

Reconciliation

Pardon and Peace

PROGRAM DIRECTOR'S MANUAL



“Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

Mark 1:15b

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Reconciliation

Pardon and Peace

Implementing the Program

Like preparation for Confirmation and First Communion, parents and the parish catechetical leader, together with the pastor, are responsible for determining when children are ready to receive First Penance and Reconciliation. Readiness for reception of this Sacrament includes knowledge of the person of Jesus and the Gospel message of forgiveness, knowledge of sin and its effect, and understanding and experience of sorrow, forgiveness, and conversion.

National Directory for Catechesis 36B2

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Welcome!



As the Catechetical Leader you have many tasks to perform as you plan and implement your parish Sacrament preparation program. RCL Benziger wants to assist you in your ministry by providing a guide that will help make Sacrament preparation a holy and memorable experience for the children, their families, and the whole parish.

The *Program Director's Manual* is divided into four sections that reflect a whole community catechesis for Penance and Reconciliation.

- **Implementing the Program** provides background and direction for using RCL Benziger's *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace* successfully.
- **Forming the Catechists** suggests ways to assist your catechists in the use of the program. Additionally, reproducible articles are provided that will give the catechists a theology of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.
- **Involving the Parish** offers ideas for involving the whole parish in the Sacrament preparation of the children for First Penance and Reconciliation.
- **Connecting to Families** presents ways to include the whole family in the Sacrament preparation of their children. The section also contains reproducible articles for parent education on the Sacraments.

The material in the *Program Director's Guide* is comprised of four major categories:

- **Articles** about the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation
- **Group sessions** for parish adult education, for catechists, and for parents and their children
- **Suggestions** for implementing the program and involving the parish
- **Other reproducibles** including a scope and sequence chart, a bibliography for families, a bibliography for catechists, a sample letter to parents, bulletin inserts, and more.

May God bless you in your ministry to the children, their families, and the whole parish!

The RCL Benziger Vision

A Creative Perspective



Introduction

Catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation first depends on the person's acknowledgment of God's faithful love, of the existence of sin, of the capacity to commit sin, and of God's power to forgive sin and reconcile the sinner with himself and with the Church. "If we say, 'We are without sin,' we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."⁴²² The normative point of reference for catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is the *Rite of Penance*.⁴²³ (*National Directory for Catechesis* 36B1).

A Vision of Sacramental Catechesis

The tools for catechesis are the Sacred Scripture and the Rites. In addition, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides the basic content of catechesis. The *National Directory for Catechesis* provides a strategic plan.

The following list outlines RCL Benziger's vision of catechesis.

1. *True Mission and Ministry*: We believe that catechesis is a ministry for the entire baptized community. It is a priestly ministry rooted in the priesthood of all the baptized.
2. *An Evangelical Ministry*: We believe that catechesis is a call to proclaim the Good News and for the faithful to live and witness that Good News.
3. *A Ministry of the Entire Community*: We believe that catechesis is one of the primary functions of the parish and that the parish is the catechist.
4. *A Ministry of Initiation*: We believe that catechesis is in the service of initiation. It is part of the gradual process by which people encounter God, join the faith community, and are formed in it.
5. *A Mature Ministry*: We believe that the product of all catechesis is the adult believer of mature faith. All members of a parish are both the subjects and objects of this evangelical ministry.

Endnote references may be found on page 110.

6. *A Ministry of God's Own Pedagogy:* We believe that the ministry of catechesis is more than just instruction or a course of study. We believe that God has provided the pedagogy—a gradual Revelation through creation, through the Incarnation event, and through the history of Salvation. We believe in the divine invitation, the journey of discovery, and the life of witness.
7. *A Ministry of Inculturation:* We believe that there is no message if a person cannot hear it. Therefore, the message we proclaim has to be embedded in culture, language, and images of the people and age groups who are the receivers of the catechetical ministry.
8. *A Trinitarian and Christocentric Ministry:* We believe that the people who receive this ministry must be formed in the life of the Blessed Trinity and in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
9. *A Communal Ministry:* We believe that the Church is the presence of Christ in the world. Catechesis proclaims a message of continuity. Personal Salvation is seen within the context of the life of community. All catechesis springs from and leads to participation in the life of Christ—the life of the Christian community.
10. *A Sacramental Ministry:* Catechesis uses all the tools, signs, symbols, and media to proclaim the Gospel. It reveals God the way God reveals—through the created world. The human senses encounter the footsteps of God, and catechesis helps people follow the way.

A Creative Mission

In the creation of a Sacrament preparation program, it is RCL Benziger's mission to bring together the best and most creative materials

- for those being catechized
- for the formation of the catechists
- for the families in the parish
- and for the whole parish

It is our mission, too, to assist in catechesis by creating materials that raise the bar. It is our conviction that if we answer the call to provide the best and most creative materials, God will provide the spiritual growth.

Aims of the Sacrament Preparation Program

- To help children to understand that participation in the Eucharist is to become a full member of the Body of Christ
- To focus on the prayers and primary symbols of the liturgy as the starting point for sacramental catechesis
- To introduce the idea and importance of mystagogy and lifelong reflection
- To encourage celebration of initiation during the Paschal season. Even when Christian initiation is celebrated outside the usual time, the text for these Sunday Masses of the Easter season may be used (see RCIA 247).
- To enable the catechists to become familiar with the liturgical documents and the Rites
- To provide a process for parents and other adults to actively participate in the Sacrament preparation of the children
- To stress the idea of service to the community as a way of living out the call of Baptism
- To acknowledge the place of the Eucharist in the life of the Church

Catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

Taking direction from the *National Directory for Catechesis*, RCL Benziger presents a catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation that

- emphasizes God's love for creation and his plan for the Salvation of all
- acknowledges God's unconditional love
- teaches that God desires everyone to be reconciled to him
- portrays God as a loving Father who runs out to embrace the repentant sinner
- recognizes the existence of good and evil in the world and a person's capacity to choose between right and wrong
- teaches the steps of the Rite of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation: repentance, confession, acceptance of an act of penance, and absolution
- explores the meaning of the symbols, prayers, and gestures of Penance and Reconciliation
- uses Scripture stories as a basis for catechesis on Penance and Reconciliation
- makes the connection between Baptism and Penance and Reconciliation
- points to Reconciliation as a Sacrament of ongoing conversion
- challenges Christians to be forgiving even as they are forgiven
- encourages regular celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

Readiness for the Reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

“Like preparation for Confirmation and First Communion, parents and the parish catechetical leader, together with the pastor, are responsible for determining when children are ready to receive First Penance and Reconciliation. Readiness for reception of this Sacrament includes knowledge of the person of Jesus and the Gospel message of forgiveness, knowledge of sin and its effect, and understanding and experience of sorrow, forgiveness, and conversion.”

“In the Latin Church, children must receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation for the first time prior to their first reception of the Eucharist.”⁴³⁵ (*National Directory for Catechesis* 36B2).

Since the family is so intimately involved in the moral formation of the children, it is imperative that the family be closely involved in the preparation of the children for the celebration of the Sacraments. The family should also be involved in discerning the child’s readiness for the Sacraments.

The following may be used as a guide to determine a child’s readiness for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Remember that actions speak louder than words. A child’s understanding of these basic concepts does not necessarily have to be articulated aloud. Make sure that the child understands that

- sin is freely choosing to do wrong
- sin hurts both the sinner and the community
- Penance and Reconciliation pardons sins committed after Baptism and brings the sinner back to God and the community
- Penance and Reconciliation brings an increase of spiritual strength for Christians
- followers of Christ are called to continual conversion and renewal
- God’s mercy is celebrated in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation
- to receive God’s mercy, we must first be sorry for our sins and desire not to sin again
- we do penance such as prayers or actions, which forms good habits of virtue
- the priest forgives in the name of Christ and the Church

Endnote references may be found on page 110.

Scope and Sequence

Chapter	Faith Summary	Catechetical Documents
1 God's Love	Reconciliation begins with God's great love for us. Jesus came to bring all people back to God's love. The Sacrament of Baptism celebrates the saving love of God. Vocabulary: Original Sin, Baptism, grace	*NDC 35B, 36A1, 36A3b.1, 36B1, 36B2, 42D, 42E, 48E2 **CCC 416-418, 804, 985
2 Loving God	In our Covenant with God we follow the Ten Commandments. God's Law requires us to love God and others. Following God's Law leads to eternal life. Vocabulary: Covenant, Ten Commandments, eternal life, Great Commandment	NDC 35B, 36A3b.1, 36B1, 42E, 44, 48E2 CCC 45, 73, 1980, 2081
3 Refusing to Love	Sin is a deliberate choice to act in opposition to God's will. Sin hurts one's relationship with God and with others. The Church celebrates God's forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Vocabulary: free will, sin, mortal sin, venial sin, mercy, Penance, Reconciliation, social sin	NDC 35B, 36A3b.1, 36B1, 42D, 42E, 43D, 48E2 CCC 1486, 1711, 1871
4 Loving Choices	God gives everyone a conscience to guide his or her moral choices. Prayer, Scripture, and the teaching of Christ and the Church are aids in forming one's conscience. A prayerful examination of conscience is an important step in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Vocabulary: conscience, examination of conscience	NDC 35B, 36A3b.1, 36B1, 36B2, 42C, 42E, 44, 48E2 CCC 1713, 1798, 1802
5 Returning to Love	To return to God's friendship when you sin, you must: be sorry for your sins and ask God's forgiveness; confess your sins to a priest; do the penance the priest gives you. Vocabulary: contrition, penance	NDC 35B, 36A3b.1, 36B1, 36B2, 48E2 CCC 1490, 1491, 1493
6 Celebrating God's Love	In the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, sins are wiped away by God's forgiving love. The priest acts in the place of Christ. The priest gives absolution from sin in the name of God and the Church. Vocabulary: penitent, confess, absolution, satisfaction	NDC 35B, 36A3b.1, 36B1, 36B2, 48E2 CCC 1491, 1495, 1497
7 Showing Love	Through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, God: forgives sin; restores our relationship with God and the Church community; gives us grace to practice virtue and to extend forgiveness to others. Vocabulary: conversion, virtue	NDC 35B, 36A3b.1, 36B1, 36B2, 42A, 42B, 48E2 CCC 1490, 1496, 1833
8 Living Reconciliation	The Sacraments are a mystery. Penance and Reconciliation renews Baptism. Sacraments are a call to lifelong conversion. Vocabulary: conversion	NDC 35B, 35D, 36B1, 36B2, 48E2 CCC 1075, 1131

* National Directory for Catechesis (NDC) **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)

