; the Love that is unconditional and given to me freely, though I'm unqualified; yet, makes my brokenness ok -- through Christ! "
4. What Spiritual seasons have you experienced? "I'm in a continual trusting-season with Christ... trusting Him ruthlessly because I have been totally naked with Christ. "
5. Do you know that our that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession called "Reconciliation of a Penitent " in our Book of Common Prayer? " Yes and I would go through confession with another..."
6. What is your understanding/hope of confession? "We are changed in confession. We are brought back into a vital union. God will not refuse a humble heart; nothing more humbling then confession, true confession, is the greatest spiritual vulnerability we will have. In that moment, it is the total unconditional Love of Christ; in that moment it is the gift of life. "
7. Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can effect sin or that is something only God can remove? What is the difference between private and cooperate confession? "Yes a liturgical confession is good for forgiveness. God forgives and powerfully transforms us through forgiveness... Sometimes though, for sins that are heavy, heavy on the heart God, liturgical, and public confession are necessary. Corporate confession -- or public, small group confession -- puts my heart right, relationally with God, so my private can be complete."
8. Have you ever made a private confession, why or why not? What does reconciliation mean to you?

Witthoeft ([REDACTED]).
The Rev. Hillary Raining
Confession
11/25/12

LAC INTERVIEW ON CONFESSION/FORGIVENESS

1. How long have you been a member at St. Davids? " I have been a Episcopalian for 17 years and at St. David's for 9 years. "

2. Did you come from a different denominational background before becoming an Episcopalian? " No. "

3. What Bible study story makes you think of forgiveness/confession? " The story of Saul/Paul... "

4. What Spiritual seasons have you experienced? " I experienced a spiritual low when my Grandma died a couple of years ago, but through that travail was able to grow spiritually, and experienced a spiritual high through God's consoling Love. "

5. Do you know that our that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession called " Reconciliation of a Penitent " in our Book of Common Prayer? " No I didn't know that... "

6. What is your understanding/hope of confession? " My understanding of hope/confession is that through Jesus' sacrifice for all, for me, I've been redeemed, as God's dear child of God, and he loves me and wants the best for me. "

7. Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can effect sin or that is something only God can remove? " I think a liturgical and a direct, personal confession can remove sin, as long as both are from the heart. The person confessing must have a contrite heart, really saying what they mean. " Have you ever made a private confession, why or why not? " I have never made a private confession, but certainly a heart-to-heart with God. " What does reconciliation mean to you? " Reconciliation means being renewed into the person God is calling me to be, through Jesus Christ. "

8. Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life? " I have changed behaviors in my life because of guilt. As I'm young, (17), though they haven't been major changes, guilt has caused me to change how I treat some friends at school. "

9. Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? " I think it is part of the human condition not to want to admit you are wrong. Also, people are embarrassed and feel foolish when they are wrong... and think they have to be perfect. " Would having a way to do that in a meaningful personal way in a service or worship make it easier? " The service would have to welcome parishioners in a warm, comfortable atmosphere... and the service would have to be small. Also, I think the social setting and connections would effect the comfort, or not so comfortable " .

10. What would you think it would be like if St. David's used private confession? " I think private confession would work... if you mean one to one with a Priest. I think many parishioners do that already at St. David's in a not so formal way. A lot of times people just meet with a Priest and talk to them about what is heavy on their hearts and that, for them, serves as a confession... just knowing the Priest are there for you, to talk, privately, provides an avenue for confession/ forgiveness. "

11. How much does sin weight? " Sins weights heavily... at the end of my day, I try to look over it and assess the things I did right and wrong. I really try to honestly, assess, and ask for forgiveness, if I need to, and change my way, doing the right thing next time... I always want to do the right thing . In our society, around this area of the country, at least, I think sin weighs heavily and people try to do the right thing. "

12. Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life? " I betrayed a friend in high school and felt horribly guilty. I felt like I a had to make it up to that person and to my pier group that found out about it. "

13. Tell a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person? " I really can't recall a broken story, as I haven't really lived long enough. "

14. Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness? " No... but I think if people don't know what another person sin is, it keep one from asking; but the shame makes one long for forgiveness. "

15. How do you Spiritually exfoliate? " At the end of each day, when I'm alone, I try look hard at the choices I made, the interaction, my relationships, and try to see where I may have made mistakes and sins. I also, look at the positives... Writing helps me to reflect. I may not go back to it, but if can write my feelings out, I'm able to see more clearly and I feel better. "

16. How do you prepare yourself to take a step to the right of forgiveness? " First, I go into forgiveness recognizing that people are not all bad. Generally, I think people are good, but they make mistakes. Having this mind set helps me to start the process of forgiveness. Second, I try to put myself in the other persons shoes, I truly try to understand, to see things from their eyes... and, lastly, I talk to God about it, and listen.

Appendix Eight

The First In-Class Self Questionnaire

This appendix contains facsimiles of the Lenten Class participants' initial self-questionnaire answers.

Reconciliation Questionnaire

Please remove this questionnaire and return it to Rev. Hillary Raining before the next session. The data used in these answers will be used to look for transformation and awareness changes as you will be asked the same questions at the end of our time together. Although the data will be used to inform the research, the information will be kept anonymous and confidential.

How long have you been a member of St. David's? 11 1/2 years

Did you come from a different denomination before becoming Episcopalian? If yes, where?

Lutheran

Before this class, did you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession?

yes

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

Corporate "We confess..." - not as contemplative as a private "I confess" - that results from turmoil/meditation/prayer

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not?

No - Primarily, I have not spent much time thinking about it. My confessions are internal through prayer. My understanding of salvation is that my sins are forgiven. My ongoing internal confession is my ongoing work of my satisfaction.

My sin by definition and in reality separates me from the full enjoyment of God's love. My confession, repentance and desire to reconcile brings me closer to that full enjoyment. A work in progress.

What is your understanding or hope of confession?

To bring me into greater life w/ God.

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can affect sin or do you believe that is only something God can remove?

Jesus Christ died once for all. My sin is covered - justified - through my faith in Christ. Only He removes my sin. The liturgical confession is a vehicle to help me understand my sin - to vocally confess it - and to aid me in understanding the meaning of God's forgiveness in the way of love my life.

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

Luke 15 The Prodigal Son

The breadth of God's love & the necessity of confession to God to internalize & receive the meaning of that forgiveness/love.

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

I am in the midst of the process, prayerfully seeking change + renewal of a relationship

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful, personal way in a service of worship make it easier?

When my sin is the inability to forgive, an inability to humbly re-enter into a relationship, to ask God for forgiveness is putting the cart before the horse, so to speak.

How much does sin weigh?

The weight of sin is calculated in lost days + hours - that cannot be retrieved; in lost dreams, expectations.

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

The story is, I pray, being written, and not yet ready to be told. w/ God's help + my trust in His love and care, I will continue on the path. I know He is preparing.

Recount a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person

Ditto. My greatest brokenness began to unfold several years ago and I am seeking, through prayer, to understand how to heal the brokenness in my life that is hindering me from living the fullest life I can.

