



Private Confession at St. Paul's during Lent

As a community of people learning how to follow Jesus, we strive to be a place of integrity and authenticity. We are a church that wants to create space for everyone, regardless of where they are on their spiritual journey, to acknowledge their desperate need for forgiveness and a fresh start. This Lent, by offering the spiritual practice of making confession to a priest, we hope to open up a non-judgmental space for people to rejoice in God's mercy, love and forgiveness.

The practice of making an oral confession to a priest will be new to many at St. Paul's. However, it is an ancient and valued part of our Anglican tradition, which teaches that "all may, some should, and none must". Though we confess our sins together in our weekly Eucharist service, individual oral confession offers believers an opportunity for deep self-reflection and specific repentance, as well as a personal experience of God's grace and forgiveness.

Confessions will happen in St. Paul's Chapel and St. George's Chapel (in the main sanctuary), and a volunteer in the glass atrium will direct you. Confessions will be private—you will not be seen or overheard by anyone else—and kept absolutely confidential. You do not need to make an appointment, and people will be received in the order they arrive.

It is important to prepare for confession in advance. You can use the guide for self-examination below.

What is confession and why do we do it?

Sin is action (in thought, word, or deed) that breaks the union between the soul and God that is created in baptism. *Forgiveness* is God's loving and gracious restoration of our union with him.

Repentance, which means turning away from our sin and back to God, is the bridge between sin and forgiveness.

Confession is an honest and sorrowful naming of the sins we have committed, with a resolve not to commit them again. Confession is the core of repentance.

Because the Lord Jesus Christ is the only mediator between humanity and God the Father, any Christian can confess his or her sins directly to God in prayer and be assured of forgiveness.

However, it is also the role of the church to assist people in their relationship with God. In that capacity, priests of the church are authorized to hear private confession of sins and pronounce the *absolution* (forgiveness) that is given by Jesus through his church.

The confidentiality of confession is absolute: the priest may not, under any circumstances whatsoever, reveal what is confessed. (In general, the priest will not even bring a memory of confession into subsequent interactions with someone who has made confession—sins that are forgiven are forgotten.)

How do I prepare for confession?

Prayerful *self-examination* is essential prior to making a confession so that we can be honest with ourselves and with God. Self-examination is an internal inventory of the ways that we have sinned, which we write down to use in making our confession.

The guide for self-examination below is adapted from the preparation for confession in the *St. Augustine's Prayer Book*, from the Anglican monastic Order of the Holy Cross (. It follows the traditional "seven deadly sins", which are an ancient catalogue of human behaviour. This guide is intended to be used as a kind of written mirror that we hold up to our lives, helping us make a complete inventory by jogging our memories and bringing to mind sins that we may otherwise overlook or forget.

To conduct your self-examination, set aside some time so that you will not be rushed. As you go through the guide below, *write down* any of your sins that occur to you. Do your best to be honest and careful, but do not be anxious about what you may have forgotten. This written list of sin is important, since our memories are unreliable, and it keeps us honest. This is not a journaling exercise, so avoid creating narratives around your sin, which can lead to self-justification. Confession is a time to name your sins simply and specifically, not to tell stories about them or explain them.

You will bring this list to confession and use it to make your confession. No-one else should see this list, and when you are done making your confession you will destroy it.

Self-examination

Find a quiet place to sit with pen and paper. Begin with this prayer:

O Holy Spirit, Source of all light, Spirit of wisdom, of understanding and of knowledge, come to my assistance and enable me to make a good confession. Enlighten me, and help me now to know my sins as one day I shall be forced to recognize them before your judgment seat. Bring to my mind the evil which I have done and the good which I have neglected. Permit me not to be blinded by self-love.

Grant me, moreover, heartfelt sorrow for my transgressions, knowing how deeply they have wounded the loving heart of my Heavenly Father; and help me to make a good confession that all stain of guilt may be washed away in the precious blood of my Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Then go through the following guide, writing down any individual sins, or patterns of sin, that come to mind as you read.

