

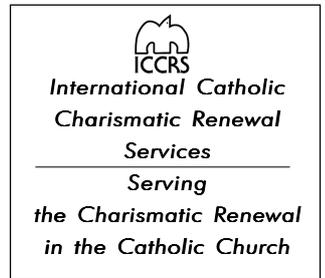
# LEADERSHIP FORMATION

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## Sacramental life, the new challenge for the third millennium

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### TEACHING OUTLINE

**Introduction. The Sacraments: signs and channels of Christ living and working in us**

1. **Baptism and Confirmation – the need for a renewed Christian Initiation**
2. **The Eucharist - for ongoing personal Renewal and Growth in relationships**
3. **Reconciliation and Anointing – for deep and total Healing of spirit, mind and body**
4. **Matrimony and Ordination – for communitarian and ecclesial Service**

**Conclusion: Sacramental Life for Discipleship and Evangelisation**

### Introduction

**T**he sacramental life of the Church is the work of Christ himself, inspired by his words and actions, and actualized by the power of the Holy Spirit (Gal 2:20). Hence the sacrament is efficacious in itself, but becomes effective in each one's life according to the measure of one's faith. The seven Sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life (CCC: 1210-1211). There are three sacraments of Christian initiation, Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist; two sacraments of healing, Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick; and two sacraments for communion and mission, Holy Orders and Matrimony.

### Sacraments of Initiation

**Baptism:** Through the invocation of the Blessed Trinity and the pouring of or immersion in water, a person, child or adult, is exorcised or delivered from the power of Satan, is forgiven all his personal sins, if any, becomes in a special way a son or daughter of God and is incorporated into the body of Christ, the Church. The Sacrament, if received in infancy, becomes all the more effective through a response of faith on reaching maturity. But it is especially through the experience of what is called the Baptism in the Holy Spirit that these extraordinary graces of the sacrament are released, often evidenced by an incredible conversion of one's life. A leader then must constantly look back at that first love or experience and see how faithful has he remained to that initial grace. Has he gone beyond being just born in the Spirit to living and growing in and being led by the Spirit? (Rev 2:4,5; Gal 5:16,25).

**Confirmation:** In contrast with the way we were confirmed as children, many of our youth today are being prepared for this sacrament very much along the lines of the Life in the Spirit Seminar leading to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the prayer for his charisms. Those of us who were con-

firmed without perhaps fully realising what it all meant, have experienced through the same Baptism of the Holy Spirit a reactivation of the powerful graces of this sacrament. But are we now living in a constant awareness of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit within us, both transforming our lives and empowering us, through the various charisms that the Spirit has given to each of us, for the building up of the body of Christ in our parish and for evangelising the world around us in our neighbourhood? (Eph 4:12; Mk 16:15).

**The Eucharist:** In practice our normal sacramental life consists of the weekly (at least) attendance at the Sunday Liturgy of the breaking of bread: the Word of God and the Body of Christ, and in going to the sacrament of reconciliation regularly and often (Jn 6:51,54,56). The Eucharist is the heart and the summit of the Church's life (CCC 1407). Every word and gesture in the Mass is meant to be both the sign of our ongoing relationship of discipleship with the Lord and the channel of his wisdom, love and power flowing to us: coming together as God's family, the penitential rite, singing praises to God, the proclamation of his Word, thanksgiving for the Father's gifts, especially the gift of his Son, the consecration of bread and wine, as the memorial of the sacrifice of the cross, and the receiving of the Lord's body and blood. All this is meant to elicit from us a response of faith in his Word that will give us life in his name (Jn 20:31). With every Eucharist a leader should thus become a more faithful follower and disciple and a more effective leader and evangelist.



### Sacraments of Healing

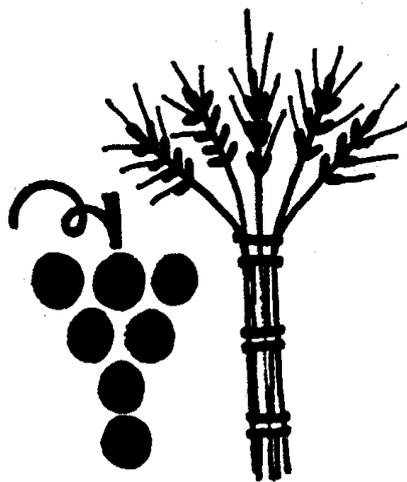
**Reconciliation:** This Sacrament is meant to give us a deep experience and assurance of the forgiveness of our sins, (the most important and basic healing we all need), as we pour out our hearts in repentance to Christ's minister listening to us in perfect secrecy and without the slightest condemnation. One should feel in faith the loving embrace of Abba Father as the prodigal son did and hear in faith the heavens rejoice as we return ever more closely to the Father's house. As its present name suggests, the sacrament should bring about a deeper reconciliation not only with God but also with every person whom I have hurt or who has hurt me, by receiving and offering forgiveness (Jn 20:22,23). The Sacrament thus becomes a school