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness?

see above

How do you spiritually exfoliate?

Deep introspection which can be painful and sad but can only be done if I contemplate God's love-endoring and unfailing love.

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

Prayer, a spiritual discipline to take the amount of time needed to come to an understanding of the ~~more~~ separation my sin has placed between God's love + me and what that separation ~~means~~ means day to day.

I am to do that - I think the "service" was done at the end of the process for me after I have prayed through it. This may be a mis-interpretation on my part of the role of the priest.

Reconciliation Questionnaire

Please remove this questionnaire and return it to Rev. Hillary Raining before the next session. The data used in these answers will be used to look for transformation and awareness changes as you will be asked the same questions at the end of our time together. Although the data will be used to inform the research, the information will be kept anonymous and confidential.

How long have you been a member of St. David's? *about fifteen years*

Did you come from a different denomination before becoming Episcopalian? If yes, where?

Roman Catholic

Before this class, did you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession?

No

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

Private confession is between the penitent and a priest and is spoken. Corporate is spoken in a group (?)

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not?

Yes, often when a practicing Roman Catholic

Never as Episcopalian

What does Reconciliation mean to you?

forgiveness from God.

What is your understanding or hope of confession?

To be released from a large burden

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can affect sin or do you believe that is only something God can remove?

I believe liturgical confession can affect sin.

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

unforgotten

Reconciliation Questionnaire

Please remove this questionnaire and return it to Rev. Hillary Raining before the next session. The data used in these answers will be used to look for transformation and awareness changes as you will be asked the same questions at the end of our time together. Although the data will be used to inform the research, the information will be kept anonymous and confidential.

How long have you been a member of St. David's?

OFF & ON FOR YEARS; CURRENTLY FAST 2 YEARS

Did you come from a different denomination before becoming Episcopalian? If yes, where?

NO

Before this class, did you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession?

NO

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

PRIVATE IS ONE ON ONE WITH A PRIEST;
CORPORATE IS BY A GROUP

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not?

NO

What does Reconciliation mean to you?

RESOLVING DIFFERENCES, USUALLY IN CONTEXT
OF DISPUTE OR EMOTIONAL HURT.

What is your understanding or hope of confession?

ADMITTING TO ANOTHER, OR POSSIBLY YOURSELF,
A PERCEIVED WRONGFULL OR HURTFULL ACTION.

THE HOPE WOULD BE INCREASED RESOLVE TO
CORRECT OR AVOID RECURRENCE.

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can affect sin or do you believe that is only something God can remove?

a) NO

b) YES

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

a) RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON

b) LORDS PRAYER

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

CERTAINLY HAD GUILT FEELINGS, PARTICULARLY IN OMISSIONS IN RELATIONS W/ OTHERS - I.E. THE THING NOT DONE. CANNOT CLAIM MAJOR CHANGE.

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful, personal way in a service of worship make it easier?

a) REQUIRES BE CONSCIOUS RECOGNITION OF SINFULL ACT (OR OMISSIONS) AND COURAGE TO ACKNOWLEDGE SAME.

How much does sin weigh?

WHEN IN ONE'S CONSCIOUSNESS - IMMENSE BUT TOO EASILY FORGOTTEN.

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

PART OF A GROUP THAT DEFILED THE SCHOOL'S HEADMASTER'S HOUSE. AS A THOUGHTLESS PRANK. THIS LED TO MAKING A PERSONAL CONFESSION TO HIM AND SEEK FORGIVENESS (RECEIVED).

Recount a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person.

AS THE RESPONSIBLE EXECUTIVE, LAID OFF AN EMPLOYEE IN SPITE OF BETTER JUDGMENT TO BUY PEACE WITH OTHERS, AND MEMORY OF THIS WRONG & WEAKNESS ABIDES WITH ME AND HOPEFULLY INFORMS NEED FOR COURAGE IN DEALING W/ OTHERS WHOSE LIVES I WANT.

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness?

YES - NEVER

CONFRONTED THE EMPLOYEE NOTED ABOVE (NOW DECEASED) TO CONVEY MY REGRET FOR WRONGFULL ACT.

How do you spiritually exfoliate?

REGULAR PRACTICE IS CHURCH SERVICE. OTHER SPIRITUAL MOMENTS ARE OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH GREAT MUSIC, OR QUIET MOMENTS WHEN ALONE, INCLUDING DRIVING.

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

THROUGH SELF EXAMINATION, USUALLY W/ CONSIDERABLE ANGST, FOLLOWED BY DESIRE TO RESOLVE ISSUE AND GAIN RELIEF FROM CONCERN.

Lucy Irwin

Reconciliation Questionnaire

Please remove this questionnaire and return it to Rev. Hillary Raining before the next session. The data used in these answers will be used to look for transformation and awareness changes as you will be asked the same questions at the end of our time together. Although the data will be used to inform the research, the information will be kept anonymous and confidential.

How long have you been a member of St. David's?

6 years

Did you come from a different denomination before becoming Episcopalian? If yes, where?

No

Before this class, did you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession?

No (what you mean it's not just a catholic thing?)

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

Corporate is more general private is specific - and more difficult to me

1) Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not?

1) No 2) I have always worked directly with God.

What does Reconciliation mean to you?

Because of your thesis I am becoming Reconciling for the first time. I really love the idea of reconciling as part of bearing your (one's) soul.

1) What is your understanding or hope of confession?

My understanding - unburdening myself of something I have done, thought or said that is causing me angst.

2) My growing understanding (and hope) is how important the preparation BEFORE confession is

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can affect sin or do you believe that is only something God can remove?

I believe forgiveness/absolution is something only God can do. I am confident that working through any of our excellent priests would be beneficial through their guidance, caring and sharing of the service.

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

That said - not all priests are good let alone good at confession. Wasn't God smart to allow us direct (daily, hourly, minute by minute access to him)

I am beginning to see that the theoretical preparation for confession required me to get specific - and not gloss over specific incidents and hide behind the general confession

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

Yes and Yes. The extreme discomfort of guilt was too uncomfortable - continually weighing on me. By changing how I do things (behavior, thought patterns, attending someone)

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful, personal way in a service of worship make it easier? ~~fraying~~ working so hard all my life to be and remain strong - I would be exposing my frailty. I have ~~not~~ had the privilege - with a therapist and thru my relationship with God of bearing my soul. Yes - for me confession with a priest would be great.

How much does sin weigh?

so much it ~~makes~~ weighs me down so I am miniscule. I am very aware of how far short I fall regularly in the sight of God! But - HE IS Faithful

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

once upon a time, I was annoyed with a close friend and talked out loud to group of other friends - I was called out about it! Convinced I changed on the spot from gossiping. I am not perfect at it at all - but if and when I slip there is a strong reminder from God - like bells going off or the voice

Recount a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person.

John and I have traversed a very difficult and humiliating path these past 4 years. Our faith and St. David's has allowed our devastation to be comforted, allowing us to stand with God!

