

THE JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY AND RESERVED SINS¹

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Introduction

Right from the beginning of his pontificate, the theme of mercy has occupied a central place in Pope Francis' speeches. In his first Angelus Message, he stressed that God is never tired of forgiving us. Rather, it is we who are tired of asking for his mercy.² In order to give this theme of mercy a special boost, on April 11, 2015, Pope Francis promulgated a bull, *Misericordia Vultus*, to proclaim the extra-ordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy.³ The Jubilee of Mercy is extra-ordinary because Jubilee Years in the Church are usually celebrated every twenty five years to commemorate the Year of the Lord. So we were not to expect another Jubilee Year until 2025. But for Pope Francis, we cannot wait till then because of the urgency of proclaiming the Lord's mercy in a special way.

To promote the Year of Mercy, the Pope made two significant offers that have brought the issue of reserved sin to the front burner. The first is the broadening of the faculty to remit the penalty due to the reserved sin of abortion to all priests, which is ordinarily under the competence of bishops, and the second is the sending out of missionaries of mercy to remit the reserved sins proper to the Apostolic See.⁴ The secular media's coverage of the

news was captured under headlines such as “Pope Francis to allow all Catholics priests to forgive abortion during Holy Year.”, “Pope Francis asks priests to forgive sin of abortion”⁵ etc. Such media captions do not always sufficiently represent the nuances involved in the meaning of reserved sins. They reflect a lack of distinction between reserved sins in themselves and the penalty due to them after the sins have been forgiven.

In order to shed more light on the issue of reserved sin, this paper discusses its theological foundation, nature, and pastoral procedures for the remission of its penalties. But first we take a look at the purpose of the Jubilee Year and how the Pope expounds the theme of mercy in his bull. At the end of these discussions, we shall draw our conclusion.

The Purpose of the Jubilee Year of Mercy

The purpose of the Jubilee Year is embedded in the significance of its opening and closing dates. There are two important events that marked the beginning date of the Jubilee Year on December 8. The first is the liturgical feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. It is a feast that highlights the supremacy of God's mercy over sin. This feast, which is rooted in the Church's interpretation of the proto-evangelium of Gen. 3:15, is God's response to humanity's sin.⁶ He did not abandon us to our sinfulness, but prepared a way for the coming of the saviour by granting Mary the preventive grace from sin. The Immaculate Conception of Mary thus underlines the merciful character of the incarnation of the Son of God. Consequently, she represents our hope of mercy. In her, we see what God has done with his mercy and the possibilities that also open up for us if we trust in his mercy. Just as Christian piety refers to Mary as the Gate of heaven, on December 8 the Holy Door of the Jubilee Year was opened. For Pope Francis, the Holy Door signifies the “Door of Mercy through which anyone who enters will experience the love of God who consoles, pardons and instils hope.”⁷

The second reason why December 8 was chosen is that the date commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the end of Vatican II.

The pope thinks that the council is remarkable because “[t]he Council Fathers strongly perceived, as a true breath of the Holy Spirit, a need to talk to men and women of their time, in a more accessible way.”⁸ Therefore, the Jubilee Year of Mercy wants to promote a new way of communicating the gospel message today. The recourse to mercy as a means for effectively communicating the gospel is a characteristic mark of the current pontificate. Hence, Pope Francis has often described the Church as a field hospital which offers emergency care to bleeding souls who are under the weight and burden of sin.⁹

The ultimate goal of the Jubilee Year is signified in its closing date. It is the feast of Christ the King on November 20, 2016. On that day the Holy Door was sealed. It was sealed “with a sense of gratitude and thanksgiving to the Most Holy Trinity for having granted us an extra-ordinary time of grace.”¹⁰ Christians are to use this grace to proclaim the Lordship of Christ over the entire universe. One could compare the closing of the Holy Door to the *ite missa est* that we hear at the end of the mass. It is a mission to go and share the grace we have received with others. The celebration of the Jubilee is a launching pad to proclaim God's mercy anew so that “everyone may work together to build a brighter future.”¹¹