Scripture	Living the Faith	Liturgy and Prayer
The Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:4-6) Romans 8:35 1 John 4:16 Psalm 100:3,5	Tell our own story of God's love for us. Write about or draw how we will show our love for others. Make a list of things we associate with Baptism. Home and Family Talk as a family about the ways God shows love for us. Share memories of our Baptism.	Psalm 100:3,5
The Greatest Commandment (Luke 10:25-28) Psalm 143:10 Psalm 119:165 Leviticus 26:12 Psalm 19:7,8,14	Write about or draw ways to show love for God and others. In a maze follow a path to love by reviewing the Great Commandment. Write about how we can be Good Samaritans. Make road signs on a path to love. Home and Family Discuss ways to follow the Great Commandment. Together create a list of family commandments to help love God and others.	Psalm 19:7,8,14
The Judgment of the Nations (Matthew 25:41-45) Psalm 95:7-8	Perform a skit that shows people saying <i>No</i> to God's love, and then another that shows loving choices. Distinguish sins from accidents or mistakes. Perform a skit that shows parishioners helping the "least ones" in the community. Home and Family Ask family for ways to say <i>No</i> to sin and <i>Yes</i> to love. As a family, plan ways to help people who need clothes or food.	<i>Penitential Act; Rite of Penance, Appendix II, 46</i>
The Two Foundations (Matthew 7:24-27) Psalm 119:57 Ephesians 5:8-9	Act out a scene in which people make good or bad choices. Distinguish between choices built on "rock" and choices built on "sand." Discuss examples of moral choices and the consequences for each choice. Home and Family Share an important choice made today and how the choice was made. Discuss moral decisions made by characters in TV shows and in movies.	<i>Rite of Penance, Appendix II, 50</i>
The Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:17-24) Psalm 41:5 Psalm 25:4-5	Make a "Welcome Home" banner as a reminder that God's love always is waiting to welcome us home. Write a thank-you note to God. Write or talk about ways to make up for wrong choices. Home and Family Talk about how family members ask for and offer forgiveness when they have hurt each other. As a family, participate in a parish penitential service.	<i>Rite of Penance 45</i>
Zacchaeus the Tax Collector (Luke 19:1-10) Psalm 32:1	With a teacher or parent, practice the steps of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Using words or pictures, make a reminder card of these steps. Home and Family Talk about the different ways the Sacrament of Reconciliation has been experienced by family members. Plan a family celebration for the day that the Sacrament is celebrated for the first time.	<i>Rite of Penance 60</i>
The Pardon of the Sinful Woman (Luke 7:36-39, 44-47) 1 John 4:11 Psalm 119:10-11	Make a list of virtues and tell how we can practice them. List or draw good things that come from the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Make a bookmark as a reminder that being forgiven and forgiving others are connected. Home and Family Discuss times when being forgiven led us to be forgiving of others. Make refrigerator magnets to remind the family of virtues to practice.	<i>Rite of Penance 99</i>
The Ministry of Reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17-21) Luke 5:20 Luke 15:10	Write about or draw what you remember about celebrating the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Write about how celebrating the Sacrament helps us to become ambassadors for Christ. Home and Family Discuss how the family can act as ambassadors of reconciliation. Share memories of family celebrations of the Sacrament.	2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Components and Features of *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace*



Student Editions English

Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace Primary

Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace Intermediate

Student Edition Bilingual (Spanish)

Reconciliación: Perdón y paz Primary

Each of the student texts follows the same lesson process:

- **Invitation** Life experience to introduce the chapter theme.
- **Scripture** Scripture as the basis for the doctrinal content.
- **Development** The Church's teaching on the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.
- **Application** An activity for the children to apply what they have learned to their own lives.
- **Prayer** A group prayer related to the theme of the chapter.
- **Home and Family** A connection to family with home activities.

Each text contains a special eighth session. The children gather after the celebration of the Sacrament for a mystical reflection—a liturgical catechesis which aims at deepening the child's understanding of the Sacrament. The *National Directory for Catechesis* calls for this catechesis when it states the following: [Sacramental catechesis] “enables the believer to reflect on the meaning of the Sacrament received by implementing a thorough experience of *mystagogia* following the celebration . . . (NDC 35B).”

Each text includes: **A Little Catechism** which provides summaries of Church doctrine, the Mass and the Rite of Penance, tips on living a Christian life, and prayers to know; a **Glossary** of new words; and **Music Lyrics**. The student texts include the following special features: **Parish Connection, Catholic Practices, This We Believe, We Celebrate, Word of God, and Let's Talk**.

Catechist Editions (English and Bilingual) For each student edition there is a full catechist edition with reduced student pages, full teaching notes, and additional reproducible activities.

Program Director's Guide Provides the program director background and practical suggestions, as well as tools for implementing the program, forming the catechists, involving the parish, and connecting to families.

Music CD Music in English and Spanish.

Models for Using RCL Benziger's *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace*



Parishes all over the country use varied approaches to prepare children for the celebration of the Sacraments. A common denominator among these approaches is the need for family involvement in the preparation of the children. This family component is strongly recommended by the nation's bishops. The *National Directory for Catechesis* clearly states:

“Since the family is intimately involved in the preparation of a child's moral conscience and ordinarily integrates the child into the wider ecclesial communities, parents should be involved with the formation of their children for this Sacrament [Penance and Reconciliation] so that they can affirm and reinforce frequent participation in the Sacraments. They orient the child toward God and encourage continual growth in the understanding of God's mercy and love” (*National Directory for Catechesis* 36B2).

RCL Benziger offers the following Sacrament preparation models for your consideration.

Traditional Classroom Model

In the parochial school or parish religious education program, Sacramental catechesis most often will take place within the setting of the regularly scheduled religion class. When this is done it is important to coordinate the use of the Sacrament texts with the presentation of the core religion curriculum. RCL Benziger's *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace* has seven chapters which should be taught consecutively prior to First Penance and Reconciliation. The eighth chapter is meant to be taught *after* the celebration of the Sacrament.

The families may be involved in their children's Sacramental formation by attendance at meetings, practices, and liturgies. Opportunities for family involvement are increased through the use of the Home and Family pages, which are sent home after each session. In addition to the children's sessions, consider bringing the children and families together for the Family Experience Days.

Family Model

The material in the children's books is taught in the home and the children and their families are brought together for four sessions as a large group gathering. See pages 75-89 of this *Program Director's Manual* for a complete outline of the four sessions. Pages 99-109 contain reproducible articles and information for families.

This model also can be effective by implementing the program in neighborhood clusters. In this mode several families gather to cover the material in the children's books. As with the single family model, opportunities for sessions with the larger parish community should be provided.

Intergenerational Model

Parents are not the only ones who can prepare their children for the Sacraments. Grandparents, older siblings, and extended family members and friends may also be included in the children's preparation. Use the Family Experience Days on pages 75-98 as an experience for the whole family. You may wish to invite and include interested parishioners in the process as well.

Whole Community Catechesis

The time of preparation of the children for First Penance and Reconciliation is a perfect time to offer adult education for the whole parish.

“The witness of the Christian community—particularly the parish, family, parents, and catechists—is an important element in catechetical methodology. . . . The effectiveness of catechesis depends to a great extent on the vitality of the Christian community in which it is given” (*National Directory for Catechesis* 29C).

To that end it is important to form the whole parish community and offer opportunities to deepen the understanding of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation for everyone in the parish.

See page 53 in this *Program Director's Manual* for ideas and suggestions for involving the whole parish. Sample Bulletin Inserts on the themes of Penance and Reconciliation can be found in reproducible form on pages 56-59 of this Guide. A detailed session for the adults in the parish on the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is found on pages 60-67.

The parish community should be kept updated on the children's progress toward the celebration of the Sacraments. What better way than to remind the parish that the whole parish community catechizes the children by the way they witness the Gospel and the importance of the Sacraments in their lives. Seeking to deepen their own understanding of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation will speak volumes to the young people of the parish.

Roles of the Family, the Catechist, and the Parish



Role of the Family

“Parents are the most influential agents of catechesis for their children. They have a unique responsibility for the education of their children; they are the first educators, or catechists. They catechize primarily by the witness of their Christian lives and by their love for the faith” (*National Directory for Catechesis* 54C).

The role of the family in the religious formation of a child is both a privilege and a duty. At Baptism the family speaks for the children and asks entrance into the Church. The role that the family plays in Baptism is continued in the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. It is important to integrate the family into the Sacrament preparation at all stages.

At the end of each lesson in the student book there is a Home and Family page which is sent home with the student. This page contains a note to the family about what the child learned in the lesson, questions for discussion at home, and some activities to reinforce the lesson. Family Experience Days are another way in which this program integrates the family.

Role of the Catechist

The role of the catechist is to be a guide for the child. The catechist seeks not only to teach the child the necessary knowledge for the celebration of the Sacrament, but also helps the child to grow in a relationship with God.

Role of the Parish

The whole parish community shares responsibility for the religious education of the children. Through its faithful witness to the Gospels, the parish is called to help the children understand the nature of sin and be examples of God’s forgiveness. The parish “intercedes for them and helps penitents with maternal care and solicitude to acknowledge and confess their sins and to obtain the mercy of God, who alone can forgive sins” (*Rite of Penance* 8).

Use the suggested parish bulletin announcements and inserts found on pages 54-59 to keep the parish informed and involved.

A Director's Work Is Never Done!



Use the following list of tasks as a guide to planning your parish Sacrament preparation program. Under "Date," fill in the target date for finishing the task. When it's done, put a check mark in the "Done" column and breathe a sigh of relief!

Task	Date	Done
Before the program begins:		
• Read through the student edition and catechist edition of <i>Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace</i> .		
• Read through the <i>Program Director's Manual</i> and tab the material that you will use as you plan your program.		
• Meet with your Sacrament preparation team to do the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set the date for the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. 		
• Decide on the model(s) for Sacramental preparation that best fit(s) your parish. (See pages 15-16 in this manual for suggested models.)		
• Schedule the sessions for the children and/or sessions for parents and children. Reserve the parish facilities.		
• Publicize the program in the parish.		
• Hold registration for the program.		
• Conduct family interviews. (See page 20 of this guide.)		
• Place an order with RCL Benziger for <i>Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace</i> .		
Primary _____ Student _____ Catechist Intermediate _____ Student _____ Catechist Bilingual Primary _____ Student _____ Catechist Music CD _____		
• Recruit catechists and conduct an orientation session. (See pages 31-33 of the manual.) Copy the articles and bibliography for your catechists. (See pages 38-50 in this manual.)		
• Send a welcome letter to each family. (See page 21 of this manual.)		
• Schedule the Family Experience Days if these are to be a part of your program. (See pages 75-98 of this manual.)		
• Schedule the Parish Enrichment Session if this is to be a part of your program. (See pages 60-67 in this manual.)		
• Form a team to assist with the planning and implementation of the Family Experience Days and the Parish Enrichment Session. Meet with your team to plan each session.		

Task	Date	Done
After the program is underway:		
• Use the bulletin announcements to inform the parish about the program. (See pages 54-55 in this manual.)		
• Copy the bulletin inserts and arrange for them to be inserted into the parish bulletin. (See pages 56-59 of this manual.)		
• Copy handouts needed for each of the Family Experience Days and the Parish Enrichment Session.		
• Meet with the pastor, parish liturgists, musicians, and team members to plan the celebration of First Penance and Reconciliation.		
After the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation:		
• Invite the children back for the eighth session (mystagogy) as outlined in their books.		
• Invite the children and their families to a Family Experience Day to reflect back on the experience of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This is part of the mystagogy on the Sacrament. (See pages 94-98 of this manual.)		