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness?

for many years always been coming to God for forgiveness. But to other people - I was ashamed (as well as fearing appearing not to be strong)

How do you spiritually exfoliate?

By throwing myself at God's feet - emptying myself and praying (over again) for his love, energy, forgiveness. What could I possibly explain to God? He knows all about me

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

Until - this focus on reconciliation, I must honestly say I have not thought about preparing myself for forgiveness, confessing my sins, or the eucharist. Bill Dully's class as well as Tom's pre causing great awareness for me!

Mike is more patient and relaxed - I am closer to God -

in my head that says Lucy? and I know

as prevented me from asking forgiveness time.

Mr. C. Ronald
Rubley
621 Vassar St
Wayne

Reconciliation Questionnaire

Please remove this questionnaire and return it to Rev. Hillary Raining before the next session. The data used in these answers will be used to look for transformation and awareness changes as you will be asked the same questions at the end of our time together. Although the data will be used to inform the research, the information will be kept anonymous and confidential.

How long have you been a member of St. David's? *New-Entering Member*

Did you come from a different denomination before becoming Episcopalian? If yes, where?

Episcopalian - 1938 - 1961
Catholic - 1961 - 2012

Before this class, did you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession? *NO*

What is the difference between private and corporate confession? *Do Not Know*

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not?

Yes - in Catholic Church

What does Reconciliation mean to you? *Making it right with God*

What is your understanding or hope of confession? *Forgiveness from God*

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can affect sin or do you believe that is only something God can remove?

Only God can remove

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

Do not know such a Bible story

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

Yes

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful, personal way in a service of worship make it easier?

It is not hard for me to ask for forgiveness

How much does sin weigh?

Right now in my life it weighs nothing quite a bit

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

I have had to deal with severe depression in my life. I separated from my wife for a period. God helped me to get through it and my wife and I celebrated last year 50 years of a wonderful marriage

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness? No

How do you spiritually exfoliate?

I am not aware that I remove, or cast off my spirituality

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

Silent Prayer

Reconciliation Questionnaire

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How long have you been a member of St. David's?

25 yrs.

Did you come from a different denomination before becoming Episcopalian? If yes, where?

Wesleyan of Christ Church, Church of the Epiphany, Episcopal, Holy Trinity, and Calvary, Ohio

Before this class, did you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession?

yes

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

Private confession is a sacred, specific, and confidential sacrament. It is not to be shared with anyone else. Corporate confession is a public act of repentance and forgiveness.

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not?

Yes. That time was not of necessity. I felt the need to confess my sins. The sacrament seemed to help & I did not feel my confession was a burden.

What does Reconciliation mean to you?

Being in right relationship with God and myself. It is about being able to share & confess my sins & forgive.

What is your understanding or hope of confession?

My hope is that I will feel forgiven & feel unburdened. My understanding is that if you confess your sins to God, He will forgive you.

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can affect sin or do you believe that is only something God can remove?

If it is effective for me, I wouldn't stop confessing my sins and asking forgiveness. It is difficult for me to feel forgiven or forgiven.

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

The Parable of the Sower
David in Ps. 51

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

Yes, I decided to get married again - to the same person
(guess who? :))

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful, personal way in a service of worship make it easier?

Because having to another is embarrassing & shameful to admit
Yes - but that can become rote.

How much does sin weigh? uncommitting forgiveness

Don't even know how to ask when I don't
ask it.

How much? Enough to break relationships

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

I was dominated and deeply in love with someone I wanted to marry. The reality of hate & unforgiveness in divorce had broken each one of our hearts and the other part would be broken. The functioning breakdown of this "living history" of my family led me to realize (Dad's will for me was that I should have to change with power I didn't have to move without power. Dad's love

Recount a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person.

His love & grace gave into my heart and life. It transformed my character and longing and truth and right side up.

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness?

yes

How do you spiritually exfoliate?

confess to God in prayer - begging for forgiveness and start again in my heart. But I repeat again and again.

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

Recall and think about my own

Personal my life with grace

Reconciliation Questionnaire

Please remove this questionnaire and return it to Rev. Hillary Raining before the next session. The data used in these answers will be used to look for transformation and awareness changes as you will be asked the same questions at the end of our time together. Although the data will be used to inform the research, the information will be kept anonymous and confidential.

How long have you been a member of St. David's? 72 years

Did you come from a different denomination before becoming Episcopalian? If yes, where?

Great Valley Baptist Church 1950
Episcopal Church 1951

Before this class, did you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession?

No

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

one on one or with congregation
in terms of forgiveness of sin
no difference

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not?

Have talked to priest when in my
spiritual distress

What does Reconciliation mean to you?

Reconciliation
a relationship with God
and with my

What is your understanding or hope of confession?

Improved spirituality

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can affect sin or do you believe that is only something God can remove?

Yes - with clergy assistance, God removes
a change of heart and

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

Prodigal Son

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

Some guilt with regard to failure in balancing my life between raising my children and being a wife of a Foreign Service Officer short changing the children.

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful, personal way in a service of worship make it easier?

I have tried to be more available to the family and more aware of their needs.

How often I asked for forgiveness primarily at confession in church.

How much does sin weigh?

It weighs some but is relieved by asking God for help and trying to do my best so that my life will set a reasonably good example.

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

When I found a hotel payment which proved my husband's infidelity, I got up early every morning, read the bible and prayed to God asking how to mend my marriage and my relationship. The amazing thing is that God told me what to do and it worked.

Recount a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person.

The power of prayer forgiveness and love have been remarkable.

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness?

No - to people
Yes to God

How do you spiritually exfoliate?

With prayer

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

Again - with prayer

Reconciliation Questionnaire

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How long have you been a member of St. David's?

8 yrs

Did you come from a different denomination before becoming Episcopalian? If yes, where?

Yes. Presbyterian

Before this class, did you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession?

no

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

In Private confession the words are spontaneous and the issues are personal

In Corporate confession the words are (usually) pre-written.

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not?

No. I guess it never occurred to me.

What does Reconciliation mean to you?

coming together, acceptance of the reality, respect for differing approaches, forgiveness.

What is your understanding or hope of confession?

If there is true repentance one would be open to feel that God will forgive.

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can affect sin or do you believe that is only something God can remove?

I believe that only God can forgive but liturgical assurance can certainly be helpful.

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

THE PRODIGAL SON

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

guilt about infidelities during part of my first marriage caused me to vow to stop and have avoided those behaviors ever since.

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful, personal way in a service of worship make it easier?

Part 1. It is hard to ask for forgiveness if you feel undeserving and/or fear that it will be denied.

Part 2. Yes, definitely

How much does sin weigh?

Sin must be much heavier than it seems because it lays down a heavy dose of guilt, isolation, broken relationships, depression etc.

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

I feel guilty about being self-centered, judgemental, impatient and controlling. As a result, I am practicing (as best I can) being aware of my feelings and behavior and then practicing loving-kindness to myself and others and putting God first, others second and me third. My guilt and distress about about my self-centeredness, etc. is transforming me to behave differently.

