

The purpose of this folder is to introduce the man to the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Pointers for Folder 11

It is best to speak of a Sacrament of Reconciliation rather than of penance, confession or forgiveness, because these words often have strong negative overtones for men in jail. In all the discussions about sin be careful not to imply that God's attitude toward the sinner never changes. It is always one of love. It is the sinner who changes, when he turns from God, not vice versa. God's love is unconditional. The Holy Spirit is always prompting the sinner to take responsibility for his or her actions and to ask for forgiveness. It is only by the grace of God that a person can say, "I'm sorry" and ask for pardon.

It is also necessary to make clear that sin resides in the heart. It is a breaking of our relationship with God, a turning away from God, and a refusal to love God, self or neighbor. It is something much deeper than breaking a law. There is a difference between sin and making a mistake or breaking a law unintentionally. Sin requires one to know that what one is doing is seriously wrong, that one does it freely and that a serious matter is involved. These conditions are required for what is called mortal or deadly sin because it breaks off the relationship with God. Some people will say, "A sin is a sin." But if we think of sin in terms of relationships it is easy to see that some thoughts, words or actions are more serious breaches of love than others.

The norm for sin, which Jesus laid down, is the law of love. "Do unto others what you would have them do unto you." These words are amplified in the Sermon on the Mount and in the various sayings of the Lord. The Commandments are a summary of the various areas that damages our relation to God and others.

The first step on the new Way is to take personal responsibility for our thoughts, words or deeds and ADMIT not only that we have done WRONG but WHAT we have done wrong, express our sincere SORROW for doing that wrong and RESOLVE to make amends and do penance. Of course, God's forgiveness is ours as soon as we do this, but being human we need some sign or indication that God has really forgiven us. In serious matters this sign comes to us through the words of the priest during the sacrament of reconciliation.