

Considering Sinful Patterns

Lisa Calderone-Stewart, EoD

Penance might be the sacrament we Catholics are least excited about. And yet, youth ministers report that the sacrament of Reconciliation is often the part of a youth retreat that many teenagers cite as their favorite.

Sometimes, we approach this sacrament with the burden of drafting a list of sins, but this is a fragmented way of looking at our lives. It won't always lead to deeper reflection or new insights. Often, it's more helpful to imagine the pattern of our sinfulness. An examination of conscience that looks at the "big picture of how we sin" might assist young people in this process of discovery and transformation.

Youth leaders at your parish could assist with putting together questions that would stimulate the kind of reflection needed for teens to see the big picture of their sinful habits.

Here's one approach: How might I be hurting myself or others?

You could start by asking your leadership group to brainstorm the kinds of things that teenagers often do to themselves, to others, or to their families—things that are negative patterns or habits. You can help them turn their list into reflection questions. Here are a few examples of sinful habits that hurt myself:

Do I end up frantic and frustrated, trying to do everything last-minute, yet never learning from my mistakes?

How can I get more organized, so I can treat myself better?

Sinful habits that hurt my friends.

Do I betray the secrets of one friend to create a bond with another friend?

How can I start to treat my friends better?

Sinful habits that hurt my family.

Do I take my parents for granted? Do I treat my family with disrespect?

How can I start to treat my family better?

Here's another approach: What is one area of sinfulness that affects all of my relationships and everything I do?

You could give your leadership teens a list of sinful patterns to consider. Request questions that help young people recognize themselves in patterns. More examples:

Do I have a habit of being angry?

Am I impatient or irritable? Do I lose my temper easily? Do I expect too much?

What can I do to become more peaceful and forgiving?

Do I have a habit of being too proud or arrogant?

Do I want everyone to think they need me? Do I always have to be right?

What can I do to become humbler and accepting?

Do I have a habit of being dishonest?

Do I lie or twist the facts to present my spin on reality?

Do I deny what's true?

What can I do to become more truthful and honest? •

Do I have a habit of being jealous?

Do I hate it when someone else to reflect on their sinful habits.

gets a lot of attention? Do

I always need to be noticed?

What can I do to accept being more "ordinary"?

Do I have a habit of being selfish or greedy?

Do I want a lot of stuff I don't really need? Do I focus on myself instead of others? Do I never think about how someone else might feel about a situation?

What can I do to become more generous toward others?

Do I have a habit of being too afraid to act?

Do I worry too much about what others think? Am I too afraid of being criticized?

How can I become more courageous?

Do I have a habit of seeking too much entertainment?

Do I eat too much, party too much, or hate the idea of any discomfort? Do I make jokes about a problem to avoid having to take anything too seriously?

What can I do to increase my self-control or expand my "comfort zone"?

Do I have a habit of being disrespectful?

Do I usually try to get my way by power, force, intimidation, or bold challenge? Do I look down on anyone who is different than I?

What can I do to become more tolerant and accept limitations more easily?

A teen leader who helped with this process told me he started out thinking of all the sins he wanted to remind his friends about. He had someone in mind for every question he wrote. But when it was all finished, he ended up seeing himself in all of them. By the time he spoke with a priest at the Reconciliation service, he had his "make-over" plan ready to go! He told me, "The priest said, 'I don't even have to give you a penance! You came up with your own!'"

Imagine the results if all of us reflected on our sinfulness so thoughtfully! **It.**

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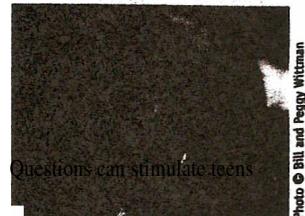


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