



The Reconciliation Chapel



The place where the sacrament of reconciliation is to be celebrated as part of the faith life of the community remains an unsettled issue. Some of us recall the confessional, the "box," with its hard kneeler, dim light (if any), hushed tones and cramped quarters. There was an obvious connection between physical austerity, the discomfort of being in the box and the darkness of the sins to be confessed or the harshness of the penance to be assigned.

The reform of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) has helped us come to a greater awareness of the wonderful gift of God's forgiving love as the primary focus of the sacrament. As are all the sacraments, reconciliation is communal in nature; it is more than an act of confession of personal peccadilloes. It is reconciliation with our sisters and brothers who are the church, as well as reconciliation with God. The celebrating of this sacrament, which returns us to the embrace of the church "through the merits of the Lord Jesus and power of Holy Spirit," requires a special place.

Although there is no liturgical norm requiring a separate room for reconciliation, or specifying guidelines for its design, there are some excellent opinions in the current literature on the environment for worship that deserve serious consideration. In *Shaping a House for the Church*, Marchita

Mauck writes, "The integrity and holiness of the ritual of penance demands an honored place reserved for it alone." This means that the place for reconciliation is dedicated to that sole purpose. The place does not also serve as a storage room, extra sacristy or a cry-room. It is properly a chapel, a place for worship, for liturgy; it is not a counseling room or therapist's office. In keeping with our understanding of the sacrament of reconciliation as an experience of conversion and of reclaiming our baptismal identity, the chapel for reconciliation could be located in relationship to the baptismal font. Since reconciliation returns us to the common table, the eucharistic gathering, it is appropriate for the reconciliation chapel to open into the main worship area. As Mauck points out, "reconciliation is about re-entry and re-union as church."

The design of the reconciliation chapel should take into account the options that the rite intends: face-to-face confession or anonymity; sitting, kneeling or standing as the penitent chooses. The placement and material of a partition or screen, sacred art, acoustical privacy and the proper lighting and ventilation are all important elements. This is a holy place; we are never more vulnerable than when we approach this sacrament, and never more conscious of God's love than when we stand forgiven.

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