Jesus as the Face of God's Mercy

Misericordia Vultus (MV) expounds God's mercy with a hermeneutics that is characterised by the unity of the Old and New Testaments. It takes its point of departure from Thomas Aquinas' statement that links God's mercy to his omnipotence: “It is proper of God to exercise mercy and he manifests his omnipotence particularly in this way.”¹² (6). Thereafter, it shows how the zenith of the Old Testament's conception of God's mercy was reached in the psalms. The most significant of these psalms is Psalm 136 which has a refrain that is repeated after each verse: “for his mercy endures forever.” Jesus and his disciples sang this psalm at the Last Supper, hence Matthew wrote: “when they had sung the hymn.” (Matt. 26:30). This is because Psalm 136 is included in the Great Hallel, which are a group of psalms from 118-136, that are usually sung during the Passover or other

important liturgical feasts. For MV, the singing of this psalm is important for understanding the place of mercy in Jesus' revelation of God. It shows how the sacrificial love of Christ for us in the Eucharist flows from God's mercy: "while he was instituting the Eucharist as an everlasting memorial of himself and his paschal sacrifice, he symbolically placed this supreme act of revelation in the light of his mercy." (7)

This act of revelation is rooted in the Trinity. In revealing God's mercy to us, Christ came to show us the inner life of the Trinity which is the mystery of divine love, because God is love (1 John 4: 8,16). Just as he received the Father's love, Jesus totally gave us his love. This love is manifested in a special way in his solicitude with sinners, the poor, the sick, the suffering and the marginalised. Mercy and compassion were characteristic features of his mission. These were evident in the feeding of the crowd, the raising of the only Son of the Widow of Nain, the parable of the lost coin, the prodigal son etc. Christ also teaches us the imperative of being merciful in the parable of the unforgiving servant. If we must receive mercy, then we need to be merciful ourselves. This is how we show that we are children of God. If we are not merciful, like the unforgiving servant, we cut ourselves away from our heritage as sons and daughters of God. This leads *Misericordia Vultus* to speak about the importance of the corporal and spiritual works mercy:

It is my burning desire that, during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. And let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God's mercy. Jesus introduces us to these works of mercy in his preaching so that we can know whether or not we are living as his disciples. Let us rediscover these corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. And let us not forget

the spiritual works of mercy: to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead. (15).

This need to promote more access to the mercy of God has led the pope to broaden the avenues for remitting reserved sins, which is the next section of our discourse.

The Theological Foundation of Reserved Sin

The idea of reserved sin is closely linked to the relationship and interdependence between God's justice and his mercy. Just as mercy is not opposed to justice, so is justice not opposed to mercy.¹³ Every sin we commit offends God's justice, hence the psalmist says, "against you, you alone have I sinned, what is evil in your sight I have done." (Ps. 51:4)¹⁴ The vertical rupture of sin also has a horizontal or a social dimension.¹⁵ Sin separates us from others just as it inflicts injury on us. God's mercy that we receive as a result of our sins thus fulfils a twofold aim of healing us from our sins and bringing us to reconciliation. This is because it is one thing to be healed, and something else to be fully reconciled after healing. Reconciliation involves reparation. In this way mercy does not annul, but helps fulfil the demands of justice. We can explain this with the analogy of a physical wound. When we sustain an injury, and it is healed, a scar still remains even after the healing. This scar represents the temporal punishment due to our forgiven sins, just as it also represents our need for reconciliation with the Church. The very fact that we are given penance to do after confession attests to the presence of a debt to pay for complete reconciliation. This penance, which is called satisfaction, is an indication that there is something that still needs to be done to complete reconciliation. While satisfaction is not a condition for forgiveness, it is, however, part of the process of reconciliation.¹⁶ The practice of indulgence comes from the possibility that we may not completely make satisfaction for our sins or that there may be some minor sins that need to be remitted. Indulgence is the Church's way of making God's mercy more accessible to us, whether we are living or dead.