PRIDE is putting self in the place of God as the center and objective of our life, or of some department thereof. It is the refusal to recognize our status as creatures, dependent on God for our existence, and placed by him in a specific relationship to the rest of his creation.

Irreverence. Deliberate neglect of the worship of God every Sunday in his Church, or being content with a perfunctory participation in it. Disregard of other Holy Days or of additional opportunities for giving God honor. Failure to thank God or to express our gratitude adequately.

Disrespect for God or holy things by deliberately treating them, in thought, word or deed, in a profane, contemptuous or over-familiar manner. Use of holy things for personal advantage, or the attempt to bribe or placate God by religious practices or promises.

Sentimentality. Being satisfied with pious feelings and beautiful ceremonies without striving to obey God's will.

Presumption. Dependence on self rather than on God, with the consequent neglect of the means of grace sacraments and prayer. Dispensation of ourselves from ordinary duties on the grounds that we are superior persons. Satisfaction or complacency over our spiritual achievements. Refusal to avoid, when possible, immediate occasions of temptation. Preference for our own ideas, customs, schemes or techniques. Foolish optimism.

Failure to recognize our job as a divine vocation, or to offer our work to God. Unwillingness to surrender to and abide in Christ, to let him act in and through us. Failure to offer to God regularly in intercession the persons or causes that have, or should enlist our interest and support.

Distrust. Refusal to recognize God's wisdom, providence and love. Worry, anxiety, misgivings, scrupulosity (legalism), or perfectionism. Attempts to discern or control the future by spiritualism, astrology, fortune-telling or the like. Magic or superstition.

Over-sensitiveness. Expectation that others will dislike, reject or mistreat us; over-readiness so to interpret their attitude, or quickness to take offense. Unfounded suspicions.

Timidity in accepting responsibility, or cowardice in facing difficulty or suffering. Surrender to feelings of depression, gloom, pessimism, discouragement, self-pity, or fear of death, instead of fighting to be brave, cheerful and hopeful.

Disobedience. Rejection of God's known will in favor of our own interests or pleasures. Disobedience of legitimate laws, regulations, or authority; or slow and reluctant obedience. Failure when in authority to fulfil responsibilities or to consider the best interests of those under us.

Refusal to learn God's nature or will as revealed in Scripture, expounded in instructions or expert advice, or discernible through prayer, meditation or the reading of religious books. Absorption in our own affairs, leaving little time, energy or interest for the things of God.

Violation of confidence. Breaking of legitimate promises or contracts. Irresponsibility. Treachery. Unnecessary disappointment of another, or the causing of shame or anxiety to those who love us.

Impenitence. Refusal to search out and face up to our sins, or to confess and admit them before God. Disregard of our sins or pretense that we are better than we are. Self-justification or discounting our sins as insignificant, natural or inevitable. Self-righteous comparison of ourselves with others.

Refusal to accept just punishment or to make due reparation when possible. Deceit or lying to escape the consequences of our sins, or allowing another to suffer the blame for our faults. Overcompensation or attempts at self-reform or self-vengeance, to avoid surrender to God in humble penitence.

Shame (hurt pride), sorrow for ourselves because our sins make us less respectable than we like to think we are, or because we fear punishment or injury to our reputation, rather than sorrow for what sin is in the eyes of God. Refusal to admit we were in the wrong or to apologize. Refusal to accept forgiveness from God or others. Doubt that God can forgive our sins, or failure to use the means of getting assurance of his forgiveness when we need it. Unwillingness to forgive ourselves.

Vanity. Crediting to ourselves rather than to God our talents, abilities, insights, accomplishments, good works. Refusal to admit indebtedness to others, or adequately to express gratitude for their help. Hypocrisy. Pretense to virtues we do not possess. False humility. Harsh judgments on others for faults we excuse in ourselves.