Program Evaluation



Use the following model to create evaluation forms to distribute during the Family Experience Days, the Catechist Formation sessions, and the Parish Enrichment session.

In an effort to improve our program, please comment on the following.

- **Scheduling:** Was the session conveniently scheduled?

- **Hospitality:** Were the participants made to feel welcome?

- **Environment:** Was the environment (room, seating, temperature, etc.) conducive to learning? _____

- **Format:** Was enough time/too much time given for the session? Was the pace appropriate? _____

- **Presentation:** Was the presentation effective in content, style, and delivery? _____

- **Prayer:** Were the prayer session(s) reflective? inviting? worshipful?

- **Relevance:** Did the session sufficiently address the topic?

- **Please add other comments and suggestions.**

Family Letter



Dear Family,

An exciting and important event lies ahead for your child and you. He or she will be celebrating the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation this year. As your child prepares to celebrate the Sacrament, you, too, have a role to play. At Baptism you spoke for your child and promised to bring him or her up in the faith. This duty includes not only the daily example you give of Christian living, but it also presumes your presence on your child's journey to First Penance and Reconciliation.

Your child will be using RCL Benziger's *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace* to prepare for this Sacrament. There are a number of ways for you to share in your child's preparation. At the end of each chapter, he or she will bring home a page entitled Home and Family. This page consists of four parts:

- **Family Note** is a brief explanation about what your child learned in the chapter.
- **On Your Own** suggests an activity for your child to do individually that relates to the material in the chapter. Encourage him or her to do the activity.
- **With Your Family** is an activity that your family can do together to reinforce your child's learning.
- **Family Chat** suggests a topic for family discussion.

With your guidance and with the support of the entire faith community, your child's celebration of First Penance and Reconciliation will be an enriching experience for everyone. Please contact me if you have any questions or ideas to share during this important preparation time.

Sincerely,

Note: Give this letter to students' families at registration time, or send it home on the first day of class.

Family Interview



Purpose

The purpose of the family interview is twofold. Firstly, it allows the child and his or her family to meet someone from the parish catechetical staff in an informal setting and to express any needs, concerns, or questions about the process. Secondly, it gives the parish catechetical staff a chance to get to know the children and their families, to review what is expected of them, to ask for their commitment to the process, and to address any special needs that may be present. The interviews should be conducted in a relaxed, informal, and private setting. The atmosphere should feel welcoming.

Who Is Involved

Each family with a child preparing for the Sacraments should be interviewed. The child should be present with his or her family. The interview may be conducted by the pastor, program director, or catechist. If the family is uncomfortable conversing in English, bilingual interpreters should be provided.

Sample Questions

Prepare beforehand a list of questions to ask the children and a list of questions for parents. State the questions in your own words and listen carefully to their responses. Avoid the impression of giving a test.

Sample Questions for Children What is your favorite subject in school? What kinds of things do you like to do on the weekends? Are you looking forward to celebrating the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation? Do you have any questions about it? Do you know any prayers by heart? Do you know any stories about Jesus? What is your favorite? Do you have any questions?

Sample Questions for Parents Have you been in the parish long? What would you like your child to understand about the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation? Are there any special needs your child has that need to be addressed in the program? Would you be interested in learning more about the Sacraments? Do you have any questions about what is expected of your child? Would you be interested in helping with the program in some way?

The RCIA and Sacrament Preparation



The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) is the Church's way of leading adults and children of catechetical age to the Sacraments of Initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. It contains the vision of Christian initiation. Moreover, it is the model for all catechesis¹ (see *General Directory for Catechesis* 59, 90-91). The RCIA has much to say regarding Sacramental catechesis. Furthermore, unbaptized children (and some baptized) who present themselves for the Sacraments participate in the RCIA. Read the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (also see article 2). Here is a brief overview.

Journey of Conversion: Leading to Paschal Mystery

The RCIA is a journey of conversion which incorporates candidates into the mystery of Christ. The RCIA is a faith-filled journey where candidates learn the Christian way of life. It is like an apprenticeship. The journey culminates with the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil.

Periods and Rites of the Journey

The RCIA is a process that includes periods of formation as well as rites. Each period of formation has a different purpose. The formation process is gradual and complete. It begins with evangelization, then “suitable catechesis,” spiritual reflection, and finally, mystagogy.

In particular, mystagogical reflections after the reception of the Sacraments are an important element of all Sacramental catechesis. Mystagogy helps children better understand the Sacraments they have celebrated.

The liturgical rites are the cornerstones of the entire process. They mark the progress of the candidates, as well as form them in the faith.

Frequently Asked Questions

- *Why do children in the RCIA receive all three Sacraments of Initiation?*
The Church holds the unity of the Sacraments of Initiation as preeminent. Children of catechetical age have “attained the use of reason” and are capable of a personal faith. They must receive Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist at the same celebration (*Code of Canon Law*, canons 852, 866). They must be confirmed, unless a grave reason prevents it.

- *Should children in the catechumenate process be in the parish Religious Education program?*

Discern the needs of the child to determine what is best for her or him. The typical religious education program is designed for baptized, catechized Catholic children. In most circumstances the parish religious education program would not be appropriate for an unbaptized, uncatechized child.

The RICA With Children and Youth

Children in the parish mean children celebrating Sacraments. In today's diverse and transitory society, we have children in all different stages and phases of faith development. More specifically, most parishes have children of catechetical age who are unbaptized, older baptized children who have not received Eucharist, and many other variations of Sacramental need and readiness.

The RCIA as adapted for children and youth meets the needs of some of these children. It is part of the parish RCIA process (see article 1), and it is primarily for unbaptized children. This is for children who seek initiation into the Catholic community, including:

- unbaptized children who have attained the use of reason (see RCIA 252)
- children baptized in another Christian Church who seek full communion into the Catholic Church (see RCIA 400)
- some children who were baptized as infants in the Roman Catholic Church, "but did not receive further catechetical formation" (see RCIA 400)

Although there are many different types and categories of children in the parish, it is important to integrate the children and have a holistic approach to Sacramental ministry with children. Children who are in the catechumenate process must also interact with their peers "who are already baptized and are preparing for Confirmation and Eucharist" (RCIA 254).

Consider the following when preparing for the catechumenate with children and youth and Sacrament preparation for the baptized:

- Form a children's catechumenate group (see RCIA 255).
- Some of the catechetical formation you do with children preparing for Confirmation, Eucharist, and Penance and Reconciliation might also be appropriate for children in catechumenate (see RCIA, National Statute, 19).
- Most traditional religious education programs are designed for baptized, catechized Roman Catholic children.
- Sponsoring families are a good way for catechumenate families to be integrated into the parish community.

Collaboration between Religious Education, RCIA, and Youth Ministry will make for good Sacrament preparation for the children and their families.

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation and the RCIA with Children and Youth

The Church desires that the baptized celebrate Penance and Reconciliation, the Sacrament of pardon and peace, as often as possible. All baptized children in the RCIA are to receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation prior to their reception into the Church and the celebration of Eucharist. All baptized Catholic children in the Religious Education program are to celebrate Penance and Reconciliation before First Eucharist (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1457, the *Code of Canon Law*, canon 914 with commentary “Penance before First Communion”, and RCIA National Statute 36.)

In addition, the unbaptized children in the catechumenate should receive catechesis on the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, but they do not celebrate the Sacrament until after their Baptism. Baptism is the primary Sacrament of conversion and forgiveness of sin. Penance and Reconciliation renews Baptism.

Moreover, catechesis on the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is important for all the children in the RCIA. Certainly, God’s call to conversion through Jesus Christ is part of the “suitable catechesis” that children in the catechumenate receive (see RCIA 75). Jesus’ teaching on repentance and the forgiveness of sin would also be part of their formation in the Christian way of life.

Catechesis on all the Sacraments should be part of the catechumenate with children and youth. Baptized children would receive catechesis for the immediate reception of the Sacrament, whereas the unbaptized children would be catechized for a more remote celebration of Penance and Reconciliation.

For baptized children in the RCIA, preparation for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation includes celebration of a penitential rite(s). Found in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (see RCIA 291–303 and 459–472), the penitential rites foster a spirit of deeper conversion and prepare the candidates for the later celebration of the Sacrament. Similarly, the unbaptized children celebrate the Scrutinies (see RCIA 141ff and 291–303), which have prayers of exorcism not appropriate for the baptized.

The preparatory catechesis on Penance and Reconciliation found in *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace* is suitable and helpful for children in the catechumenate. Have children from the RCIA join with children from the Religious Education program, but remember to honor the distinction between the baptized and the unbaptized.

The Role of the Family in the RCIA with Children and Youth

The catechumenate is a journey of conversion for the child. By hearing the Good News and living in the midst of the Christian community, the child deepens her or his relationship with the living God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Parents need to be involved when their child is undertaking such a serious, life-changing journey.

Indeed the Church asks conversion of the children (see RCIA 253), and this conversion affects the entire family. Family systems theory, as well as plain old common sense, tells us that when one member of the family undergoes a change, the entire family unit is affected. (For an overview of family systems theory see Roberta M. Gilbert, M.D., *Extraordinary Relationships: A New Way of Thinking About Human Interactions* [New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1992].) Therefore, if at all possible, parents walk alongside the child on the faith journey.

Another reason parents are to be involved in the process is that often they themselves have been away from Church and need to be re-evangelized. The parents may also be inquiring in the RCIA. Frequently parents need as much formation as the child. Although the process focuses on the child, “the formation they receive depends . . . on the influence of their parents” (RCIA 254). Furthermore, “[t]he period of initiation will also provide a good opportunity for the family to have contact with priests and catechists” and other members of the parish (RCIA 254.2). Initiation is not just a matter of welcoming and forming an individual child; it is a matter of welcoming an entire family unit.

Here are some ways parents and family members can be involved in the process of initiation:

- Parents and siblings participate in catechumenal sessions which are intergenerational in design. The family sessions given in this *Program Director’s Manual* offer a good example.
- Parents present their children at the various rites of initiation, including giving testimony on behalf of their child.
- Parents participate in the preparation sessions and mystagogical sessions for the rites.
- Parents assist in discernment by giving input in pastoral interviews and family discussions.
- Parents serve as first catechists and role models by worshipping, praying, and serving in the community.

If parents cannot be involved in the process, “their place should be taken by ‘sponsors’” (RCIA 260). Having family sponsors even when parents are involved in the process is a great way to evangelize and build community.

Guidelines for Discernment in the RCIA With Children and Youth

One of the most important issues in the ministry of the RCIA with children and youth is discernment. Discernment on several different levels is necessary.

Discerning Who Belongs in the Catechumenate

An initial pastoral interview with the family is very important. It is an opportunity to get to know the family and begin to build a trusting relationship. Discuss why the child and the parents seek the Sacraments. What is their religious history? What does the child know of God, Jesus, and the Church? This information will help you and the parents discern together whether the RCIA is what the child needs. If the child is a baptized Catholic, she or he may only need Sacramental catechesis. Also, this is a time to convey the parish expectations and to briefly describe the RCIA.