It is this same act of mercy that extends to the power to remit reserved sin. Technically, it might make more theological and even make more canonical sense or clarity to speak of the remission of reserved penalties rather than reserved sins. This is because as long as one is sorry for any sin, no human power can deny the person forgiveness (Cf. canon 1358). So what really remains or is reserved after confession is the punishment or penalty due to forgiven sin. When the gospel speaks about the power of the Church to forgive sin or retain sin (Cf. John 20:23), retention of sin here can be understood in the case of a person who is not sorry or what canon law refers to as contumacy.¹⁷ The reason why one cannot be forgiven without sorrow for sins is because the constitutive elements for the validity of the sacrament of penance is sorrow for sins, which is the matter of the sacrament of penance, and the form is the power of absolution.¹⁸ Sorrow for sins involves a firm purpose of amendment. That is, one is not only sorry for the sin, but he or she is also resolved to remove any sinful condition and avoid that sin in future. For example, for a person living in concubinage to receive a valid absolution from sin, there should be the resolution to stop the sinful relationship and any form of cohabitation. When this resolution is not present, one cannot talk of an effective sorrow for sin or contrition. So the retention of sin on the part of the Church in this case is to refuse to grant an invalid absolution. But even when the confessor must delay absolution, it should be with mercy and compassion.¹⁹

The Nature of Reserved Sin.

As already noted, the theological foundation of the penalty due to reserved sin arises from the horizontal consequences of sin. Sin also affects the Church. It creates a rupture between us and the Church. So after healing from sin through forgiveness, there is need to reconcile with the Church. The gravity of some sins makes the Church to clearly stipulate their penalty. Those penalties that we incur by the very fact of the sin are called *latae sententiae*, a Latin phrase meaning, 'sentence already passed', that is, by the very fact of committing the act one incurs the penalty, which could be an excommunication, that is, one is no longer in

communion with the Church, or an interdict, which is the same as suspension from certain Church practices or functions. *Latae sententia* applies even when this has not been declared or made public. The other type of penalty is *ferendae sententiae*, meaning 'sentence to be passed.' In this case the sentence is only passed when declared or imposed. Some of these penalties are established by the Roman Pontiff or any of the Roman Dicasteries competent to do so.²⁰ These penalties are called Universal and only the Apostolic See or its delegated authority can remit the punishment. There are other kinds of penalties that are established by Episcopal Conferences, Provincial Councils or diocesan bishops. These are called particular (c.1315).

The censures or penalties that can only be remitted by the Apostolic See are:

1. the desecration of Sacred Species (c. 1367),
2. violence against the Roman Pontiff (c. 1370),
3. attempted absolution of a partner in sin against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue (c. 1378),
4. direct violation of the seal of confession (c. 1388),
5. consecration of a bishop without pontifical mandate (c. 1382), and
6. a priest who assists in the completion of abortion (cc. 1041, n.4, § 1, n.3).

Penalties not reserved to the Apostolic See but which a diocesan bishop may reserve the faculty to remit to himself or his delegates are:

1. *latae sententiae* interdict for lay persons and *latae sententiae* suspension for priests who use physical force against the bishop (c. 1370, §2),
2. *latae sententiae* of completed abortion (c. 1398),
3. and penalty for heresy, apostasy, and schism. Canon 751 defines these three acts thus:

Heresy is the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith, or it is likewise an obstinate doubt concerning same; apostasy is the total

repudiation of the Christian faith; schism is the refusal of submission to the Roman Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him.

Pastoral Procedures for the Remission of Reserved Sins

While the power to absolve a person from sin is proper to the office of sanctification, that of removing the penalty due to reserved sin is proper to the Church's office of governance. Hence while all priests have the capacity to absolve all sins, not all priests have the power to remit penalties except it is delegated to them by the competent authority. However in danger of death, any priest can validly remit all kinds of penalties (c.976). In the exercise of the power to remit censures not reserved to the Holy See, a diocesan bishop has three options. First, he may reserve the remission of all cases to himself, except those which fall under the universal law, or in danger of death, where any priest can remit all penalties. Second, he may grant the faculty to some priests either personally or by virtue of their office. Third, he may grant the faculties to all priests to exercise with or without certain conditions. The conditions that can apply could be the faculty to, for instance, remit the penalty of an abortion only for first instance, which could be single or multiple first instance and not for second and further instances. We have a case of a multiple first instance when one is confessing multiple abortions that have not been previously forgiven and remitted. Second and further instances refer to when the person has previously confessed the sin of abortion, and it has been forgiven and remitted. So any other abortion for the second time or more is what is referred to as second and further instances. A bishop may decide to allow all priests remit the penalty of abortion for a single or a multiple first instance only. He may then delegate the remittance of cases of second and further instances to some priests personally or by virtue of their office.