of holiness as its graces root out our compulsive habits of sin, deliver us from evil influences, heal us of our emotional hurts and often cure us even physically. And the leader through regular recourse to this sacrament will become a more effective and compassionate leader (2Cor 5:18-20).

**Anointing of the Sick:** The first time I used the then new or revised rite of this Sacrament about 28 years ago was when I was called to pray for the Superior General of an Indian religious congregation who was dying of cancer. Our combined prayer of faith resulted in his instant and complete healing (James 5:14,15). The comforting prayers of this sacrament will reveal to us the mind of Christ and his Church regarding our sick and motivate us to pray both for the endurance of their cross and for the healing of their disease in today's culture of hate, violence and death (Jn 10:10; 11:3). But even death, which is man's greatest and final healing, (and the end of his sacramental life), if celebrated solemnly but joyfully, can become a witness of faith in life after death and of hope in the resurrection. The funeral that I celebrated for the first time in this charismatic way drew from my traditional parish priest the compliment, "This is the first truly Christian funeral I have seen", and from the non-christian spectators the plea, "Tell us more about your faith for, if it can make you joyful even in the midst of death, there must be something in it" (2Cor 5:6-8; Jn 11:25).

### Sacraments of one's state of life

**Matrimony:** If there is such a deluge of broken marriages (divorces) and broken homes (single parents) even among Catholics, it is very much because the couples have not been made sufficiently aware of or/and are not well prepared for the expectations and graces of the Sacrament of Matrimony and/or are not living them out in their married life. It is therefore through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and specifically through inner healing retreats for married couples and families, which culminate in a renewal of the marriage commitment, that miracles of a complete renewal of married and



family life, do happen with great benefit to the children and to the community (cf 1Tim 3:4,5).

**Priestly Ordination:** Thousands of priests all over the world have testified to their priestly life and ministry being amazingly renewed through the Baptism of the Spirit, which awakened in them the charisms of their ministerial priesthood: pastoral leadership, bold proclamation and compassionate healing for the service and renewal of their parish community (cf 2Tim 1:6,7). During a clergy retreat, a young priest told me that he had decided to leave the priesthood because he found no fulfilment in it, having nothing to do the whole day except 'saying' a quick Mass for a handful of pious old women. But ever since that retreat, he wrote to me, his parishioners noticed a difference in his lifestyle and in the performance of his priestly 'duties' and started flocking to him for all their needs. His complaint to me now was that he had no more time for himself. That was also the experience of the seminarians and priests who attended our retreat 26 years ago in Kerala, South India, and who now run the largest retreat and evangelisation centre in the Christian world.

### Conclusion

There is some truth in the oft-repeated slogan, 'Our Catholics are sacramentalised, but not evangelised'. But if the sacraments are administered and received with proper understanding and expectant faith, they can become powerful means of evangelisation, renewal and growth. As we become more aware of what the Holy Spirit started in us through the first two Sacraments of Christian Initiation, we will continue to become more Christlike and live a victorious Christian life through the Sacraments of the Eucharist and of Reconciliation, and we will become more empowered by the Holy Spirit through the Sacraments of consecration of our particular state of life to refresh the Church and even to renew the face of the earth in the third millennium. 

## Questions for discussion

1. *Has your charismatic experience diminished or deepened your appreciation for and need of an authentic Sacramental life? In what way/ways?*
2. *In what ways has the Baptism of the Holy Spirit activated the graces of your Baptism and Confirmation?*
3. *In what ways can you help in making the Sunday Eucharist an ongoing renewal and growth for yourself and your parish community?*
4. *In what ways can you help in ministering to the sick and oppressed through the Sacraments of Healing?*
5. *In what ways can your married or religious or priestly vocation be an instrument of evangelisation and service in your parish/diocese?*
6. *In what ways can you bring about a new awareness of the Sacraments for Renewal and Evangelisation in the third millennium?*

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