

Introduction

**Our commitment to the Catholic social mission
must be rooted in and strengthened by our spiritual lives.
In our relationship with God we experience
the conversion of heart that is necessary
to truly love one another as God has loved us. ¹**

The *Leader's Guide to Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*, published by the United States Catholic Conference in 2000, reminds us that: "The key is to look at the social meaning of symbols and texts, not just at their personal meanings. Given our individualistic culture, this is a challenge."

One of the graces in the liturgical movement coming out of the Second Vatican Council was to see more clearly the communal character of the sacraments. The sacraments are a celebration of the community—not something that is normally done in private. They are a celebration for the nourishment of the community. It is in the renewal of the communal aspect of our sacramental life, that we find a powerful challenge to our social life and the possibility to receive the grace to put our faith into practice more powerfully.

**In a global culture driven by excessive individualism, our tradition
proclaims that the person is not only sacred but also social. . . .
The Catholic tradition teaches that human beings grow and
achieve fulfillment in community. . . .
While public debate in our nation is often divided between those
who focus on personal responsibility and those who focus on social
responsibilities, our tradition insists that both are necessary.²**

A Pre-note: Do not force your justice concerns into the liturgy. One does not need to do violence to the liturgy in order to acknowledge our social teaching or in order to be empowered into action on behalf of justice. A healthy celebration of the sacraments supports social ministry. Our sacraments are meant to be communal celebrations and to empower us into action. The following reflections are not an invitation to make every sacramental celebration into a rally against the death penalty or a reflection on the moral issues around world trade and globalization or a spelling out of right to life issues or a call for an increase in the minimum wage. Rather, these thoughts are presented to promote awareness—an awareness of the social values imbedded in our liturgical practice when it is at its best—an awareness of the larger implications that flow from the story of Jesus and the living practice of Christ among us. Our desire is to nurture awareness, not a political ideology. As Jesus says: "The truth will set you free."

¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*, 1998, <http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/contents.htm>

² Ibid.



RECONCILIATION AND CST

| Liturgical Practice | Comment | Connection to Catholic Social Teaching | Implications |
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| Examination of Conscience | We look at Personal and Social Sin. | In the Catholic Tradition of examination of conscience, one is called not just to look at one's personal relationships, but look at the world and its structures and the need for reconciliation with respect to social sin. | One is called not simply to create a list of one's person sinful actions, but is called to be aware of the sin of the world in which we live – a sin for which no one person is responsible. We all share responsibility. We all are invited to acknowledge our need. |
| Acknowledge one's need for forgiveness | Awareness made explicit is an essential element of the process of repentance and reconciliation. | Without awareness, there is no real basis for responsible action. Without awareness we run the risk of ideology. | Christians are not afraid of looking at themselves and the world with open eyes and discerning hearts. |
| Gesture of touch | In the new rite, the priest is encouraged to place his hands on the head of the person to whom he is proclaiming reconciliation. | The physical reality of the sacrament reminds us of the need for lives rooted in and connected with the realities of the world and its people. | Reconciliation is not just something that one does in one's head. It touches on one's self and one's actions and one's relationships. |
| Social celebration | Whether the sacrament is celebrated in the context of a parish service or in the context of a simple encounter of the priest and the penitent, we believe that sin has something to do with community. It is not simply a personal secret thing between the person and God. It affects community. | Catholic Social Teaching challenges us to move away from privatized religion to a religion that is rooted in community and care for the common good. | We are invited to see our sin as not just something between God and me, but also as something that involves the community and effects the community. Our repentance is reflected in our work for justice, for this work breaks down barriers and creates reconciliation. |

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| Experience of the world and its pain and struggle | Our inability to see the injustice of the world or our unwillingness to even look for it might be called a sin of omission. | The “grace of the sacrament” is a change of heart – a new way of looking at the world that may challenge the culture of our time and society. | We are called to look at sin in terms of relationship, not just in terms of law. |
| Penance | The point of a penance is not to do something to earn God’s forgiveness, but to open oneself to a deeper awareness of God, self, and sin and then to direct one’s life toward new ways of being and acting. | Religion is concerned with life and the actions of our life, not just something in our head. | One’s penance is not determined by what would be the most difficult or painful thing to do, but on what will help one to be more aware and to move into action for what is right. |

The celebration of the Mass and the sacraments, our participation in faith formation and our active membership in the parish is all preparation to go out and live the gospel in our workplaces, our neighborhoods, our communities, and the world.¹

We request that diocesan offices of religious education develop programs of preparation for the sacraments which will highlight their social as well as individual dimension.²

¹Ministry of Social Action, Diocese of Davenport, <http://www.davenportdiocese.org/ddo-ministries/page14.html>

²National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *To Do the Work of Justice: A Plan of Action for the Catholic Community in the U.S.*, May 4, 1978, <http://www.justpeace.org/NCCB541978.htm>

Questions for Reflection

How has this study guide expanded your ideas about the implications of Reconciliation?

Brainstorm ways in which you can creatively weave Catholic Social Teaching into your parish's understanding of Reconciliation.