Recount a story about how your sense of bitterness has transformed you.

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness?

Yes, often I feel undeserving of forgiveness so I let the matter lie hoping it will recede in time.

How do you spiritually exfoliate?

I don't know, but, perhaps I can, by awareness and a desire to change, exfoliate my ~~condemns~~ some layers of contempt for myself and need to control.

How do you encourage yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

I visualize the other person and then forgive and/or ask for forgiveness.

I also rehearse in my mind what I will say

Reconciliation Questionnaire

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How long have you been a member of St. David's?

38 yrs

Did you come from a different denomination before becoming Episcopalian? If yes, where?

Methodist - as a child in England

Before this class, did you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession?

No

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

Private is a more personal approach

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not?

No

What does Reconciliation mean to you?

Bringing together

Smoothing differences

Aiming for peaceful co-existence

What is your understanding or hope of confession?

Lightening a personal burden

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can affect sin or do you believe that is only something God can remove?

God can forgive while liturgical confession

can lighten the burden

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

There are many stories, the one with a widespread impact is the Prodigal Son

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

Yes.

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful, personal way in a service of worship make it easier?

Acknowledgment of one's personal failings.
Can communicate to God through prayer

How much does sin weigh?

Varies on how one measures the level of sin

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

Recount a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person.

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness?

No

How do you spiritually exfoliate?

Private prayer
Regular church attendance

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

Ask God's guidance

Reconciliation Questionnaire

Please remove this questionnaire and return it to Rev. Hillary Raining before the next session. The data used in these answers will be used to look for transformation and awareness changes as you will be asked the same questions at the end of our time together. Although the data will be used to inform the research, the information will be kept anonymous and confidential.

How long have you been a member of St. David's? *off & on for years. Moved around, always came home!*

Did you come from a different denomination before becoming Episcopalian? If yes, where?
Lutheran. Phoenixville PA

Before this class, did you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession?
NO

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

Private more personal. Support from priest but not congregation

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not?

In my mind

What does Reconciliation mean to you?

reaching, hoping for purity of spirit.

What is your understanding or hope of confession?

losing the guilt, being refreshed, spiritually

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can affect sin or do you believe that is only something God can remove?

Really a combination... Through liturgical confession one can reach God, but one can also reach God on one's own

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

2 Corinthians 1-14 Forgiveness for the Offender

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

Yes. It has to do with my mother, a narcissistic, egocentric woman, who wanted me to be her image. She ruled by "guilt"; I disappointed her when I did things differently, like have a 3rd child. I was "damaged goods" when I needed an operation after I was married.

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful, personal way in a service of worship make it easier?

Only if "ego" is involved is it hard, but if you think an offer of apology will be accepted it is not hard.

How much does sin weigh?

Depends on the sin, or "mistake", it could be a great burden.

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

I had to come to understand my mother, and forgive her for the misery she lay on me, and remember the good, even if the good was done to make her look wonderful... at my expense.

Recount a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person.

Through my husband's love, confidence and understanding helped me realize that my relationship with my mother could be put behind me.

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness?

I don't think so. Maybe feeling that I am so very right I don't want forgiveness from "wrong" person.

How do you spiritually exfoliate?

Exchanging "Peace" with others on Sundays - or other. Feeling a commitment with others to be better.

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

Searching by my conscience to sort out the ~~sit~~ situation. Understanding that we all commit sins we do not recognize.

Reconciliation Questionnaire

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How long have you been a member of St. David's? 13 years

Did you come from a different denomination before becoming Episcopalian? If yes, where?

No, baptised an Episcopalian

Before this class, did you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession?

I knew it was available but didn't know

there were a forms for doing it

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

Private - one on one with a Priest

Corporate - what we do every Sunday at Church

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not?

No, I didn't want to a Priest that was

part of my congregation. I didn't want it

to have a negative impact on my standing with Priest

What does Reconciliation mean to you?

It means being forgiven or forgiving someone else and creating a new more open relationship

What is your understanding or hope of confession?

I see confession as an opportunity to move past something or things that are creating

a sense of guilt or shame, and build a

more fruitful relationship with God and lead to

a more peaceful and happy life

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can affect sin or do you believe that is only something God can remove?

I believe that the Clergy can forgive you as

representatives of God in the same way that

the Council Communions

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

Jesus died to forgive our sins.

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

Several times in my life I have felt that I was on the wrong track and needed to make a change. This was a much more difficult process before I came back to the Church.

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful, personal way in a service of worship make it easier?

I don't find it hard to ask God personally for forgiveness. However this took many years of spiritual growth and understanding.

How much does sin weigh?

I don't know if "weigh" is the right word, but

the burden of guilt can have a very negative impact on your life. Being able to be relieved of the burden can

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

This is something I would like to discuss after the course. I found much easier to forgive others than forgive myself.

bring very positive change.

Recount a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person.

Going through a divorce after living a very interesting life drove me back to the Church.

I was looking for something more meaningful in a community where the members treat their hearts in the right place."

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness?

At one time I felt such a burden of shame that I didn't think I could be forgiven.

How do you spiritually exfoliate?

I talk to the Clergy about personal issues that are troubling me and I have taken the time to sit alone in the Chapel where I feel closer to God than

any other place.
How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

I like the liturgy that steps you ~~for~~ through the Confession Process. I like having a formal process to help you and the Clergy guide you through the act of confession. I think it makes feel less awkward.

Reconciliation Questionnaire

Please remove this questionnaire and return it to Rev. Hillary Raining before the next session. The data used in these answers will be used to look for transformation and awareness changes as you will be asked the same questions at the end of our time together. Although the data will be used to inform the research, the information will be kept anonymous and confidential.

How long have you been a member of St. David's? 1 YR.

Did you come from a different denomination before becoming Episcopalian? If yes, where?

YES - METHODIST

Before this class, did you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession?

NO

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

1 ON 1 - COMMUNION

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not?

YES - DURING ILLNESS

What does Reconciliation mean to you? PEACE

What is your understanding or hope of confession?

FREE, MORE ENERGY + MOTIVATION, RELIEF

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can affect sin or do you believe that is only something God can remove?

CONFESSION CAN AFFECT SIN

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

- JESUS LAST WORDS
"FORGIVE THEM - THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO"
- ... "GO NOW + SIN NO MORE"

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

YES
LOSS OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful, personal way in a service of worship make it easier?

EMBARRASSMENT
YES

How much does sin weigh?

LIMITS POTENTIAL (ENERGY)

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

DEPRESSION

Recount a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person.

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness?

YES

How do you spiritually exfoliate?

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

PRAYER

Reconciliation Questionnaire

How long have you been a member of St. David's Church?

30ish years (with a break in between some of those years)

Before this class did you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession?

No

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

Private is a one-on-one with a priest and the corporate is with the congregation as a part of our worship service and prior to taking communion.

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or Why not?

No, I thought this was only done in the Catholic Church.