When a penitent comes to confession with any of the reserved sins whose remission of penalty is proper to the bishop or his delegates or to the Apostolic See, the confessor who does not have the power or delegated authority is to take the following step:²¹

1. The penitent should be told that his or her sins have been forgiven, and that he or she may receive Holy Communion. This is based on the provision of canon 1357 § 1 which states that “Without prejudice to the prescripts of cann. 508 and 976, a confessor can remit in the internal sacramental forum an undeclared *latae sententiae* censure of excommunication or interdict if it is burdensome for the penitent to remain in the state of grave sin during the time necessary for the competent superior to make provision.”

The next three steps are based on the provisions of canon 1357 §2 which states that “In granting the remission, the confessor is to impose on the penitent, under the penalty of reincidence, the obligation of making recourse within a month to the competent superior or to a priest endowed with the faculty and the obligation of obeying his mandates; in the meantime he is to impose a suitable penance and, insofar as it is demanded, reparation of any scandal and damage; however, recourse can also be made through the confessor, without mention of the name.” Consequently, the confessor takes the next three steps

2. He tells the penitent that he or she is still under the penalty or censure even after the absolution until recourse has been made to the competent authority or their delegates for full reinstatement into the Church.
3. The confessor should arrange a fake name or a pseudonym with the facts of the case and request for the remission from the competent authority.
4. The penitent should be given one month to return for the response. If he or she fails to return then the penalty remains. This is what the code refers to as reincidence.

Conclusion

The Jubilee Year of Mercy has provided an occasion for us to once more reflect on the many possibilities of mercy that the Church offers us. The remission of the penalty due to reserved sin is one of such possibilities. The theological foundation and nature of

reserved sin exemplifies the interdependence between God's justice and his mercy. Both are not opposed, rather, they reinforce each other. Hence justice should not be used to undermine mercy, just as mercy should be used to undermine justice. The purpose of mercy is to fulfil the demands of justice. Our reception of God's mercy is to bring us to accomplish his justice in our lives. The injustice that sin causes to God, ourselves and others/the Church is what God's mercy repairs through forgiveness and reconciliation. This is what the Church seeks to do in defining reserved sins and the possibilities of mercy and reconciliation that are open for us. The Church is able to do this because of the ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation that Christ has entrusted to her. Through this ministry, by her office of sanctification, she applies the power of absolution to all those who are sorry for their sins. In a similar vein by her power governance, she grants the remittance of penalties due to forgiven sins. The reservation of the remittance of certain penalties due to some sins is to underline their severity and the need to consciously seek reconciliation. Pope Francis' decision to broaden the faculty for the remission of the penalty due to the reserved sin of abortion to all priests and the sending of the missionaries of mercy is, therefore, a right step in making God's mercy more accessible to all.

We hope that this faculty to all priests for remitting the penalty due to abortion will come to stay even after the Jubilee Year of Mercy.²² This is because if the reservation of certain penalties helps to underline their severity, then more so should the avenues for their remission be made more accessible to all. If the absolution of sins is valid based on the contrition of the penitent, then we can also trust in that contrition to educate the penitent on the severity of such sins and the need to seek forgiveness and reconciliation since contrition should include a firm purpose of amendment to avoid that sin and its occasions.

Appendix:
**Samples of Letters Requesting for the Faculty to Remit
and to Grant the Remittance of a Censure**²³

Below are samples that can be used for the faculty to remit and grant the remittance of a censure or penalty due to reserved sins. The format designed below for request to the bishop or other properly delegated priests can also apply for application to the Holy See through the Apostolic Penitentiary.

**Sample Letter Requesting the grant of Faculty to Remit
a Censure from the Bishop or Vicar General or Dean:**

Your Grace, or Dear Very Rev. Fr. ...