Boasting, exaggeration, drawing attention to ourselves by talking too much, by claiming ability, wisdom, experience or influence we do not have, or by eccentric or ostentatious behavior. Undue concern over, or expenditure of time, money or energy on looks, dress, surroundings, etc., in order to impress others; or deliberate slovenliness for the same purpose. Seeking, desiring or relishing flattery or compliments.

Arrogance. Insisting that others conform to our wishes, recognize our leadership, accept our own estimate of our worth. Being overbearing, argumentative, opinionated, obstinate.

Snobbery. Pride over race, family, position, personality, education, skill, achievements, or possessions.

ANGER is open rebellion against God or our fellow creatures. Its purpose and desire is to eliminate any obstacle to our self-seeking, to retaliate against any threat to our security, to avenge any insult or injury to our person.

Resentment. Refusal to discern, accept or fulfil God's vocation. Dissatisfaction with the talents, abilities or opportunities he has given us. Unwillingness to face up to difficulties or sacrifices. Unjustified rebellion or complaint at the circumstances of our lives. Escape from reality or the attempt to force our will upon it. Transference to God, to our parents, to society, or to other individuals of the blame for our maladjustment; hatred of God, or antisocial behavior. Cynicism. Annoyance at the contrariness of things; profanity or grumbling.

Pugnacity. Attack upon another in anger. Murder in deed or desire. Combativeness or nursing of grudges. Injury to another by striking, cursing or insulting him; or by damaging his reputation or property. Quarrelsomeness, bickering, contradiction, nagging, rudeness, or snubbing. Retaliation. Vengeance for wrongs real or imagined, or the plotting thereof. Harsh or excessive punishment. Hostility, sullenness or rash judgment. Refusal to forgive, or to offer or accept reconciliation. Unwillingness to love, to do good to, or to pray for enemies. Boycotting or ostracizing another for selfish reasons. Spoiling others' pleasure by uncooperativeness or disdain, because we have not got our way, or because we feel out of sorts or superior.

ENVY is dissatisfaction with our place in God's order of creation, manifested in begrudging his gifts and vocation to others.

Jealousy. Offense at the talents, success or good fortune of others. Selfish or unnecessary rivalry or competition. Pleasure at others' difficulties or dis-tress. Belittling others.

Malice. Ill-will, false accusations, slander, backbiting. Reading false motives into others' behavior. Initiation, collection or retailing of gossip. Arousing, fostering or organizing antagonism against others. Unnecessary criticism, even when true. Deliberate annoyance of others, teasing or bullying.

Contempt. Scorn of another's virtue, ability, short-comings, or failings. Prejudice against those we consider inferior, or who consider us inferior, or who seem to threaten our security or position. Ridicule of persons, institutions or ideals.

COVETOUSNESS is the refusal to respect the integrity of other creatures, expressed in the inordinate accumulation of material things; in the use of other persons for our personal advantage; or in the quest for status, power or security at their expense.

Inordinate Ambition. Pursuit of status, power, influence, reputation, or possessions at the expense of the moral law, of other obligations, or of the rights of others. Ruthless or unfair competition. Putting self or family first. Conformity to standards we recognize as wrong or inadequate in order to get ahead. Intrigue or conspiracy for self-advancement.

Domination. Seeking to use or possess others. Overprotection of children; refusal to correct or punish lest we lose their affection; insistence that they conform to our ideal for them contrary to their own vocation. Imposing our will on others by force, guile, whining, or refusal to cooperate. Over-readiness to advise or command; abuse of authority. Patronizing, pauperizing, putting others under a debt of gratitude, or considering ourselves ill-used when others' affection or compliance is not for sale.

Respect of persons, favoritism, partiality, flattery, fawning, or bribery to win support or affection. Refusal to uphold the truth to fulfil duties, to perform good acts, or to defend those wrongfully attacked, because we fear criticism or ridicule, or because we seek to gain the favor or approval of others. Leading, tempting or encouraging another to sin.