What does Reconciliation mean to you?

Coming to peace with. Owning my part. Seeking forgiveness.

What is your understanding or hope of confession?

Unburdening my self of the weight of a sin, perceived or actual and experiencing grace through forgiveness.

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can affect sin or do you believe that is only something God can remove?

As long as I come to God (whether in private prayer or in the presence of a priest who God is speaking through) with a true heart and a sincere desire to change whatever it is within me that has caused me to sin.

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

The story of the Prodigal Son. The son reaches the end of his rope and comes back to his father, acknowledges his sin and is remorseful. The father demonstrates his unconditional love and forgives his son (for he was lost and is found) and throws a big party to celebrate his son's return. (repentance).

How do you spiritually exfoliate?

I pray in private, during spiritual retreats, and through church services.

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

I do self reflection and acknowledge my sin to myself.

Appendix Nine
Last Lenten Self-Questionnaires

This Appendix contains the last self-questionnaires answered by the members of the Lenten class

Final Class Questions

As you remember from our first class, this questionnaire should be filled out and returned to the Rev. Hillary Raining as soon as possible. You will be asked many of the same questions as in the previously questionnaire to help us measure any transformation that may have accrued as a part of this class. Although the data will be used to inform research, the information will be kept anonymous and confidential.

How long have you been a member of St. David's? ~~10~~ 11 1/2 years

Did you come from a different denominational background before becoming an Episcopalian? If yes, what?

Lutheran - very Lutheran! Mother a Missouri Synod Lutheran

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

Forgiveness - Prodigal Son

Confession - Nathan David

What spiritual seasons have you experienced?

I have had a deep love for Jesus since I was little - I remember a moment when I realized it. I have always sought a church community - some connection to God's family. In the past 15 years I have been growing in my knowledge of God's word and I now seek a truly personal and deep connection to a life with God. I seek a

Do you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession called "Reconciliation of a Penitent" in our Book of Common Prayer?

Yes!

"wholeness" in my relationship with God.

What is your understanding/hope of confession?

Confession should be done after much prayer & self-examination to honor the moment. I speak my burdens & sin out loud. It feels much more concrete than silent prayer. My hope in confession, hearing God's forgiveness, I will be strengthened to be more forgiving, more humble, to live as God desires me to live.

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can effect sin or that is something only God can remove? God forgives sin / puts them away

What is the difference between private and corporate confession? Liturgical confession - relieve the spirit, assurance, strengthen, keeps accountable the penitent

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not? Has participating in this class changed your answer?

Yes & only because of this course did I have the strength to do it.

The meditations led to much introspection, clarity, desire to move forward in my life with God. Would not have participated prior to this course. It was a heavy desire to speak my sins out loud. The presence of a confessor was a tangible element that I discovered truly aided in confession.

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

Guilt usually causes changes in my behavior for the worse.

I became prideful, arrogant, put up walls, indulge in bitterness & self-righteousness. I do not like myself when guilt rules my spirit.

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful personal way in a service of worship make it easier? It is hard to ask because of the shame. To speak of such things out loud is embarrassing/humiliating.

To my surprise, the act of entering, looking at the confessor, kneeling, the presence of the vestments - give me the assurance of a sacred time, a sacred act. As I recited Ps. 51, this time w/ a priest, by myself, I was strengthened. Though emotional and though the admissions were painful, I felt at the same time, a lightness entering me. Ever afterwards, I experienced a sense of peace & comfort during the process.

What would you think it would be like if St. David's used private confession?

I would like opportunities for reconciliation liturgies. Very much! I would like it. I already feel a growth after my experience. It was healing.

How much does sin weigh?

A lot when I confront it, when God opens my eyes to my sin. It is very hard to feel worthy of serving God, of even desiring to serve God when my sin is heavy on me.

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

My guilt over a broken relationship changed me radically. It has only been through a committed spiritual discipline that I have confronted it and understood these changes. I seek and to reconcile with God by forgiving and asking for forgiveness from the other person.

Tell a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person.

When I realize how disordered my life has become through sin (materialism, pride, arrogance, anger, fear, etc. etc. etc.) I am ashamed and feel overwhelming remorse. I ask God for the grace to redeem the no last year and to renew a right spirit within me.

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness?

On yes. It still is but I am have made plans to walk through the fear of being shamed regarding to seek a reconciled relationship. I feel strengthened to face that fear to know I will experience the shame completely, but that God will be with me and keep me face the fear.

How do you spiritually exfoliate?

I have to ask God to show me my sin - expose it. I have to welcome the surprising and painful things He does show me. It hurts, but unless I understand my failures, my false attachments, I cannot break free of them.

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

Committed disciplined prayer - I not only understand my failures, my brokenness but I understand what I truly desire -> to be close to God, to feel His embrace without feeling unworthy. When I understand how deep that desire is, how true, how fundamental to who I am & to what I always have been then no step is too hard to take. That's where I find myself now. Thanks be to God.

Did this class/workshop lead to any new transformation in your understanding of Reconciliation?

The teaching in the "ministry of reconciliation" on being "ambassadors of reconciliation" has turned my thinking about my commission. I now seek to reconcile so much in my life - even down to possessions and I seek to offer reconciliation in personal relationships in the broader community. God will give me what I need.

Never stop paying attention to where I am in my relationship w/ God. Never let anything take such a hold of me that my deepest desire goes unfilled. I truly believe that my deepest desire - to dwell w/ God and in God - are God's deepest desires for me. He wants me to give Him devotion and to give it extravagantly. I want to live my life w/ God at the center - I want to "swirl and twirl" in His midst all the time.

Any final thoughts or comments?

Just thank you. It was transforming for me. I opened myself to the meditations and they were so effective. I love the materials, esp the worship materials. I use them in my devotions.

"Trust in the slow work of God" has been such a powerful message for me. I love the contemporary psalm. I love the rock, the bowl (!!!), and, of course, my icon. It has become part of me. I had no idea what was in store for me, but truly, this class has shown...

I use them in my devotions.

"Trust in the slow work of God"

has been such a powerful message for me. I love the contemporary psalm. I love the rock, the bowl (!!!), and, of course, my icon. It has become part of me. I had no idea what was in store for me, but truly, this class has shown...

Final Class Questions

As you remember from our first class, this questionnaire should be filled out and returned to the Rev. Hillary Raining as soon as possible. You will be asked many of the same questions as in the previously questionnaire to help us measure any transformation that may have accrued as a part of this class. Although the data will be used to inform research, the information will be kept anonymous and confidential.

How long have you been a member of St. David's? 8 yrs.

Did you come from a different denominational background before becoming an Episcopalian? If yes, what?

Yes. Presbyterian

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?
The Prodigal son

What spiritual seasons have you experienced?

Long seasons of drought interspersed with some lush and green seasons.

Do you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession called "Reconciliation of a Penitent" in our Book of Common Prayer?

