

ATTACHMENT B

Submission on Sacramental Program for Reconciliation

On 21 July 2016, we sent a letter to the Confraternity for Catholic Doctrine in the Archdiocese of Sydney explaining the reasons why we believe that the sacramental programs for Reconciliation and Eucharist are deficient and in breach of both the Code of Canon Law and the Catechism. *(A copy of this letter can be found at Attachment O).* In this submission, we summarise what we think the sacramental program for Reconciliation should achieve.

The present sacramental program for Reconciliation does not provide children with the information they need to live good Catholic lives and this information is not completely provided in the subsequent years of their schooling.

It needs to be pointed out to children receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time, and to their parents, that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is an essential part of our faith and we should receive the sacrament regularly because: -

- People commit mortal sins and need God's forgiveness;
- They need to have all mortal sins forgiven so that they can receive the Sacrament of Eucharist worthily;
- The regular reception of this Sacrament allows us to examine our consciences not only to see what mortal and venial sins we have been committing, but also to consider how we can act in a more loving way towards our neighbour, in future. It keeps us on the right path.
- Just like other sacraments, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is an important source of sanctifying grace.

More particularly, we need to point out the obligations which the Church places on its members.

Paragraph 1415 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church states: -

"Anyone who desires to receive Christ in Eucharistic communion must be in a state of grace. Anyone aware of having sinned mortally must not receive communion without having received absolution in the sacrament of penance."

Paragraph 1385 states: -

"To respond to this invitation we must prepare ourselves for so great and so holy a moment. St Paul urges us to examine our conscience. 'Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread or drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement upon himself'. 216 Anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion."

Paragraph 1417 states: -

"The Church warmly recommends that the faithful receive Holy Communion each time they participate in the celebration of the Eucharist; she obliges them to do so at least once a year."

Paragraph 1457 states: -

“According to the Church’s command, ‘after having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year’. 56 “Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion, even if he experiences deep contrition, without having first received a sacramental absolution, unless he has a grave reason for receiving communion and there is no possibility of going to Confession.” 57 “Children must go to the sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time.”

58 *“We must not receive the Sacrament of Eucharist if we have committed an unforgiven mortal sin”* (paragraphs 1415 and 1385) *and we must receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist at least once each year* (paragraphs 1417 and 1457). It should be emphasised that mortal sins can only be forgiven by confessing them in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Children should be made aware of this vital link between the two sacraments.

Children who receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist these days generally receive them at age eight. In the past, they received these sacraments at age seven, which is the age of reason. Children were told of the difference between mortal sin and venial sin at this age and this distinction between the two kinds of sin was discussed in more depth in each subsequent year. The idea is to tell them about the whole package and provide a further more detailed explanation in each subsequent year.

So, in those days, the concept of confession did not change from the concept they were initially taught. Today they are taught about the Sacrament of Reconciliation at age eight and then, in high school, they are taught a more complicated version involving mortal and venial sin, but mortal sin and venial sin are given little emphasis. Children therefore tend to follow the simplified practices they learnt in the sacramental program and to give little or no importance to the concept of distinguishing between mortal and venial sin. “If the simpler system was all right for primary school then why is it not all right now?” appears to be the logic children adopt.

In the textbooks “To Know Worship and Love”, year 7, it is taught that there are three elements of a mortal sin. To commit a mortal sin, you must have done something which is a seriously wrong. You must know that you are doing a serious wrong and you must consent to the doing of the wrong. The textbook asks, in regard to consent – “Do we have the ability to act in a different way”. Up to this point, what is said in the text book is “spot on” and extremely simple. If the textbook left it there, students and everyone else would have a clear idea of the elements of a mortal sin.

However, the textbook then goes on to suggest that, if you are placed under any pressure, you may not have given consent. This suggests to the student that, if you are under any pressure or duress of any kind, you may not have committed a mortal sin. This statement is completely unclear and confusing. I know that there is a theological debate going on, at the moment, about so called “mitigating factors”. However, for the purposes of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, it is probably better not to raise these issues. When examining their consciences, it would be better for children or, indeed anyone else, to determine mortal sins on the basis of the three elements and confess them. If not sure if they have committed a mortal sin, the advice should be to confess the sin. To bring in the “mitigating circumstances” concept merely confuses the issue. With all sins, we are under some form of outside pressure. That is generally why we commit sins.

In the Catholic school system, even in high school, we do not give our students a good idea of what sins are mortal sins. The result is that most students and members of our faith regard the bar as being

extremely high. Even children at age eight can commit serious sins. Looking back to our early school days, we can remember instances of other children being bullied by class mates and, in some cases, children being physically and violently assaulted by their peers. Both the bullying and the violent assaults would be mortal sins under the fifth commandment. Hating another child in your class could also be classified as a mortal sin. Stealing a sizeable amount of money from a child's mother's purse would be a mortal sin, even 10 or 20 dollars. \$10 or \$20 is a relatively big amount for a child to steal. Lying to a teacher or to anyone else about another student so that they get blamed for something they did not do is a mortal sin. Missing Mass on Sunday without a reasonable cause is a mortal sin. Children should be introduced briefly to the Ten Commandments during the Sacramental program (as they are in the Sydney sacramental program) and examples of mortal sins they might commit should be given to them. Children, at this stage, will not have a full knowledge of what they need to know. However, they will have the whole basic story which they will get to know more fully with each year after they first do the sacramental program. At the moment they get half the story.

Finally, it is fairly pointless to have a sacramental program on Reconciliation, even if it is in accordance with the Code of Canon Law and the Catechism, if students find almost no one attending the Sacrament of Reconciliation and priests not reminding parishioners of their obligations and urging them to attend Reconciliation. This is a situation which we have in all of our churches today. Parish priests must begin to once again tell parishioners their obligations under Canon Law and the Catechism and to encourage them to attend the Sacrament of Reconciliation regularly.