**EARLY CHURCH**

In the Early Church, Penance was seen as part of Baptism. There was no separate Sacrament as we have it today. If a baptised person sinned seriously after Baptism, they were excluded from the Christian Community.

**250 AD**

The Church announced that every sin is forgivable. The sinner:
- had to confess sins to the Bishop;
- had to sit at the back of the Church and wear sackcloth and chains;
- had to leave after the gospel;
- was not permitted to stay for the Eucharist;
- had to seek forgiveness at Easter;
- was forgiven by the Bishop who assigned a penance;
- had to pray and fast till death.

Because these laws were so strict, many people waited until they were dying for the opportunity to be forgiven.

**400 AD**

Penance:
- became a public matter;
- was received once in a lifetime;
- was necessary for the forgiveness of the three serious sins:
  - giving up the faith;
  - committing murder;
  - breaking the marriage vow.

During this time the practice of seeking private spiritual advice developed. In Irish monasteries younger monks sought advice from older members of the community. Penances for different kinds of sins varied. These penances were recorded in special books. St Columban introduced private penance. Gradually the decision was made that people could receive the Sacrament of Penance many times during life.

**1200 AD**

Pope Gregory initiated some changes. ‘Penance’ became known as ‘Confession’.

**1215 AD**

The Lateran Council decreed that Confession from now on was to be in private:
- the form of Absolution was to be: I absolve you …;
- everyone was to receive the Sacrament at least once a year.
The Church later taught that Penance is necessary when serious sin has been committed.

1962 - 1965
- The Second Vatican Council called for a revision of the Rite and formula of the Sacrament of Penance.
- The Sacrament is known as the Sacrament of Penance or the Rite of Reconciliation. In this Sacrament we obtain pardon and mercy from God and are reconciled to the faith community.

Advent 1976
Introduction of three Rites of Reconciliation:
- 1st Rite: Private/individual reconciliation;
- 2nd Rite: Community celebration of God’s forgiveness with individual confession and absolution;
- 3rd Rite: Communal celebration with general confession and absolution.

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