Discerning What Type of Catechetical Formation Is Needed

Each child seeking the Sacraments has a unique background and different catechetical needs. The uncatechized children need an extended period of evangelization. Catechized children need less time. Some children may prefer to participate in the parish Religious Education program in addition to the RCIA. Older children need to be connected with parish youth ministry. All catechumens, and usually the baptized candidates, are dismissed from the Mass prior to the Liturgy of the Eucharist for continued reflection on and discussion of God's Word (see RCIA 75.1 and 75.3).

Discerning Who Is Ready for the Major Liturgical Rites of the RCIA, Including the Sacraments of Initiation

The Church gives fairly clear prerequisites for advancement through each of the periods of initiation. You may discern readiness for the next step through pastoral interviews or by giving parents discernment questions to discuss with the child at home. Some parishes also design a group process with sponsors, godparents, and catechists giving testimony. Study the rite closely to better understand the Church's focus for each period.

Prior to the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens, the prerequisite is: initial conversion has taken place as evidenced by the beginnings of a spiritual and prayer life, and that the fundamentals of Christian teaching have taken root (see RCIA 42).

Prior to the Rite of Election (election indicates readiness for Sacraments) there is conversion of mind and action, and an acquaintance with Christian teaching (see RCIA 120).

Using Music in Sacrament Preparation



Music is an important part of any Sacrament preparation program. Children are engaged through all of their senses. A program preparing children for the Sacraments should be rich in sensory stimulation. Children respond to visual images such as illustrations and photographs. They respond to gestures and touch, such as signings, laying on of hands, a handshake as a sign of peace, or an anointing with oil. They respond to a lighted candle, the smell of incense, and the sound of music.

RCL Benziger's *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace* provides a music CD which is an integral part of the program. The CD contains a repertoire selected from music that is popular in parish settings. It is hoped that the children will learn music that is currently being used in liturgical settings in their parish.

The music CD is composed of 16 songs with vocals. It also contains an instrumental version of the songs. The music on the CD is in English, Spanish, and Bilingual for use in parishes with various needs. Each chapter in the Catechist Edition suggests songs from the music CD that reinforces the theme of the lesson and enhances the prayer time.

The following are suggestions for making the best use of the music CD:

- Listen to all of the selections on the CD. Decide which songs might enhance or support the theme of a particular session or closing prayer.
- Play the vocal rendition of the song to help the children learn the lyrics.
- Use the instrumental version to gather the children for class or for prayer. This will help them become familiar with the melody.
- Encourage the children to memorize the lyrics. They can enter into prayer better if they do not have to use music sheets.
- Begin by having the children sing only the refrain of a song. Have a cantor sing the verses.
- Encourage the children to sing the bilingual or Spanish versions found on the CD.
- Make up gestures for the refrain of the song.

Select music the children have been learning in their sessions for the First Penance and Reconciliation service. Involve your parish music minister in the planning of the Penance and Reconciliation service. If the music for the service is chosen in advance, the children and their families will have the opportunity to learn the songs before First Penance and Reconciliation.

Reconciliation

Pardon and Peace

Forming the Catechists

Faith is a gift from God. In his Providence, God has chosen to use human instruments to ensure the growth of the faith received in Baptism. Under the prayerful intercession of the Virgin Mary, who was herself both a disciple and a catechist, members of the Church community are called not only to grow in knowledge of the faith but, at the same time, to pass that faith to others. Like St. Paul, the evangelist and Apostle, catechists exemplify the manner in which we cooperate with God's grace to ensure the growth of faith and remind us that it is God who causes the grow

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Catechist Orientation Session on Penance and Reconciliation



Endless and Forgiving Love

Purpose

This session is intended to prepare catechists for teaching the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation by helping them to review the components of the Penance and Reconciliation program and to deepen their awareness of God's forgiving love in their life.

Scheduling

The catechist orientation meeting should be scheduled prior to the first Family Experience Day and four to six weeks in advance of the first catechetical session. Select articles from the Forming the Catechists section of this *Program Director's Guide* that catechists may find helpful. Make copies and distribute them to the catechists, asking them to read the material prior to the orientation session.

Materials needed

- nametags
- writing paper or notebooks, markers, pens or pencils
- session handouts, song lyrics, and copies of the Rite
- copies of the *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace* Student and Catechist Editions
- items for the prayer table
- vigil candle for each catechist
- flip chart paper or poster board
- songs, instrumental music, and a CD player
- refreshments

Advance Preparation

- Set up the prayer table with the Bible opened to John 8:1–11. Include a plant, a cross, and a pillar candle. Display a purple banner or runner and a sign that reads “Pardon and Peace”.
- Make copies of the handouts you wish to use.
- Preview the content and amend it to fit your needs.
- Mark sections you wish to share from the *Rite of Penance*.
- Prepare the meeting space with tables and chairs and make it inviting for your catechists. On each table place the session handouts, markers, pens or pencils, writing paper or notebooks and a vigil candle for each catechist. Set up a welcome table with nametags. Provide refreshments.

Welcome and Introduction

Warmly welcome the catechists. Introduce other members of the catechetical team who may be present. Invite the catechists to introduce themselves to the group. Briefly describe the purpose and outline of the session.

Opening Prayer

Bring all to quiet readiness for prayer. Play or sing “Psalm 100: We are God’s People/Nosotros Somos Su Pueblo” by Jaime Cortez or another hymn suitable for quiet prayer and reflection. (See RCL Benziger’s *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace* music CD for selections.) When everyone is ready, light the candle and begin the prayer.

Leader: Let us pray. Loving and forgiving God, we praise you, for your mercy is endless. Grace us with your Spirit so we will be refreshed by your great compassion as witnessed in the life of your Son. Give us the grace of your wisdom, so that we may be better able to bring your Word to the young people we teach. Open our hearts to conversion through him, who is Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Reading: John 8:1-11

Responsorial Psalm: “Psalm 103: The Lord is Kind and Merciful”

Brief Reflection: Stress the lack of Jesus’ emphasis on a laundry list of sins and the number of times committed. Underscore the simplicity of his words, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.” Accentuate the restoration, the hope, and the challenge Jesus offers to the woman, and the reality that Jesus offers us the same in Penance and Reconciliation.

Closing Song: “Change Our Hearts” by Rory Cooney

Life Experience

Organize participants groups. Pass out flip chart paper or poster board and markers. Then begin with this story:

The second-grade children were receiving the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation for the first time. One little girl came out of the reconciliation room whom the teacher noticed was ready to cry. The teacher asked her what was wrong. The child replied she had gotten a hard penance. The teacher asked her what it was. The child told her, “*Three Hail Mary’s!*” The teacher responded that the penance didn’t seem too bad. “But,” the child wailed, “I only know one!”

Acknowledge that the majority of adults and children most likely feel some anxiety regarding the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Introduce this activity as a way to examine their own thoughts and feelings about the Sacrament.

List the following questions on an easel or chalkboard. Read each question aloud. Make sure to pause for sharing among small groups. Offer assurance that they need share only that which they are comfortable sharing. Then have each group write down some of the responses that were shared. Tell them that they will share their small group responses with the whole group.

1. How did you feel before going into your first confession?
2. How did you feel after you had confessed?
3. How willing are you to ask forgiveness from someone?
4. How willing are you to grant forgiveness?
5. Do you have an area in your life that needs healing, pardon and peace?
6. Are you comfortable celebrating the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation?
7. What do you hope your students will take away from their study with you regarding the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation?

When the groups have finished sharing, ask each group to present their responses. You may want to assign each group one or two questions to present to the whole group, making sure that all of the questions are presented. After each group has presented their group sharing, encourage any questions or clarification.

Next, take some time to review the basic teaching about the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Do not assume your catechists will be entirely familiar with it. Therefore, make sure the catechists have a clear understanding about the following points. Expand on each point as you deem necessary and encourage questions and/or discussion from the group. You may wish to display the following on a flip chart or white board.

- The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is about pardon and peace!
- The Sacrament has evolved from the focus on penance and confession to emphasis on the restorative, unifying and healing grace of the Sacrament. Reconciliation occurs between the penitent, God, and the community of the Church.
- As catechists we will have great influence. The moral and faith development of children need to be considered when teaching about sin and God's response. Teach a benevolent God who desires us to be freely happy.
- There are four rites: one for individuals, two communal rites within a liturgical service, (one with private absolution, the other with communal absolution), and an abbreviated form for those near death.
- In the Sacrament the priest represents both God and the Church and seeks forgiveness from both for the penitent.
- Our God is a God of second chances. Nothing we can ever do will turn God away if we are contrite.
- Reception of the Sacrament is liberating and calls us forth to more intentional discipleship.
- The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is a renewal of our Baptism.

These talking points also are available as a separate handout for you to duplicate for your catechists. See Handout #1 on page 36.

Review Features in the Reconciliation Program

Reviewing the features of *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace* will give catechists:

- a comprehensive overview of the program;
- expectations for each session;
- answers to any questions catechists may have about the program.

Refer to Overview of Components on page 12 of this *Program Director's Manual* for a summary of the program. You also may wish to make copies of the articles on pages 38-50 and distribute them to the catechists. Be sure to explain to the catechists what your own expectations are for them. Also, make certain the catechists understand the nature and purpose of the special eighth session. Explain the importance of the mystagogical reflection portion of the program.

Handout #1 Catechist Orientation Session on Penance and Reconciliation

Keep these points in mind as you teach the children.

Points to Remember

- The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is about pardon and peace!
- The Sacrament has evolved from the focus on penance and confession to emphasis on the restorative, unifying and healing grace of the Sacrament. Reconciliation occurs between the penitent, God, and the community of the Church.
- As catechists we will have great influence. The moral and faith development of children need to be considered when teaching about sin and God's response. Teach a benevolent God who desires us to be freely happy.
- There are four rites: one for individuals, two communal rites within a liturgical service, (one with private absolution, the other with communal absolution), and an abbreviated form for those near death.
- In the Sacrament the priest represents both God and the Church and seeks forgiveness from both for the penitent.
- Our God is a God of second chances. Nothing we can ever do will turn God away if we are contrite.
- Reception of the Sacrament is liberating and calls us forth to more intentional discipleship.
- The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is a renewal of our Baptism.



Handout #2 Catechist Orientation Session on Penance and Reconciliation

Closing Prayer and Ritual

Distribute this Closing Prayer and invite all to quiet themselves in readiness for prayer.

Song of Response: “Change Our Hearts” by Rory Cooney. (See RCL Benziger’s *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace* music CD for selections.)

Ritual

Have each catechist light a vigil candle at their table.

Leader: As a sign of our deeper awareness of the Lord’s endless and forgiving love and a desire to bring Christ’s light to others, please bring your candles forward and place them on the prayer table. Please join in a circle for our closing prayer.

Leader: O God, you are kind and merciful! How can we ever thank you for your faithfulness? Give ear to our meager attempts.

Our response is: Blessed are you, O God, for your mercy sustains us!

Reader: Faithful God, continually you offer your covenant to us even though we fail in our covenant to you. Hear us praise you . . .

Reader: Giver of Life, you created us in your own image and likeness; in our sinfulness, we are destructive to all of creation, yet you never turn away. Hear us praise you . . .

