

SIN, RECONCILIATION AND CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES



As Director of the Office of Life, Justice and Peace, I work with all sorts of organizations, Catholic and not.

Jesus was criticized by the Pharisees and scribes for welcoming sinners and eating with them (LK 15: 13). But we are all sinners; no one is without sin. We tend to want to forget this, dismiss it. It's scary to acknowledge our sins.

What is sin? The Catechism defines it as a "failure in genuine love for God and neighbor..." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1849.)

Our faith calls us to recognize the face of God within every human being and show our love for God by loving our neighbor. When we fail to genuinely love our neighbor – sin – we are failing to genuinely love God. Sin is an offense against God ... Sin sets itself against God's love for us and turns our hearts away from it (CCC 1850). Yes, acknowledging our sins is scary.

The commonly-used Greek word for sin is "hamartia." Hamartia means to miss the mark, as in archery competition. We could say that to sin is to miss the mark of loving our God and neighbor with all our hearts, with charity and justice. It's still sin but not so scary.

There is hope. There is always hope. That is the genius of our faith. St. Paul writes that God has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation; namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

So we miss the mark. What then? We teach our children to admit mistakes, learn from them, and make amends. When we sin we follow these same steps to reconcile ourselves with God. Like a diet to lose weight, reconciliation is a diet for the soul, removing a great weight that wears us down.

Reconciliation is defined as the ending of conflict or renewing of a friendly relationship between disputing people or groups. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation we seek forgiveness to repair our relationship with God. Once forgiven a great weight is removed forever. Acknowledging our sins doesn't have to be scary.

Reconciliation – the ending of conflict between disputing groups – is an element of [peacebuilding](#), one of the many human-focused programs of [Catholic Relief Services](#).

CRS carries out the commitment of the Bishops of the United States to assist the poor and vulnerable overseas. Most of us are aware of its responses to international emergencies in Haiti and Japan. Many are familiar with [Rice Bowl](#) and the [Fair Trade](#) program. Less well known but equally important is CRS's work helping victims of [human trafficking](#) and refugees and [microfinancing](#) and [water/sanitation](#) projects that provide hope to our poor global brothers and sisters.

And peacebuilding, providing hope in places recovering from or on the edge of violence and war, such as Sudan and the Philippines.

(Readings for Fourth Sunday of Lent)



Office of Life, Justice, and Peace