I, the undersigned priest, wish to apply for the faculty to remit the censure of excommunication incurred by Penitent XY whom I heard his confession. During this time the penitent expressed regret for committing the crime of abortion (*or any other undeclared censure not reserved to the Apostolic See*). This is the second time (*or third or fourth e.t.c*) that the penitent is committing this crime. (*If applicable, the penitent stated that this was a case of multiple cases of abortions*). This penitent has manifested complete repentance and withdrawal from contumacy and in my own opinion has shown enough remorse and conversion of heart to receive the remittance of this censure.

I look forward to hearing from you soon. I assure you of my prayers and fraternal support for the common solicitude for the mission of Christ entrusted to the Church.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Fr. XYZ,

Parish priest; assistant parish priest, parochial
Administrator etc.

Date:

Sample Letter of the Grant of the Faculty to Remit the Censure of Abortion

Dear Rev. Fr.,

Your letter dated ... was received by me on ... (*date*). Having reviewed your petition on behalf of the penitent whom you have certified as having fulfilled the requirements for the reception of the remittance of penalty of excommunication incurred as a result of a completed act of an abortion or abortions (*any other undeclared censure not reserved to the Apostolic See*). By the authority given to me, I hereby grant you the faculty to remit the penalty. You are to ensure that the penitent complete the stipulated penance of (*state the penance e.g., praying the five sorrowful ministries for nine days asking God and Our Mother Mary to assist those contemplating committing the crime of abortion to give them a change of heart. Other appropriate penance may be given*).

I assure you of my prayers and blessings upon your apostolate. I entrust you to the care of our Mother Mary who is the Queen of the Apostolate of Christ entrusted to the Church. May she continue to assist you in your priestly ministry.

Yours in Christ

+ Most Rev. Dr.....
Catholic Archbishop/Bishop of
Date:
or

Yours in Christ,

.....
Very Rev. Fr/Rev.Fr.....
The Vicar General/the Dean/ of
Date:

ENDNOTES

1. This paper was originally presented at a talk on the Jubilee Year of Mercy at Holy Cross Cathedral, Benin City, Nigeria on February 9, 2016.
2. “Do not forget this: the Lord never tires of forgiving! It is we who tire of asking forgiveness.” Pope Francis, Angelus, March 17, 2013. Available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2013/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20130317.html (Accessed February 18, 2016)
3. Pope Francis, *Misericordia Vultus*, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, April 11, 2015. Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa,
4. Pope Francis, “Letter on the Granting of Indulgence to the Faithful on the Occasion of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy.” Available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2015/documents/papafrancesco_20150901_lettera-indulgenza-giubileo-misericordia.html. (Accessed February 16, 2016). Pope Francis, *MisericordiaVultus*, 18.
5. See Nigerian Vanguard Online, “Pope Francis to allow all Catholic priests to forgive abortion during Holy Year” September 2, 2015. Available at <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2015/09/pope-francis-to-allow-all-catholic-priests-to-forgive-abortion-during-holy-year/> (Accessed February 14, 2016). Religious New Service Online, “Pope Francis asks priests to forgive sin of abortion.” September 1, 2015. Available at <http://www.religionnews.com/2015/09/01/pope-francis-asks-priests-to-forgive-the-sin-of-abortion/> (Accessed February 14, 2016).
6. Cf. F. Ocariz, L. F Mateo Seco and J. A Riestra. *The Mystery of Jesus Christ*. Translated by Michael Adams and James Gavigan. (Dublin: Four Court Press, 1991). 33-34
7. Pope Francis, *Misericordia Vultus*, 3
8. *Ibid*, 4
9. Antonio Spadaro, S.J. “A Big Open Heart” *Interview with Pope Francis*. America Magazine: September 30, 2013. Available at <http://americamagazine.org/pope-interview> (Accessed on February 18, 2017)