Reader: Holy One, you share your Spirit with us and still we choose darkness over light. Hear us praise you . . .

Reader: One True God, in faithful love you walk with us now and through all of history, yet we look to other gods to fulfill our needs when it is you alone who can do so. Hear us praise you . . .

Reader: Redeeming Lover, your compassion and tenderness are immeasurable to our broken hearts. Hear us praise you . . .

Leader: Kind and Merciful God, be our strength and direction. Keep us conscious of your endless and forgiving love. With your grace may we manifest forgiveness and love in the world and give witness to you. We ask this with trust. Amen.

Sacraments

by Sister Catherine Dooley, O.P.



The Sacramental celebrations of the children in the parish are always special days because they mark milestones in the child's life of faith and point to the growth of the child from infancy to childhood to the teenage years to adulthood. The celebration of Sacramental rites is an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of Sacraments and on the roles various people, particularly parents, play in preparation and celebration.

The school or parish may provide the immediate preparation, but it is the parents who have been readying their children for a long time. The lived experience of the family makes a deeper impression than the concepts learned in a textbook because it is the ordinary everyday actions that are the foundation of Sacramental life. The child comes to know God's love through love expressed in the family.

In the context of the liturgy, when we give thanks, when we ask pardon, when we praise, these words have meaning because of the actual experiences of thanking, forgiving, and affirming that take place in family life.

Sacramental Actions

Children love stories. Stories from the life of Jesus told again and again in the catechetical sessions are foundational to faith, and they prepare the children for the liturgical proclamation of the Gospel. Tracing the cross on the forehead of a child before he or she enters or leaves the classroom teaches him or her the meaning of the cross as the sign of God's love and care and develops a child's sense of identity as a baptized Christian. Even if the child may not yet be able to articulate meaning, the action provides an intuitive way of knowing that is foundational for reflection and integration in the future.

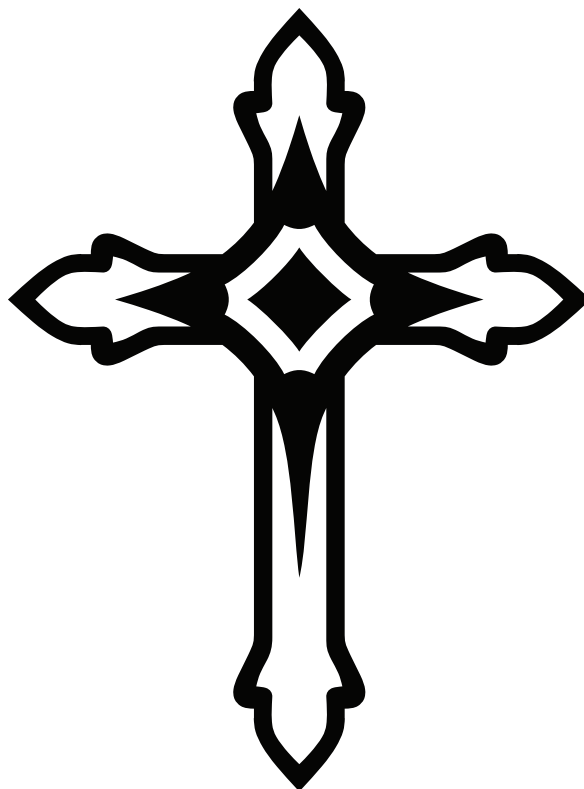
Sacraments are about relationships with God and with one another. Sometimes we place so much focus on our part in the celebration that we forget that Sacraments are God's actions in our lives. Liturgy has special significance as a way of relating to God or responding to God's relating to us. It is important to help children realize that the purpose of a Sacrament is to give worship and praise to God, to grow in holiness, and to build up the Reign of God.

Each Sacrament is not limited to the moment of celebration but is lived out in the future and is in continuity with all that has gone before. Anyone who is married would not say that their wedding day is their marriage; rather, it is the beginning of a day-to-day commitment throughout the years that is

their marriage. Nor did the couple decide they loved each other on the day of the wedding; that happened long before. So it is with all Sacraments. Our actual Baptism may have been a long time ago; yet to be a Christian is to continually live out the meaning of the baptismal promises in daily life. With children (and others) it is important to stress that sacramental celebration an ongoing part of their lives.

A Call to Action

Because the Sacraments involve more than the moment of celebration, each of the Sacraments calls us to action. As children, when we fought on the way home from Mass, our mother would often say, “Well, the Mass didn’t do you much good!” One purpose of the Sacraments is to build up the Reign of God. If we are reconciled in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, then we are called to be reconcilers. The Eucharist commissions us to go in peace to glorify the Lord by our lives. The Sacraments achieve their effect when they take root in our lives and move us to a greater service of God and neighbor. The question that we might ask the children and ourselves is: “What does this Sacrament ask of me?”



The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

by Sister Catherine Dooley, O.P.



In recent years there has been discussion about the reasons for the decline in participation in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Some of the reasons given are a changed understanding of sin or loss of a sense of sin, confusion about what is sinful, disagreement with the moral teaching of the Church, individualism, pluralism, reconciliation experienced by other means, or past difficulty with a confessor. Perhaps a major reason is that we have forgotten that the Sacrament is an act of praise and worship; it is a public confession of faith. The *Rite of Penance*, which is the normative point of reference for catechesis on the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, presents the Sacrament as liturgical prayer, as an act of worship, and an expression of the faith of the Church (see *Rite of Penance* 4). In the Sacrament we praise the healing, forgiving love, and mercy of God who acts in our lives (see *Rite of Penance* 6). It is a relationship in which God's initiative and the free response of the human person are manifest (see *Rite of Penance* 1).

The introduction to each of the liturgical rites contains a theology of that particular rite. The theology found in the introduction and in the prayers of the *Rite of Penance* offers foundational principles for catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. The introduction begins by situating the Rite within the context of the whole history of Salvation in order to show God's reconciling work in Christ. Many examples from Scripture show that God from the very beginning has called humankind to repentance through the prophets, through John the Baptist, through the life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, and through the sending of the Spirit upon the Apostles who were called to preach the forgiveness of sin by Baptism. Hence, Reconciliation is not an isolated action only involving a sinner but is an ongoing part of the saving plan of a merciful, loving God.

If there is one dominant theme in the Rite, it is that God is the God of mercy. In confessing our sinfulness, we acknowledge God's mercy. In his 1984 statement on Reconciliation and Penance, Pope John Paul II stated that confession is an act of honesty and courage. It is an act of entrusting oneself, beyond sin, to the mercy that forgives. It is interesting that Pope John Paul II used the word *courage*. The word *courage* comes from the same root as the word *heart*, and one meaning of *courage* is to have the heart to struggle for

truth. It is in the light of God's mercy and love that we, with honesty and courage, examine our actions and motivations, both the good and the bad. We take responsibility for the sinful actions, ask forgiveness, resolve to change the direction of our lives and know the meaning of God's mercy through the words of forgiveness spoken by the priest in the name of Christ.

Because of the communal nature of sin and holiness, reconciliation with God is at the same time reconciliation with the Church (see *Rite of Penance* 4). Sin and conversion are the concern of the *whole* Church because the sinfulness of one harms others just as the goodness of one benefits others. Therefore, the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation requires reconciliation with those who remain harmed by our sins. The Rite notes that although people frequently join together to commit injustice, they also call each other to conversion. Freed from sin by the grace of Christ, they become, as with all persons of good will, agents of justice and peace in the world (see *Rite of Penance* 5).

The ultimate purpose of the Sacrament, therefore, is to love God deeply and commit ourselves completely to him (see *Rite of Penance* 5a). But if the Sacrament is to truly achieve its purpose it must take root in our lives and move us to a more fervent service of God and neighbor.

Another principle found in the Rite is that the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is one of the Sacraments of reconciliation. Baptism is the primary Sacrament of reconciliation. Baptism is for the forgiveness of sin. Penance and Reconciliation, for those in grave sin, restores this baptismal grace. For venial sin, the purpose of frequent confession is the renewal of Baptism. It is a serious striving to perfect the grace of Baptism so that we may be ever more faithful Christians. The Sacrament offers strength to conform more closely to Christ and to be more attentive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist celebrates the very act by which we are saved and is, therefore, *the* Sacrament of reconciliation. The Eucharist is the preeminent sign and cause of our reconciliation and unity in Christ and with one another.

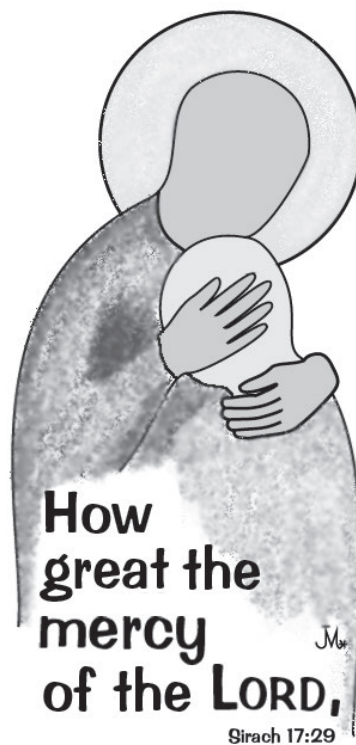
Reconciliation is the ministry of the whole Christian community which acts in different ways in the work of reconciliation (see *Rite of Penance* 8). Reconciliation and healing take place through the witness of the Christian life—whenever we reach out to another to ask or to give forgiveness, promote the dignity of all persons, or attempt to change unjust structures and work for peace. The ministry of the Sacrament is exercised through bishops and priests. Through the proclamation of the Word of God, the minister calls us to conversion, and in the name of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, declares and grants forgiveness of sins (see *Rite of Penance* 9).

We, who experience and acknowledge the mercy of God in our life, “celebrate with the priest the liturgy by which the Church continually renews itself” (*Rite of Penance* 11).

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation has several integral parts (see *Rite of Penance* 6), beginning with an inner conversion of heart in which we take responsibility for our actions, are sincerely sorry, and fully intend to amend our life. This movement of inner conversion is known as contrition. It is the most important act of the penitent. The Sacrament includes the confession of sin that is made in the light of God’s mercy. We are given a penance (satisfaction). This is intended to be a deterrent to sin and a help for the future. The sign of absolution completes the Sacrament. The absolution is a visible sign of God’s faithfulness and forgiveness. This gift is then most fully expressed in a renewed participation in the Eucharist.

Reconciliation is more than the confession of sin: it sums up the meaning of the Christian life. This Sacrament of Healing will not achieve its purpose unless it takes root in our lives and impels us to a more fervent service of God and neighbor (see *Rite of Penance* 7b).

We who have been reconciled are called to be reconcilers, ambassadors for Christ who has entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation.



Mystagogy for Reconciliation

by Sister Catherine Dooley, O.P.



In the early Church, the preparation for initiation culminated in the celebration, followed by an intense period of reflection on the mystery of God revealed in Christ. This is the period of *mystagogy*. It completes the catechumens' initiation process. The newly baptized (neophytes) are called to reflect on their initiation experience. The neophytes are also asked to determine how they can share in Christ's mission.