No - I do

What is your understanding/hope of confession?

purgings, peace

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can effect sin or that is something only God can remove?

only God can remove sin but human response to confession is ^avery helpful

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

Both are helpful but private is probably more powerful

1 Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not? Has participating in this class changed your answer?

1 no
2 no opportunity

3 no

What does "Reconciliation" mean to you?

Confession + acceptance and forgiveness.

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

Yes

1 Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful personal way in a service of worship make it easier?

1. Fear of rejection

2. Possibly. But I think God is much more forgiving than most people.

What would you think it would be like if St. David's used private confession?

not sure. But I think it is preferable in ~~many~~ many cases to confess to someone with whom we are not in frequent contact.

How much does sin weigh?

Sin must be very light because we take it up so easily.

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

From time to time I realize that I am being self-centered and/or controlling. Once I am aware I can change.

Tell a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person.

I have not become a new person but in small increments, I have learned from failures, mistakes etc and become a better person.

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness?

Yes

How do you spiritually exfoliate?

I try to empty my mind so God can enter.

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

I sometimes do the Welcoming Prayer which helps me to detach from strong emotions and to better understand the entire situation.

Did this class/workshop lead to any new transformation in your understanding of Reconciliation?

Yes, I understand that Reconciliation is preceded by kenosis and humility.

What will you take away from this experience?

I'm sorry to say that after dinner I often become tired and I either doze off or my mind wanders and wanders. Also I missed three sessions. As a result I don't think I am taking as much as I would like. But there may be some understanding at a deeper level of which I am not yet aware.

Any final thoughts or comments?

I really like the "river pebble" from the first class. I still have it and often in my pocket. The issue I put on it is CONTROL and I hold the pebble when I am in need of help in controlling my "need" to control others.

I also liked the exercise where in groups of three we shared and then asked each other a question. It helped me to know a couple of other people at a different level and to do some productive thinking.

Sorry about my handwriting!
I hope you can make it out.

Peter Abel

Final Class Questions

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How long have you been a member of St. David's?

40 yrs

Did you come from a different denominational background before becoming an Episcopalian? If yes, what?

Not on this occasion

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

Rodrigal Sn

The Lord's Prayer

What spiritual seasons have you experienced?

Do you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession called "Reconciliation of a Penitent" in our Book of Common Prayer?

Yes

What is your understanding/hope of confession?

To put one in a peaceful relationship w/ God.

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can affect sin or that is something only God can remove?

The assurance of absolution is equivalent to removal of sin by God. Yes

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

One is more personal

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not? Has participating in this class changed your answer? -- no, but made me more aware of the confession being to God

Yes - anytime I pray.

What does "Reconciliation" mean to you?

Coming to a tranquil relationship w/ both God & man.

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

Yes.

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful personal way in a service of worship make it easier?

Too it's an admission of personal failure

Petition to Hillary.

What would you think it would be like if St. David's used private confession?

I don't know. I feel it would add an additional help to certain people & perhaps a more personal feeling ~~that~~ than prayer on one's own

How much does sin weigh?

Verbs of the personal assessment of the magnitude of the sin.

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

Too hard to answer

Tell a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person.

The brokenness after a divorce

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness?

No

How do you spiritually exfoliate?

Through prayer

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

I use the church services & teaching

Did this class/workshop lead to any new transformation in your understanding of Reconciliation?

Yes - I understand the complexities better.

What will you take away from this experience?

A wider approach to the subject of
reconciliation

Any final thoughts or comments?

It is enjoyable to be made to think through such ethical problems & also understand the process(es) of reconciliation.

Final Class Questions

As you remember from our first class, this questionnaire should be filled out and returned to the Rev. Hillary Raining as soon as possible. You will be asked many of the same questions as in the previously questionnaire to help us measure any transformation that may have accrued as a part of this class. Although the data will be used to inform research, the information will be kept anonymous and confidential.

How long have you been a member of St. David's?

Currently approx 2 years; attended periodically over past 20 years

Did you come from a different denominational background before becoming an Episcopalian? If yes, what?

Yes - Baptist, as a child.

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

Crucifixion, Prodigal Son

What spiritual seasons have you experienced?

Lying fallow, as in Winter; questioning as in the birth/pain of spring; growth of awareness as in summer. The harvest of fall lies ahead.

Do you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession called "Reconciliation of a Penitent" in our Book of Common Prayer?

Yes - as a result of this study period.

What is your understanding/hope of confession?

Confession involves both self-awareness of need and process of casting off of burden of sin through addressing that burden thru reconciliation, internally and externally.

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can effect sin or that is something only God can remove?

Liturgical process can effect individual resolve - but only God (holy spirit) can ultimately remove.

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

private being a one-on-one form of confession either with oneself, or another individual; corporate confession being as a group and with intent addressing community as well as private sin.

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not? Has participating in this class changed your answer?

No. in liturgical sense, often with another individual. Class has focused me on confronting issues of spirituality, a new level of awareness.

What does "Reconciliation" mean to you?

both resolving some form of opposition, usually involving a negative, and/or gaining acceptance through casting off of negatives. Do not compromise, which often involves "climbing down."

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

Certainly, experienced guilt in various relationships with others; that none involving "major" change

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful personal way in a service of worship make it easier?

Requires courage to face "it", whether actual or spiritual in nature, i.e., to get past fear of embarrassment and of rejection by others. Doing so in worship service is not clear to me - the sincere relationship to God is internal, and can be faced anywhere at anytime, i.e., doesn't require structure.

What would you think it would be like if St. David's used private confession?

liturgical
Frankly, always assumed private confession was available so not sure of a change. Regularizing, as in the Catholic tradition, seems to have potential to diminish impact. An immense amount when a sense of guilt and shame becomes conscious

How much does sin weigh?

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

"Changed ^{my} management perception about employees' value as people" as a result of guilt about a termination of a valued person due to personal lack of courage to confront senior mgt. director. Literally succumbed to placing profit above people. In that instance, and did resolve to never let that happen again.

Tell a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person.

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness?

Same incident - regret that I never actually confronted my inadequacy with that person. (Now deceased)

How do you spiritually exfoliate?

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

Usually involves introspection to a high degree and developing sense of value in seeking forgiveness.

Did this class/workshop lead to any new transformation in your understanding of Reconciliation?

Increased focus on understanding and confronting issues of skepticism about Christian theology

What will you take away from this experience?

New perceptions about "Reconciliation" concepts as a positive force in spirituality.

Any final thoughts or comments?

Only TX for leading us through the class and into the reconciliation concepts with such positiveness.

Final Class Questions

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How long have you been a member of St. David's? *We have attended Services at St. David's for 20 years + or 1, not regularly for various reasons - moving*

Did you come from a different denominational background before becoming an Episcopalian? If yes, what?
Lutheran

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

Jesus: Father they know not what they do.

Communion service - confession and forgiveness

What spiritual seasons have you experienced?

*Christmas joy, Easter renewal, Thanksgiving gratitude
Fellowship at St. David's refreshes my faith*

Do you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession called "Reconciliation of a Penitent" in our Book of Common Prayer?

Yes!