Avarice. Inordinate pursuit of wealth or material things. Theft, dishonesty, misrepresentation, or sharing in stolen goods. Cheating in business, taxes, school or games. Making worldly success the goal of our life or the standard for judging others.

Prodigality. Waste of natural resources or personal possessions. Extravagance or living beyond our income, to impress others or to maintain status. Failure to pay debts. Gambling more than we can afford to lose, or to win unearned profits. Unnecessary borrowing or carelessness with others' money. Expenditure on self of what is needed for the welfare of others.

Penuriousness. Undue protection of wealth or security. Selfish insistence on vested interests or on claimed rights. Refusal to support or help those who have a claim on us. Sponging on others. Stinginess. Failure to give due proportion of our income to Church and charity, or of our time and energy to good works. Failure to pay pledges promised to the Church or charities, when able to do so.

GLUTTONY is the overindulgence of natural appetites for food and drink, and by extension the inordinate quest for pleasure or comfort.

Intemperance. Overindulgence in food, drink, smoking, or other physical pleasures. Fastidiousness, fussiness, demanding excessively high standards, or diletantism. Condemnation of some material things or pleasures as evil in themselves, attempting to prohibit their use rather than their abuse.

Lack of Discipline. Failure to use needed means of self-discipline. Neglect of bodily health—not getting sufficient rest, recreation, exercise, or wholesome nourishment. Failure to use or to cooperate with available medical care when ill. Use of sickness as a means of escape from responsibilities.

LUST is the misuse of sex for personal gratification, debasing it from the holy purpose for which God has given it to us.

Unchastity. Violation of the Church's marriage laws. Lack of consideration for one's partner in the use of the marital relationship. Refusal to fulfil the purpose of Holy Matrimony in the bringing forth and giving adequate care to children, or to take our full share in the responsibilities or work involved. Unfaithfulness to one's spouse. Sexual indulgence outside matrimony, in thought or act, alone or with others.

Immodesty. Stimulation of sexual desire in others by word, dress or actions; or in oneself by reading, pictures, or fantasies. Collecting or recounting sexual stories.

Prudery. Fear of sex or condemnation of it as evil in itself. Refusal to seek adequate sexual instruction or the attempt to prevent others from obtaining it. Stimulation of excessive and harmful curiosity by undue secrecy. Repression of sex.

Cruelty. Deliberate infliction of pain, mental or physical. Tormenting of animals.

SLOTH is the refusal to respond to our opportunities for growth, service or sacrifice.

Laziness. Indolence in performing spiritual, mental or physical duties, or neglect of family, business or social obligations or courtesies. Procrastination of disliked tasks. Busyness or triviality to avoid more important commitments. Devotion of excessive time to rest, recreation, amusement, television, light reading or the like. Waste of employer's time, or shoddy or inadequate work.

Indifference. Unconcern over injustice to others, especially that caused by currently accepted social standards; or unmindfulness of the suffering of the world. Failure to become adequately informed on both sides of contemporary issues or on the Christian principles involved. Neglect of duties to state or community. Failure to provide adequately for, or to treat justly those in our employ.

Ignoring of needy, lonely or unpopular persons in our own or the parish family, or in the neighborhood; or unwillingness to minister to them. Insufficient attention to the religious and other needs of our family.

Failure to fulfil our obligation of Christian missionary witness, or to take a full and informed part in the effort to make the Church's unity and holiness a manifest reality on earth.

After you finish your self-examination, pray the following prayer (or another prayer if you wish).

My God, how great are my sins! I wish I had never offended you. If by carelessness or ignorance I have forgotten anything in my self-examination, show it to me now that I may make a good confession. Give me true sorrow of heart for my many sins whereby I have grieved you, and enable me to make a full confession in your church, that I may receive perfect forgiveness, through your infinite goodness. Amen.

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