The *National Directory for Catechesis* defines mystagogy as representing “the Christian's lifelong . . . formation in the faith.” It includes “participation in the Sunday Eucharist and study of the Liturgy, the study and exploration of Sacred Scripture and the social teachings of the Church, reflection on the important events of life in the light of Christian faith, opportunities for prayer, spiritual exercises, [and] acts of charity” (NDC 35D). Mystagogy, then, is not just for the newly baptized or just for the Sacraments of Initiation. Rather it is a communal reflection that needs to follow all Sacraments because every Sacramental encounter calls us to conversion and to a living out of the Christian life. Conversion is a lifelong process, and mystagogy is a defining aspect of the Christian's lifelong catechesis.

Mystagogy on the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation may seem odd if we think of the Sacrament only in terms of confession of sin, but the fundamental purpose of all Sacraments is to give worship and praise to God. They help us to grow in holiness and build up the Reign of God. Confession is only one element of the Sacramental rite. The most important act is contrition, which results in a profound change by which we begin to consider, decide, and act in response to the gracious love of God revealed in Jesus.

Mystagogy is communal reflection, and the *Rite of Penance* emphasizes the ecclesial aspect of the Sacrament. In the Sacrament we experience the mercy of God and we are reconciled with the Church that has been affected by our transgressions. The Sacrament is always about relationships, so it is not parenthetical in our life but rather is part of the text of our lives. We share our daily experiences. We bring our failures to the Sacrament, as well as our efforts to forgive, ask forgiveness, and reconcile. With God's grace, we are strengthened to begin again to be the person that God has created us to be.

In Scripture the parables of forgiveness are mystagogy. They are a means of helping the disciples and all the listeners to recognize themselves in the story, reflect on their own lives, and choose to change. Mystagogy enables us to understand the meaning of the experience in our lives.

Effective Liturgical Catechesis Using Ritual and Symbol



Preparing children for initiation into the Sacramental life of the Church requires us to focus on a number of important catechetical tasks. The *General Directory for Catechesis (GDC)* offers us some guidance on what these tasks are. The *GDC* defines liturgical catechesis as that which “prepares for the Sacraments by promoting a deeper understanding and experience of the liturgy. This explains the contents of the prayers, the meaning of the signs and gestures, and educates to active participation, contemplation and silence” (GDC 71). This catechesis “[f]ocuses primarily on the symbols, rituals, and prayers contained in the rite for each Sacrament (NDC 35B). In speaking of catechesis on the Eucharist, the *Directory for Masses with Children* calls for the development of human values which will lead to a better understanding of Christian values. These values include community activity, exchange of greetings, the capacity to listen and to seek and grant pardon, expression of gratitude, experience of symbolic actions, a meal of friendship, and festive celebration. Summed up, all of our efforts should lead children to a conscious and active participation in the Sacraments.

For the average catechist, these tasks may seem daunting. Somehow each catechetical session must help children both understand and experience the symbols and ritual patterns of the Sacramental liturgy.

Practically, this means that we recognize that Sacraments are ritual prayer. Leading children to a conscious and active participation in liturgy means that we spend time forming their spiritual lives. Identify ritual patterns in the Sacraments. Then use them in a prayerful way to help children become comfortable with the rites. Focus on the ritual patterns and signs of gathering, listening, silent reflection, praising, thanksgiving, asking for pardon, and developing a prayerful attitude. A good catechist should build up a library of resources on ritual prayer.

We want to make sure that the children truly understand what the Church teaches and believes about the Sacraments. Experiential recall is the goal of a successful catechetical session. By creating a simple gathering prayer and having the children sign themselves with holy water to recall their Baptism, they can experience the symbols of Baptism. Asking them to renew their baptismal promises and perhaps having the children and their parents gather around the baptismal font with lighted candles, would be another way to help children experience the ritual and symbols of Baptism.

A critical ritual pattern in the Sacraments is listening to God's Word. Time should be spent on helping children, in an age-appropriate way, to become good listeners. An effective way to develop listening is to begin with developing quiet and prayerful meditation. Guided meditation with children can help. While it takes time for the children to get used to this prayer format, eventually they will become comfortable with it. Of course, using ritual prayer with God's Word also is helpful. The *Lectionary for Masses With Children* is an excellent resource for suitable Scripture texts that facilitate children's understanding.

Children are drawn naturally to ritual and gesture. The Sacraments become much more meaningful when children are invited to experience them in this way. Catechists should encourage parents to offer prayer at home. Motivate parents with prayer ideas and resources, such as *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*, published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. In addition, RCL Benziger's *Catholic Prayers and Practices* (available in English, bilingual Spanish, French, and Polish) and *Catholic Prayers and Practices for Young Disciples* (available in English and bilingual Spanish) are valuable prayer resources for children and families.

Finally, the use of music as a catechetical tool is powerful. Children love to sing. Music is an especially effective way to catechize them. Young people should be prepared to participate fully in liturgical music. Care should be given to creating appropriate musical settings of the psalms, as well as involving young people in the Eucharistic Prayer. Catechists can use the resources on RCL Benziger's *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace* and *Eucharist: We Give Thanks and Praise* music CDs.



Whatever Happened to Joy?

A Ten-Minute Retreat for Busy Catechists!

by Timothy Mullner



I can still remember her face. She had bright sparkling eyes, a perfectly ironed habit, and a knowing smile that was almost a smirk. It was as if Sister Gerald Wald, O.S.B. was in on a secret, and she couldn't wait to tell. As a sixth-grade Catholic school teacher, Sr. Gerald radiated joy as she echoed the faith to her eager group of learners. What was it that made Sr. Gerald so compelling?

The word *joy* appears in Sacred Scripture more than 315 times. Sadly, it is a word and reality that is sorely missing in today's fast-paced culture. What has happened to joy?

The Daze of Our Lives

As catechists in the United States, we find ourselves blessed to live with freedoms and prosperity. But in our attempt to keep up, to match the neighbor's lawn, or add zeros to our checking accounts, we can rush right by the real stuff of life. We tend to be so consumed with consuming that the urgent tasks of daily life make us forget the important people and things around us. We're so busy trying to *get* a life that we forget to *live* one. Such is the daze of our lives!

Here is an example. Driving to work one morning, I spied a family on their morning commute. Dad was talking on his cell phone and mom was applying makeup by the soft light of her visor mirror. In the back seat, the daughter was finishing an assignment on her laptop, while her brother was busy exercising his thumbs with a video game. Theirs was a "Little House on the Freeway"!

With every lesson plan that we prepare for adults, children, and teens, we must take great care to help folks slow down as they rush through life. By encouraging participants in our parish programs to pause and reflect through prayer, ritual action, and faith-sharing, we can help them rekindle joy and learn to inhabit the fast-paced lives they lead.

In the Image and Likeness of God!

Being busy and having stuff isn't bad. But it's in our slowing down that we remember who we are and to whom we belong. It's difficult to "echo the faith" if that fundamental truth isn't resounding in our own hearts and minds as catechists.

Sister Gerald's abundant joy came from the answers to two primordial questions. Open your Bible and read the stories of creation, the Fall, and Cain and Abel (see Genesis 1–4). Read the stories once more and notice the questions God asks: "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9) and "Where is Abel?" (Genesis 4:9).

Being created in the image and likeness of God (see Genesis 1:26–27) reminds us that God will pursue us forever in order to help us reclaim our divine birth right. Sister Gerald's joy (and yours and mine) comes from remembering that ours is a divine inheritance. While we do have a home in Heaven, we are also meant to share life with others in the here and now. Our task is to enjoy life because God never stops asking, "Where are you?" Even with the sin of our lives, we are always welcomed back. As catechists we help the whole parish community to embrace that truth as it resounds in their hearts with healing, joy, and hope.

The joy of knowing who we are, and remembering to whom we belong, connects us to the People of God, the Church. This joy also reminds us that we go to God together. God's probing inquiry, "Where is . . . Abel?" forever bonds humanity as a family of faith.

Just as there is no perfect family, the Church—our family of faith—is not perfect. Yet joy comes in knowing that nothing can separate us from God's love (see Romans 8:35–39) and that being connected to others in the Body of Christ provides the support, forgiveness, healing, and encouragement to continue the journey of faith. As catechists filled with joy, that is a faith worth echoing!

Take Some Time to Reflect

1. Call to mind a parish catechist or Catholic school teacher from your childhood who overflowed with joy and hope. What was the source of his or her joy?
2. What *stuff* in your life takes up too much time or distracts you from slowing down and remembering who you are and to whom you belong?
3. Where do you find joy in daily life, in your family, in your ministry? Pray a prayer of gratitude for these people, places, and things.
4. What areas of your life need healing and forgiveness? How can reconciliation occur in your key relationships to renew the joy that is your divine inheritance?
5. In order to experience more joy in my life, I need/want to . . .

Now, quiet yourself and take a moment to memorize these words from Proverbs 10:28: "The hope of the just brings them joy, . . ."

Including Children with Special Learning Needs

by Susan Perault



In parish-based faith formation settings, the education of children with special needs has evolved at a very rapid pace. Once educated primarily in separate schools or segregated classrooms, children with unique learning needs now learn in age-appropriate classrooms side-by-side with their peers. Educators, in partnership with parents, collaborate in the development of distinct educational goals and unique objectives designed to take place within a typical classroom setting, tailored to maximize each child's potential.

In 1978 the U.S. Catholic Bishops issued *Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities* and said, "Parish liturgical celebrations and catechetical programs should be accessible to persons with disabilities and open to their full, active, and conscious participation according to their capacity." In May of 2005, the *National Directory for Catechesis* acknowledged, "Although providing such services is challenging to parishes and dioceses, the Church owes persons with disabilities her best efforts in order to ensure that they are able to hear the Gospel of Christ, receive the Sacraments, and grow in their faith in the fullest and richest manner possible" (NDC 49). With proper planning, a bit of dreaming and scheming, and an openness to new ways of thinking, parish-based faith formation programs can include all children, regardless of unique learning needs. Modeling the planning process used in the public school setting, the catechetical team, in partnership with parents and with the support of the parish community, can develop distinct faith-formation goals and objectives for delivery within the parish setting.

At least once every school year, parents and educational professionals are required by law to meet to review current progress, create new age-appropriate goals, and design a variety of learning objectives. As a result parents gain a wealth of knowledge about their child's unique learning needs, gleaned not only from the professionals working with their children, but from their own vast experience of daily living—caring, nurturing, and loving their children day in and day out. Parents can share this experience, this information and knowledge, with the catechetical team in the development of individualized goals and specific objectives designed to enhance the religious growth and spiritual formation of their child.

Initially, the catechetical team needs to discern by grade level the essential elements of the curriculum in which every child should participate. This effort lays the groundwork for a planning template to be used when meeting with the parents of children with unique learning needs. In partnership with the parents, decisions can be made as to which experiences, opportunities, lesson adaptations, and other services will best enhance the child's preparation process for Sacraments on an age-appropriate schedule.

