Pastoral Notes and Suggestions for Implementation

The Light is On for You is an opportunity for evangelization. Those who have been disconnected from the Church are looking for opportunities to experience Christ and connect to a loving community.

Hospitality

1) Create a prayerful environment that is welcoming and engenders quiet reflection. You may want to do some of the following:
   • Make sure the heating and lighting are on in advance. Lighting may be somewhat subdued, yet light enough for people to see. If you have a large baptismal font, you may want to warm the water.
   • Perhaps create a Taize-like environment with candles and icons; or create some other environment that is inviting, quieting, and prayerful.
   • Provide quiet music to be played in the background.

2) Arrange for a few members of the parish to be present to assist people, if needed.
   • They could be quietly available as a welcoming presence for those who might visit, understanding that some who come may be dealing with difficult issues.
   • If you have a Stephen Ministry, perhaps some Stephen ministers could be on hand.
   • The idea is for the hospitality/Stephen Ministers to be more in the background in order to allow for people’s anonymity, yet to provide assistance and direction if necessary.
3) Invite parishioners to come and simply pray quietly throughout the evening. They could be asked to pray for reconciliation in their lives, in the lives of those coming back to the Sacrament, and in the world.

4) Consider offering some hospitality in a side room/family room off your gathering space.

5) Parishes with one priest and more than one church building:
   - Ask other priests without a parish assignment (e.g. religious order) to be present at one of your churches.
   - Make certain that parish churches in your region that are not open are clearly marked with information about where “The Light Is On for You” is taking place.
   - Give advance notice on your website and to your worshiping assemblies about which church(es) will be open.

Make available resources

1) On a table that is clearly visible, provide resources such as:
   - brochures on how to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. For a free brochure, visit the ODWS website: www.catholiccincinnati.org/worship
   - follow-up resources for further pastoral care of penitents in difficult situations (resources on ODWS website)
   - information on parish/region Lenten schedule, Holy Week schedule, especially the Triduum.
   - brochures on the RCIA and “returning to Church”
   - other materials from your parish magazine rack such as Care Notes

For the Reconciliation Chapel/Confessional

1) Have a few brochures on how to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the confessional (just in case penitents did not pick one up ahead of time)

2) Place a new box of tissues in the confessional.

3) For the priest:
   - Reflect on Pope Francis’ words regarding reconciliation, the priest, and his role as the instrument of Christ’s peace and forgiveness, see below.
   - Mentally prepare for difficult confessions and your response: addiction to pornography, abortion, homosexuality, violence and abuse, issues in the workplace, etc.
• Familiarize yourself with the resources made available through the Family and Respect Life Office, especially resources dealing with abortion, pornography, marriage issues, abuse, and homosexuality.
• Consider penances that are appropriate and helpful for the healing of sins confessed. Gently invite penitents to a deeper reflection on how to live their lives in Christ.

Reflections by Pope Francis on Reconciliation and God’s Enduring Mercy

Evangelii Gaudium

“… How good it feels to come back to him whenever we are lost! Let me say this once more: God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy. Christ, who told us to forgive one another “seventy times seven” (Mt 18:22) has given us his example: he has forgiven us seventy times seven. Time and time again he bears us on his shoulders. No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this boundless and unfailing love. With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew. Let us not flee from the resurrection of Jesus, let us never give up, come what will. May nothing inspire more than his life, which impels us onwards!” (3)

“Moreover, pastors and the lay faithful who accompany their brothers and sisters in faith or on a journey of openness to God must always remember what the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches quite clearly: “Imputability and responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments, and other psychological or social factors”. Consequently, without detracting from the evangelical ideal, they need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively occur.[49] I want to remind priests that the confessional must not be a torture chamber but rather an encounter with the Lord’s mercy which spurs us on to do our best. A small step, in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties. Everyone needs to be touched by the comfort and attraction of God’s saving love, which is mysteriously at work in each person, above and beyond their faults and failings.” (44)

General Audience, Wednesday, 13 November 2013

“Lastly, a brief mention of the third element: “for the remission of sins”. In the Sacrament of
Baptism all sins are remitted, original sin and all of our personal sins, as well as the suffering of sin. With Baptism the door to an effectively new life is opened, one which is not burdened by the weight of a negative past, but rather already feels the beauty and the goodness of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is the powerful intervention of God’s mercy in our lives, to save us. This saving intervention does not take away our human nature and its weakness — we are all weak and we are all sinners — and it does not take from us our responsibility to ask for forgiveness every time we err! I cannot be baptized many times, but I can go to Confession and by doing so renew the grace of Baptism. It is as though I were being baptized for a second time. The Lord Jesus is very very good and never tires of forgiving us. Even when the door that Baptism opens to us in order to enter the Church is a little closed, due to our weaknesses and our sins. Confession reopens it, precisely because it is a second Baptism that forgives us of everything and illuminates us to go forward with the light of the Lord. Let us go forward in this way, joyfully, because life should be lived with the joy of Jesus Christ; and this is a grace of the Lord.”

General Audience, Wednesday, 20 November 2013

“First of all, we must remember that the principal agent in the forgiveness of sins is the Holy Spirit. In his first appearance to the Apostles, in the Upper Room, the Risen Jesus made the gesture of breathing on them saying: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Jn 20:22,23). Jesus, transfigured in his body, is already the new man who offers the Paschal gifts, the fruit of his death and resurrection. What are these gifts? Peace, joy, the forgiveness of sins, mission, but above all he gives the Spirit who is the source of all these. The breath of Jesus, accompanied by the words with which he communicates the Spirit, signifies the transmission of life, the new life reborn from forgiveness.”

General Audience, Wednesday, 20 November 2013

“Lastly, a final point: the priest is the instrument for the forgiveness of sins… The service that the priest assumes a ministry, on behalf of God, to forgive sins is very delicate and requires that his heart be at peace, that the priest have peace in his heart; that he not mistreat the faithful, but that he be gentle, benevolent and merciful; that he know how to plant hope in hearts and, above all, that he be aware that the brother or sister who approaches the Sacrament of Reconciliation seeking forgiveness does so just as many people approached Jesus to be healed. The priest who is not of this disposition of mind had better not administer this sacrament until he has addressed it. The penitent faithful have the right, all faithful have the right, to find in priests servants of the forgiveness of God.

Homily on Reconciliation, Casa Santa Marta, October 25, 2013
Confessing our sins is not going to a psychiatrist, or to a torture chamber: it’s saying to the Lord, ‘Lord, I am a sinner,’ but saying it through the brother, because this says it concretely. ‘I am sinner because of this, that and the other thing…’

Little children have that wisdom: when a child comes to confess, he never says something general. ‘But father, I did this and I did that to my aunt, another time I said this word’ and they say the word. But they are concrete, eh? They have that simplicity of the truth. And we always have the tendency to hide the reality of our failings. But there is something beautiful: when we confess our sins as they are in the presence of God, we always feel that grace of shame. Being ashamed in the sight of God is a grace. It is a grace: ‘I am ashamed of myself.’ We think of Peter when, after the miracle of Jesus on the lake, [he said] ‘Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinner.’ He is ashamed of his sins in the presence of the sanctity of Jesus.”

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