10. Pope Francis, *MisericordiaVultus*, 5
11. *ibid*
12. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 30, a.4
13. Cf. Pope Francis, *MisericordiaVultus*, 20–21
14. For a discussion of the nature and consequences of sin, see Germain Grisez and Russell Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ: A Summary of Christian Moral Principles*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1991. Reprint 2001) 149-197.
15. In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Reconciliation and Penance*, Pope John Paul II speaks about the meaning of the social dimension of sin thus: “To speak of social sin means in the first place to recognize that, by virtue of human solidarity which is as mysterious and intangible as it is real and concrete, each individual's sin in some way affects others. This is the other aspect of that solidarity which on the religious level is developed in the profound and magnificent mystery of the communion of saints, thanks to which it has been possible to say that 'every soul that rises above itself, raises up the world.' To this law of ascent there unfortunately corresponds the law of descent. Consequently one can speak of a communion of sin, whereby a soul that lowers itself through sin drags down with itself the church and, in some way, the whole world. In other words, there is no sin, not even the most intimate and secret one, the most strictly individual one, that exclusively concerns the person committing it. With greater or lesser violence, with greater or lesser harm, every sin has repercussions on the entire ecclesial body and the whole human family. According to this first meaning of the term, every sin can undoubtedly be considered as social sin.” Pope John Paul II, *Reconciliation and Penance*. http://w2.vatican.va/content/johnpaulii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jpii_exh_02121984_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia.html 16 (Accessed February 14, 2016)
16. The Church's practice of not making satisfaction a condition for forgiveness, but important for complete reconciliation leans towards the Thomistic view of satisfaction in preference to that of St. Anselm who sees satisfaction as a condition for forgiveness. In this respect, Thomas writes: “Even this justice depends on the Divine will, requiring satisfaction for sin from

the human race. But if He had willed to free man from sin without any satisfaction, He would not have acted against justice. For a judge, while preserving justice, cannot pardon fault without penalty, if he must visit fault committed against another, for instance, against another man, or against the State, or any Prince in higher authority. But God has no one higher than Himself, for He is the sovereign and common good of the whole universe. *Consequently, if He forgives sin, which has the formality of fault in that it is committed against Himself, He wrongs no one: just as anyone else, overlooking a personal trespass, without satisfaction, acts mercifully and not unjustly.* And so David exclaimed when he sought mercy: "To Thee only have I sinned" (Psalm 50:6), as if to say: "Thou canst pardon me without injustice." *Italics mine.* Summa Theologiae, III, q. 46, a. 2. For St. Anselm's view see Saint Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*. Trans. Sidney Norton Deane (Kindle Edition: 1903) 1.15, pages 42-44. For a discussion on this see Roch Kereszty, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology*. 3rd Edition. (New York: Society of St. Paul, 2002, 2011) 268-278

17. Canon 1358 § 1 states that the "Remission of a censure cannot be granted unless the offender has withdrawn from contumacy in accord with the norm of can. 1347 § 2; remission cannot be denied, however, to a person who withdraws from contumacy." Coriden J, Green T & Heintschel D. Ed. *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary* (Bangalore, India: Theological Publications in India, 1994), 918
18. See Catechism of Catholic Church, 1450-1467. Available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P4D.HTM. Accessed January 12, 2018.
19. Cf. Pope Francis, *Mosericordia Vultus*, 17.
20. The usual competent Roman Dicastery responsible for the remission of reserved sin is the Apostolic Penitentiary.
21. Cf. Colum Daley OP, "Permanent Formation: Dominican Vice Province of Nigeria" February 1991. An unpublished paper which discussed reserved sin.
22. It is significant to note that in the Apostolic Letter, which he published at the end of the Jubilee Year, Pope Francis extended this faculty to all priests when he stated: "Given this need, lest

any obstacle arise between the request for reconciliation and God's forgiveness, I henceforth grant to all priests, in virtue of their ministry, the faculty to absolve those who have committed the sin of procured abortion. The provision I had made in this regard, limited to the duration of the Extraordinary Holy Year, is hereby extended, notwithstanding anything to the contrary. I wish to restate as firmly as I can that abortion is a grave sin, since it puts an end to an innocent life. In the same way, however, I can and must state that there is no sin that God's mercy cannot reach and wipe away when it finds a repentant heart seeking to be reconciled with the Father. May every priest, therefore, be a guide, support and comfort to penitents on this journey of special reconciliation.” Pope Francis, *Misericordia et misera*. Available at http://m.vatican.va/content/francescomobile/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco-lettera-ap_20161120_misericordia-et-misera.html. Accessed January 18, 2018. 12

23. These samples are from the format of the Catholic Archdiocese of Benin City, Nigeria.