As part of this planning process, ask the parents to describe their child's classroom setting and any various adaptations or equipment used in school. How each child spends the day, with whom, when, and for how long will provide many ideas, hints, and examples of how to create a nurturing learning environment within the catechetical setting. Take notes as parents describe the various accommodations provided, such as special seating, adaptive equipment, a personal aide, one-on-one tutor time, or distinct testing requirements: all indicate what accommodations and services the catechetical team can replicate in order to enhance the faith-formation experience at the parish level. This individualized religious education plan should state clearly the selected faith-formation goals and objectives, as well as how and when progress can be measured. It will be an invaluable guide and support for the entire catechetical team, the parents, the administrator, the catechist, and an aide or tutor, as well as the parish's pastoral care staff.

Be creative in your planning. Who might be called forth anew from the parish community to assist catechists with lesson preparation, the adaptation of materials, classroom management, or the provision of one-on-one tutoring time? Prayer, in partnership with the Holy Spirit, is bound to turn up new support, new involvement, and new resources, as well as new members for the parish catechetical team.

As noted in the *National Directory for Catechesis*, providing distinct services and accommodations on an individualized basis is indeed a challenge, but a challenge worth accepting. Our parish communities are not mandated by public law to include children with disabilities, but we are compelled by God's Law of Love to ensure that all are indeed welcome. Catechists should take special note of the hints and suggestions in their Catechist Editions for including all children. The feature, Special Needs, will guide the catechist in creating and promoting an atmosphere of inclusiveness for all God's children. Here are examples of the topics included in this feature:

Working with Children with ADD/ADHD
Communicating with Autistic Children
Adjusting for Mobility or Hearing Limitations
Including Everyone

Penance and Reconciliation Bibliography for Catechists



Books and media for catechists can be obtained by contacting the publishers or online from www.barnesandnoble.com and www.amazon.com.

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Reconciliation

Pardon and Peace

Involving the Parish

Some fundamental principles apply to catechesis for each of the Sacraments . . . parishes should present Sacramental catechesis that [is] intended for all members of the Christian community, takes place within the community, and involves the whole community of faith. . .

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Suggestions for Involving the Whole Parish



Use the following ideas to involve parishioners in the preparation of children for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

- Organize a “Getting to Know You” reception after Mass for the children and their families who will celebrate the Sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation and Eucharist during the year. Schedule this event to take place a week or so before the first session of the Sacrament preparation. Have the children and their families wear nametags and encourage parishioners to introduce themselves.
- Each week throughout the period of preparation for the Sacrament, include the names of various children in the Prayer of the Faithful at all the Masses.
- Invite parishioners to attend the Family Experience Days that are part of the parish preparation for First Penance and Reconciliation. In addition to participating, they might help with hospitality, arts and crafts activities, and in other useful ways.
- Display the pictures of the First Penance and Reconciliation children in the vestibule of the church. The pictures should be labeled clearly with each child’s name. They should remain in place throughout the time of preparation.
- Schedule some Adult Formation sessions focusing on the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.
- Prepare a “prayer tree” and place it near the pictures of the First Penance and Reconciliation children. Hang colorful slips of paper on the tree, each slip containing one of the children’s first names. Invite parishioners to take home one of the slips as a reminder to pray for that particular child during the time of preparation for First Penance and Reconciliation.
- Invite the children and their families to volunteer to speak at a Mass following their First Penance and Reconciliation, describing to the parish what the experience means to them as they reflect and remember.
- On a Sunday a few months following First Eucharist, organize a reunion of First Penance and Reconciliation and First Eucharist children and their families.

Bulletin Announcements



These parish bulletin announcements correspond to the eight chapters in the student text of RCL Benziger's Sacrament program, *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace*. Use each announcement on the Sunday before the children's session takes place. The number before each announcement refers to the chapter number in the children's book.

- 1. Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace** Using the RCL Benziger program, *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace*, our parish children will begin this week their preparation to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation for the first time. The children will learn about God's saving love and the forgiveness that comes to us through Baptism. All parishioners are asked to reflect on our baptismal call to forgive others. Please pray for these children as they begin their preparation.
- 2. Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace** Children preparing for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation will gather this week to learn more about God's love for them. Think about your own awareness of God's love for you and the ways you respond to this love. Please remember these special children in your prayers.
- 3. Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace** This week children preparing for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation will be considering what it means to turn away from God's love. They will learn how sin can be overcome by God's grace. In your own life, have there been times when God's grace helped you to overcome your own sinfulness and brought you peace and forgiveness? Continue to keep these children in your prayers.
- 4. Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace** This week our parish children preparing for First Penance and Reconciliation will discuss moral choices and how they can begin to know the difference between right and wrong choices. All of us are invited to think about our own moral choices and how we make them. What advice would you give to our First Penance and Reconciliation children? Please continue to pray for them on their journey to the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

5. **Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace** Our parish children preparing for First Penance and Reconciliation will be learning this week about contrition and God's forgiveness through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. All parishioners can join these children in spirit by praying and thinking about ways in which we all are called to sincere sorrow for our sins and to God's forgiveness through this Sacrament of healing and mercy.

6. **Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace** As our parish children prepare to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, they are learning about the rite of the Sacrament. This week the children will discuss contrition, confession, penance, and absolution. All parishioners are invited to think about how important the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is in our own lives as we seek "pardon and peace" in the words of absolution. Please continue to keep these children in your prayers.

7. **Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace** This week our parish children, who will soon be celebrating the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, will gather for their final preparation session. They will learn about the meaning of conversion and how a return to God's love is celebrated in this Sacrament. Parishioners are encouraged to reflect on their own experience of conversion or turning back to God. Please pray for the children as they celebrate their First Penance and Reconciliation.

8. **Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace** Now that our parish children have celebrated the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation for the first time, they will come together this week to think about the significance of the Sacrament. They will reflect on the experience of confessing their sins and of receiving God's forgiveness. They will remember what they did and how they felt on this special day. Please continue to pray for them, and encourage our young children as they begin a lifelong practice of celebrating the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace

Contrition

Our parish children who will be celebrating the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation for the first time this year are considering many aspects of the Sacrament and the *Rite of Penance*. All parish members can be inspired by the children's journey. We can join our hearts and minds with theirs by thinking about what Reconciliation means in our own lives. Please take a moment to pray for these children and to reflect on the thoughts presented here.

The words and prayers in the *Rite of Penance* emphasize four elements: contrition, confession, an act of penance, and absolution. How are these four elements lived out in our everyday lives as we attempt to grow in holiness and faith?

When we prepare to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, we are called to consider ways in which we have turned away from Jesus' message to love God and one another. We are all sinners, and yet we know that God's grace, God's loving presence in our lives, fills us with the strength and courage to overcome our sinfulness. Only when we admit that we have turned away from God's love can we begin to move toward conversion of heart. Contrition is the first step.

On your own, in your family, or with your friends, consider the following questions:

- What makes it difficult to admit that one's attitudes or actions are sinful?
- What has to be overcome in order to develop true sorrow for having turned away from God's love?
- What does the word *contrition* mean to you?
- How do you express to another that you are sorry?
- How do you express to God that you are sorry?
- In what ways do you need to change in order to be more aware of God's grace in your life and in your heart?

Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace

Confession

The parish children who are preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation for the first time are gathering weekly to consider how God is calling them to lifelong conversion of heart. All of us join these children in spirit when we acknowledge our sinfulness and seek God's loving compassion and mercy through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

The *Rite of Penance* asks that we speak of our own sinfulness by telling the priest of the times when our attitudes and actions have led us away from what we know is right and good. When we confess our sins, we hear ourselves saying aloud what we often do not want to admit even to ourselves. We admit that at times we have failed to live out Jesus' message of love for God and one another. Confession of sin helps us to see more clearly ways in which God is calling us to conversion of heart.

A humble confession of our sins and weaknesses also allows us to be open to the words of encouragement and compassion that the priest can offer to us. His wisdom and understanding can be invaluable in helping us to do our best to "sin no more" and to grow in God's grace.

With family or friends, or on your own, reflect on the following questions:

- What attitudes have you developed that are preventing you from being a more loving person?
- Who in your life inspires you to try harder to avoid what you know is wrong?
- When you talk to the priest in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, how does he assist you to see more clearly how you need to change?
- What one specific memory do you have of the last time you celebrated the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation? How was it a positive experience for you?

Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace

Penance

The parish children who are preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation for the first time are becoming aware of ways in which sinful acts and attitudes affect families, friends, and the world. All of us need to be reminded at times of this reality, and all of us are challenged to join our minds and hearts with the children in thinking about how repentance takes many forms.

In the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, the priest listens carefully as we describe our weaknesses, sinfulness, and shortcomings. He often will offer words of encouragement and hope, but he also can challenge us to think about how we have damaged our relationship with God or with others by our wrong choices. He may offer advice and remind us of the need to repair the harm we have done. The priest may give us suggestions for ways to restore a broken relationship. He might suggest ways in which we can grow in holiness. In the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, we are forgiven for our sins. When we accept the act of penance the priest gives us, we are challenged to make changes in our lives so that we will sin no more.

In your families, with your friends, or on your own, consider the following questions:

- When you have harmed another person in some way, what could you do to try to restore that relationship?
- What attitudes may you have that could be getting in the way of your growth in holiness?
- Think of a time when you treated someone unfairly or unjustly. How might you convey or express your change of heart to that person?
- What actions or attitudes could you develop that would bring God's peace to your family, friends, and to the world?

Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace

Absolution

The parish children who have been preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation for the first time are now ready. Soon they will experience the healing words of forgiveness that are spoken by the priest in the visible sign of absolution. The words and gesture of absolution by the priest, given in the name of Christ, bestow on the penitent the fullness of God's mercy and forgiveness through the power of the Holy Spirit.

All of us can be strengthened in holiness and faith by joining the First Penance and Reconciliation children in pondering the words of absolution. This blessing, one of the most beautiful of all the Church's liturgical prayers, expresses God's compassionate love for each of us, even though we sin.

God, the Father of mercies,
through the death and Resurrection of his Son
has reconciled the world to himself
and sent the Holy Spirit among us
for the forgiveness of sins;
through the ministry of the Church
may God give you pardon and peace,
and I absolve you from your sins
in the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

Rite of Penance 55

This week set aside some time on your own, or with family and friends, to reflect on the following questions:

- What meaning do the words *may God give you pardon and peace* have for you?
- What specific words of the prayer of absolution speak most deeply to you?
- Are there words or phrases in the prayer of absolution that might prompt you to offer forgiveness to another person?
- What does the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation offer you? What keeps you from celebrating the Sacrament more often?

Parish Enrichment Session: Whole Community Catechesis



Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace

Purpose

The purpose of this gathering is to encourage adults of all ages to broaden their understanding of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Adults in the parish sometimes need to be reminded of the beauty, joy, and sacredness of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. This gathering, conducted for the whole parish, and coinciding with the children's preparation for First Penance and Reconciliation, offers the opportunity for adults to reflect on the process of conversion that we all experience and on the Sacrament that celebrates that conversion.

Who Should Attend

This session is intended for parishioners of all ages who wish to learn more about the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation and its implications for their lives.

Scheduling

This session can be offered at any time during the children's Sacrament preparation that is convenient to the parish calendar of events. It may be held in the evening, on a Saturday morning, or on a Sunday afternoon. The suggested time frame is approximately two hours.