What is your understanding/hope of confession?

To empty myself of guilt and have renewal in my spiritual and daily life

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can effect sin or that is something only God can remove? *Only God can remove*

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

Corporate confession is very supportive and only God's grace is involved

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not? Has participating in this class changed your answer? *Yes*

to you, Hillary!

What does "Reconciliation" mean to you?

There are so many different kinds of reconciliations - or levels - about small things, hurts, in relationships to my relationship with God. All involve honesty and repentance.

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

Not on any big thing, but thing left undone. I now try to say to myself, "This is where we are, deal with it. Ask for strength from God to go forward"

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful personal way in a service of worship make it easier?

*It is hard to face one's faults, weaknesses - sort of "skinning myself!"
And, I don't always know what my sins are!*

What would you think it would be like if St. David's used private confession?

In a way private confession can be very self-centered.
It is one with me but in a way I think I 'open-up' in
How much does sin weigh? private conversations

More than the stone I carry around

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

A condemnation of my 'mother' story once I forgave her for
the way I was treated by her, I could say I am sorry for my disappointment
her.

Tell a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person.

Understanding "my lapses" and the guilt put on me, released me, over
the years to be positive and find my own best way to be a mother -
not copy my mother.

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness?

No. My mother said she was ashamed of me often enough, for
God knows what. I admit to having less than perfect times, to being
too judgmental, to be too egocentric. That I fight and try to repent.

How do you spiritually exfoliate?

Pray. Open my heart to God's will. Communion is very important to me.

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

take a deep breath, face up to my ~~inner~~ heart coming as heartfulness,
then ask forgiveness.

Did this class/workshop lead to any new transformation in your understanding of Reconciliation?

Yes indeed

What will you take away from this experience?

U empty oneself, Confession, repentance
+ rebirth renewal

Any final thoughts or comments?

I need to study Christianity & the Bible a lot more!!!

Psychology and religion are so intertwined that
it is sometimes hard to separate the two in my brain.
What is in my brain and my heart don't always match!

Thank you Hillary - for being here for me in so many
ways!

P.S. we are not perfect and God knows that and accepts and
forgives us for all the little stuff. What is big enough
to ask for special forgiveness.

What would you think it would be like if St. David's used private confession?

*I think it would be and is an excellent tool for spiritual
wholeness.*

How much does sin weigh?

More than my heart/conscience can bear.

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

*Most importantly, when I faced the consequences for me, and
most especially, for my family of leaving my life with my family*

Tell a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person.

*for another I repented.
It makes space for God to come in. Often turned around.
through my own sin and pain it helps me to be
has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness? empathetic and non-judgmental.
yes.*

How do you spiritually exfoliate?

*the examen, confession, intentionally being with other
Christians and devote folks who show me how to live a more*

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

*holy life.
self-examination, prayer*

Did this class/workshop lead to any new transformation in your understanding of Reconciliation?

*Every single time I hear the word forgiveness reconciliation,
I see the curtain that allowed access to the*

What will you take away from this experience?

*confession! Holy of Holies
How forgiveness, washes me clean and sets me free.*

Any final thoughts or comments?

*I'm continually thirsty for the things of God
and my thirst is continually quenched by learning,
living, working, and praying with God's people.*

Final Class Questions

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How long have you been a member of St. David's? 1 YEAR

Did you come from a different denominational background before becoming an Episcopalian? If yes, what? YES - METHODIST

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

1. "FATHER FORGIVE THEM FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO"
2. ?

What spiritual seasons have you experienced? SPRING

?

Do you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession called "Reconciliation of a Penitent" in our Book of Common Prayer?

NO

What is your understanding/hope of confession?

RELIEVES GUILT. GIVES ONE A SECOND CHANCE, ENERGY, TO LIVE THE LIFE (PURPOSE) FOR WHICH HE (SHE) IS HERE

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can effect sin or that is something only God can remove? GOD IS IN EVERYONE YES

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

ONE ON ONE VS. EUCHARIST

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not? Has participating in this class changed your answer?

- ① YES. WEAKNESS FROM AN ILLNESS
- ② YES - DON'T WAIT FOR ILLNESS TO CONFESS

What does "Reconciliation" mean to you?

SETTLING A DISPUTE, COMPROMISE, PEACE AFTER TORMENT

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life? YES

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful personal way in a service of worship make it easier?

- ① PRIDE, EMBARRASSMENT. YES.?
- ② YES.?

What would you think it would be like if St. David's used private confession? A CATHOLIC CHURCH

How much does sin weigh? ENOUGH OF A BURDEN TO IMPEDE LIVING LIFE TO ITS FULLEST.

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to ~~seek forgiveness~~ of make a change in your life.

CHANGING MY LIFE-STYLE BY MOVING TO A "LIFE-CARE" RETIREMENT COMMUNITY SO NOT TO BE A BURDEN TO MY CHILDREN.

Tell a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person.

DIVORCE

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness? YES

How do you spiritually exfoliate? CRY ?

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness? PRAY, QUIET TIME, LISTENING FOR GOD'S WORD, READ THE BIBLE, HYMNS.

Did this class/workshop lead to any new transformation in your understanding of Reconciliation? YES

What will you take away from this experience?

I AM NOT ALONE IN FEELING GUILT
AWARE THAT RECONCILIATION IS POSSIBLE, EDUCATIONAL, WORTH STRIVING FOR.

Any final thoughts or comments?

I AM IN AWE OF THE KNOWLEDGE, TALENT, PREPARATION, TIME & PRESENTATION INVOLVED IN, OR DEVOTED TO, THIS CLASS BY THE ~~TEACHER~~, HILLARY RAINING, LEADER.

Final Class Questions

As you remember from our first class, this questionnaire should be filled out and returned to the Rev. Hillary Raining as soon as possible. You will be asked many of the same questions as in the previously questionnaire to help us measure any transformation that may have accrued as a part of this class. Although the data will be used to inform research, the information will be kept anonymous and confidential.

How long have you been a member of St. David's?

13 years

Did you come from a different denominational background before becoming an Episcopalian? If yes, what?

No, I was baptized as an Episcopalian.

What Bible story makes you think of forgiveness? Of confession?

Jesus forgives his executioners

Jesus forgives Peter for denying him

Jesus is patient with Thomas after the Resurrection

What spiritual seasons have you experienced?

My favorite spiritual season is Lent along with Holy Week and Easter

I like Christmas Eve, but Advent is too busy. The spiritual part gets lost.

Do you know that the Episcopal Church has a form of private confession called "Reconciliation of a Penitent" in our Book of Common Prayer? I now know there is a form for private confession. I believe this

makes it easier on both parties. I knew you could do a private confession but I didn't know how it was done and it wasn't encouraged

What is your understanding/hope of confession?

We gain a sense of hope because confession gives away to

lay down our burdens of guilt and shame. We can move towards a positive

Do you believe that a liturgical confession and assurance of forgiveness/absolution can effect sin or that is something only God can remove? I believe that a priest can forgive your sins in the same way

a priest acts in God's behalf, when conducting Communion

What is the difference between private and corporate confession?

Private Confession - you make your confession directly to God or one on one with a priest.

Corporate Confession - you do as a group as part of the Sunday service liturgy

Have you ever made a private confession? Why or why not? Has participating in this class changed your answer?

No, not yet. I am trying to decide if I want to do this with a priest in my church or go to a priest outside of my church community.

What does "Reconciliation" mean to you?

It is a way to resolve the issues of guilt and shame that stand in the way of a more loving relationship with God and sense of peace with yourself.

Have you had the experience of feeling guilty and that feeling led you to make a major change in your life?

I came back to the Church in 1995 because of the shame I felt

for things that I had done or not done and I couldn't forgive myself.

Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? Would having a way to do that in a meaningful personal way in a service of worship make it easier?

I don't believe it is hard to ask for forgiveness, now, that I

have a much better understanding of the positive results and that God does want a better relationship with us. It was helpful to understand the ways that I got in the way of that

What would you think it would be like if St. David's used private confession?

I believe that it would be an excellent idea. It would be good for the greater Congregation understand the reasons and the process.

How much does sin weigh?

It can be a great burden, especially if guilt and shame keep you from having a better more fulfilled relationship with God, your family, and friends.

Tell a story about how the power of guilt motivated you to seek forgiveness or make a change in your life.

I came back to the Church when my wife and I separated and got divorced.

I was looking for a community that was a spiritual and acted as true Christians.

Tell a story about how your own brokenness has transformed you into a new person.

(see above)

Has shame ever prevented you from seeking forgiveness?

Shame definitely kept me from seeking forgiveness. In hindsight the shame I felt was greater than any sin I had committed. Now having that in a better perspective helped find a greater level of spirituality.

How do you spiritually exultate?

I go to Church almost every week which helps set my life in a better perspective. However, I also come alone to spend time in the Church or chapel to give God time to and give thanks, ask for forgiveness, and help.

How do you prepare yourself to take a step in the process of forgiveness?

I usually find time to be quiet and create space between the issues in my life before asking for forgiveness.

Did this class/workshop lead to any new transformation in your understanding of Reconciliation?

Yes!!!

What will you take away from this experience?

I want to praise Hillary for the way she conducted this class.

Any final thoughts or comments?

I arrived not sure what to expect but I wanted was a better understanding of what Reconciliation really meant and how I could use it in my day to day life.

Hillary's bright spirit and her positive, creative teaching methods made this an uplifting transformational experience for me.

I greatly appreciated her model that showed how we would be better more positive representatives for God after Reconciliation. The real goal is to be joyful and in touch with God, as well as positive ambassadors. It is great to know that we will still make mistakes (oops)

and sin but we can be forgiven and live more positive
fruitful lives.

This class opened me up and allowed me to feel a sense
of the joy and energy of being filled with the Holy Spirit,
for the first time in my life.

I am truly grateful for this class and your
example.

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hraising@stdavidschurch.org

Your message has been sent.

Mail

More

14 of 17

tonight

Inbox x

Fahey, John

jfahey@seic.com

Inbox (1)

Fahey, John

Mar 22 (2 days ago)

Starred

Important

Sent Mail

Drafts

Hillary,

Show details

Follow up

I submitted my answers to you in week two. My responses have not changed. It looks like there are two questions I could not have answered at the start of the class:

Misc

Pastoral Prayers

1. Did this class/workshop lead to any new transformation in your understanding of Reconciliation?

Priority

a. Yes, I did not know the Episcopal Church offered Reconciliation of a Penitent.

Search people .

2. What will you take away from this experience?

Betsy Wolford

a. There are things weighing heavily on me. I need to reflect on next steps, but already feeling better knowing I have an option which I trust will relieve these burdens

Elaine Sonnen...

Frank Allen

Gift Shop

Eileen Violini

Thanks for everything and since I am on vacation next week: Happy Easter!

Kathy Marcant...

Kay Joseph

Marilyn Callaghan

John

Matt Holcombe

Tom Pumphrey

John J. Fahey, Jr.

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From: Hillary Raining [mailto:hraising@stdavidschurch.org]

Sent: Wednesday, March 20, 2013 9:44 AM

To: Fahey, John

Appendix Ten

Post Lenten Class Interviews

This Appendix contains the Post-Lenten class interviews conducted by the LAC.

**Post-EPL Class Questionnaire
Solveig and John Stetson**

- 1. Before this class, did you know there was a Rite of Reconciliation of a Penitent in the Episcopal Tradition?** Neither Solveig nor John realized there was a formal process or rite, with clergy involvement and a structure. John mentioned that he always believed he could approach a priest for individual discussion, but did not understand there also was a rite.
- 2. Have you ever made a private confession before? Why or why not?** Neither had ever made a private confession. Solveig expressed being too shy to open old wounds in this manner. John had never felt the need to do so.
- 3. After taking this class, do you think you would make a private confession?** Both said they now would be so inclined, although John said he would more likely first pursue a simple conversation with a priest, while Solveig mentioned how valuable she has found such conversations already, over the idea of a formal private confession.
- 4. What did you learn about the concept of Reconciliation?** They were pleased to learn that the concept, and structure, existed, although they noted the existence already of the public version within Eucharistic services.
- 5. Where there some moments of grace/transformation for you this Lent and especially in this class?** Solveig had what she described as a moment of grace when she touched the water of a centerpiece one evening, and noted the surface ripples radiating outward. John described the more general transformational feeling of being encouraged to open himself and confront his anxieties and concerns.
- 6. Any other feedback?** Both enjoyed the experience and felt they would be more open to their emotional, rather than simply more rational thoughts about moral and philosophical issues.

For: The Rev. Hillary Raining

Interviewer: Endre Witthoef; Interviewee: Michael Brent.

April 21, 2013

Interview for EPL Lenten class

- 1) Before this class did you know there was a Rite of Reconciliation of a Penitent in the Episcopal Tradition? “ No - I had no idea; didn't know it was part of our tradition. ”
- 2) Have you ever made a private confession before? Why or why not? “ No... again I didn't know it was a part of our tradition -- thought that was a Catholic tradition.
- 3) After taking this class , do you think you would make a private confession? “ Now that I know, I may... might feel uncomfortable confessing with one of our Priest because we see them weekly; perhaps, I will with a Priest outside of St. David's. ”
- 4) What did you learn about the concept of Reconciliation? “ To become fully free as a Christian, my Reconciliation has brought new life. ”
- 5) Where were some moments of grace/transformation for you this Lent and especially in this class? “ The session at the end was phenomenal...; specifically, over the course of the class, the bowl exercise, the U- shape discussion, and the stations at the end touched me. ”
- 6) Any other feedback? “ The way Hillary delivered the message was great. She didn't lecture us, or talk down to us, but engaged us in a comfortable way through interactive teaching methods... only criticism: wish there was more time at the end of the classes, as some of us had more questions we wanted to ask - simply wanted more time.

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