Environment

Participants should experience a warm, inviting environment when they arrive. A prayer table should be set up in the front or center of the room. Cover the table with a cloth reflecting the liturgical season, and place on it symbols of reconciliation—a crucifix, Bible, stole, and possibly a plant.

- Hold this session in a room that adequately accommodates a large number of people.
- Tables for five to eight people would be useful for the small group activities. Avoid setting up the chairs in rows.
- Nametags and light refreshments should be available as the people arrive.

Advance Preparation

- Be sure the presider or leader of prayer is familiar with the closing prayer and is at ease in that role. Invite a person or persons to proclaim the Gospel and to lead the Litany of Forgiveness. Allow readers time to prepare.
- Prepare the small slips of paper for the “Getting to Know You” activity.
- Make arrangements for light refreshments.
- Make copies of handouts (the article on Penance and Reconciliation on pages 40-42 of this guide, the Litany of Forgiveness on page 66, and discussion questions on pages 62-64.)

Materials Needed

- nametags and markers
- prepared small slips of paper
- basket
- Bible
- copies of handouts
- RCL Benziger’s *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace* music CD
- CD player
- light refreshments

Order of the Session

The following is a suggested format for the session, keeping in mind that adjustments should be made to meet the particular needs of the participants.

1. Gathering and Getting to Know You Activity
2. Formal Welcome and Overview
3. Small group discussion
4. Presentation on the *Rite of Penance* with discussion
5. Break
6. Continuation of presentation and discussion
7. Closing Prayer

Gathering and Getting to Know You Activity

Greet participants warmly when they arrive and invite them to make their own nametags. Encourage people to introduce themselves and to participate in the opening activity. Have an assortment of small slips of paper of different colors available on which are printed words or phrases of forgiveness such as *I’m sorry, Mercy, Forgive me, Peace, I forgive you, God is love, I promise, Pardon,* and so on. Arrange the slips in a basket, face down, mixing the colors. (If you want five people to a group, have five pieces of paper of the same color and with the same phrase in the basket.) As they arrive, invite participants to choose a slip of paper. Invite them to find those with matching slips of paper, introduce themselves, and form a group.

Formal Welcome and Overview

Welcome everyone and thank them for attending. Present a brief overview of the format and expectations of the session. Explain that this gathering will be focusing on the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation and the importance of conversion, or change of heart, acknowledgment of our sinfulness, and forgiveness in our lives.

Small Group Discussion

Prepare the following questions either as a handout for each group or for projection:

- What has been your own experience of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation? Has this changed as you moved from childhood to adulthood? How has your understanding and experience of Penance and Reconciliation changed?
- The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is first and foremost a liturgical prayer, an act of worship, and an expression of the faith of the Church (see *Rite of Penance* 4). In the Sacrament we praise the healing, forgiving love and mercy of God who acts in our lives (see *Rite of Penance* 6). It is a relationship in which God's initiative and the free response of the human person are manifest (see *Rite of Penance* 1).

How do the statements above match your understanding of the Sacrament?

Presentation on the Rite of Penance and Reconciliation

Offer an overview of the Rite of Penance and the theology of the Sacrament with time for large group or small group discussion as you explain each part. Use the Rite of Penance as your guide to the presentation and questions for the group. A theology of the Sacrament is found in the Introduction and in the prayers of the Rite of Penance. It offers foundational principles for catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

Introduction

Make the following points: The Introduction to the Rite begins by situating the rite within the context of the whole history of Salvation to show God's reconciling work in Christ. Many examples from Scripture show that from the very beginning God has called humankind to repentance through the prophets, through John the Baptist, through the life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, and through the sending of the Spirit upon the Apostles who were called to preach the forgiveness of sin by Baptism. Reconciliation therefore is not an isolated action only involving a sinner but is an ongoing part of the saving plan of a merciful, loving God.

Conversion of heart; sorrow for sin; intent to lead a new life

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation has several integral parts (see *Rite of Penance* 6) beginning with an inner conversion of heart in which we take responsibility for our actions, are sincerely sorry, and fully intend to amend our life. Contrition is the most important act of the penitent.

Distribute the handouts with the quote from the *Rite of Penance* and the questions that the group will be discussing. Read aloud the quote.

“We can only approach the Kingdom of Christ by *metanoia*. This is a profound change of the whole person by which we begin to consider, judge, and arrange our life according to the holiness and love of God, made manifest in his Son . . .” (see Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:19 and passim; Ephesians 1:23 and passim).³¹ The genuineness of penance depends on this heartfelt contrition.

Rite of Penance, 6a

Ask the group to discuss in their small groups the following questions:

- What new insights about the Sacrament does this statement give you?
- Does it change the way you might approach the Sacrament?

After a brief time for discussion, you may call on volunteers to share any insights with the whole group. Continue with the presentation.

Confession of sin

The Sacrament includes the confession of sin that is made in the light of God’s mercy. The penitent confesses any sins, weaknesses, or wrongdoings that are present in his or her life. The priest encourages the penitent to be fully honest in the confession, and to have sincere sorrow for sin. The priest offers suitable counsel to help the penitent begin a new life freed from sin.

It is in the light of God’s mercy and love that we, with honesty and courage, examine our actions and motivations, both the good and the bad. We take responsibility for the sinful actions, ask forgiveness, and resolve to change the direction of our lives. We then know the meaning of God’s mercy through the words of forgiveness spoken by the priest in the name of Christ.

Because of the communal nature of sin and holiness, reconciliation with God is at the same time reconciliation with the Church (see *Rite of Penance* 4). Sin and conversion are the concern of the *whole* Church because the sinfulness of one harms others, just as the goodness of one benefits others.

Endnote references may be found on page 102.

Ask the group to discuss the following questions:

- Have I been aware of the communal nature of sin?
- Have I thought of sin as harming myself and my neighbor?
- Do I consider sin in light of my adult life or do I still resort to a grocery list of offenses?
- Do I fail to see myself as a sinner with need for repentance?

Following the discussion take a break.

Break

Continuation of Presentation and Discussion

Act of Penance and Absolution

We are given a penance (satisfaction) that is intended to be a deterrent to sin and a help for the future. The act of penance may take the form of prayer, self-denial, service to others, or Works of Mercy. The penitent now prays for God's pardon, expressing contrition and sorrow for offending God and neighbor, and promises to do better in the future.

The sign of absolution completes the Sacrament. The absolution is a visible sign of God's faithfulness and forgiveness. This gift is most fully expressed in a renewed participation in the Eucharist.

Ask the group to discuss the following:

- Having been reconciled to God and the Church through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, how can I be a reconciler of others?
- What can I do to further the cause of peace?

After this discussion, allow time for any further questions or clarifications. Distribute the handouts and any of the articles you have reproduced for the group. Assemble the group for prayer.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Penance and Reconciliation is more than the confession of sin: it sums up the meaning of the Christian life. This Sacrament of Healing will not achieve its purpose unless it takes root in our lives and impels us to a more fervent service of God and neighbor (see *Rite of Penance* 7b). We who have been reconciled are called to be reconcilers, ambassadors for Christ who has entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation.

Opening Song: “Christ, Be Our Light” from RCL Benziger’s *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace* music CD.

Leader: Let us pray.

Lord,
hear the prayers of those who call on you,
forgive the sins of those who confess to you,
and in your merciful love,
give us your pardon and your peace.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Rite of Penance 50

Gospel Reading: Luke 15:11–32.

Have the group reflect on their own on a time when they were forgiven by someone. Ask: *How did you feel? Have you ever felt like the older brother? In the Scripture that you heard, why was it time to celebrate?*

Litany of Forgiveness Hand out copies of page 60.

After the Session

Encourage participants to stay for a while for socializing. If possible, offer lunch or snacks, perhaps prepared by additional parishioners as a way to involve them in the event. A potluck meal, either before or after the session, is another option.

A Litany of Forgiveness

The response is, “**Loving God, forgive us.**”

Reader: For the times we have given things greater attention than we have given God, we pray:

All: Loving God, forgive us.

Reader: For the times we have neglected our prayer life and our relationship with God, we pray:

All: Loving God, forgive us.

Reader: For the times we have not contributed to the wellness and happiness of the rest of the family, we pray:

All: Loving God, forgive us.

Reader: For the times we have failed to help others by denying them our friendship, we pray:

All: Loving God, forgive us.

Reader: For the times our desire for power and material possessions lead us to neglect our relationships and service to others, we pray:

All: Loving God, forgive us.

Reader: For the times we have refused to forgive someone, we pray:

All: Loving God, forgive us.

Reader: For the times our anger has caused us to try to harm others, seek revenge, or hold a grudge, we pray:

All: Loving God, forgive us.

Reader: For the times we have used our position of authority to take advantage of others, or we have failed to pay a just wage, we pray:

All: Loving God, forgive us.

Reader: For the times we have hurt others by being untruthful or unfair, or have rushed to judgment of others, we pray:

All: Loving God, forgive us.

Reader: For the times we have done violence to others by damaging their reputation, honor, or material possessions, we pray:

All: Loving God, forgive us.

Reader: For the times we have acted against our conscience out of fear or hypocrisy, we pray:

All: Loving God, forgive us.

Leader: Let us now pray together in the words that Jesus taught us. “Our Father . . .”

Leader: Dear Jesus, you know what is in our hearts. You know that we want to follow you in everything we do and think. Send us your Spirit to guide us. Give us the grace to live out in our lives what we know is right. This we ask in your name.

All: Amen.

Leader: Please turn to one another and offer a sign of Christ’s peace.

The Rite of Penance for Individual Confession

Introductory Rite

When you enter the reconciliation room you may choose either the face-to-face or behind-the-screen form of celebration. Begin by joining the priest in making the Sign of the Cross.

Word of God

Reflect with the priest on a passage or verse from Scripture.

Confession of Sins

- Share the length of time since your last confession.
- Confess your sins. All serious or mortal sins are to be confessed; less serious or venial sins may be part of your confession.
- The priest makes comments or suggestions concerning your spiritual growth.
- The priest gives you a penance, such as an act of charity to do or a prayer to say.

Act of Contrition

The priest invites you to pray an act of contrition or sorrow for sins. The following or another form may be used.

*Lord God,
in your goodness have mercy on me:
do not look on my sins,
but take away all my guilt.
Create in me a new heart
and renew within me an upright spirit.*

Absolution

The priest gives you absolution in these words:

*God the Father of mercies . . .
I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Dismissal

The priest may say:

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

The penitent responds:

His mercy endures forever.

Or the priest may say:

The Lord has freed you from your sins. Go in peace.

Your response is *Amen*.

Liturgy Planning: Penance and Reconciliation



Communal Reconciliation Service

Use the following suggestions as you plan and prepare for the communal celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. As always, adapt the ideas to the unique circumstances of your parish.

Planning the Liturgy

- Begin your planning by reading Chapter II, “Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution” in *The Rite of Penance*. This form of the Sacrament should be planned to include not only the children but their families as well.
- Prepare the environment. Let the Scripture selected for the liturgy or the Rite itself guide you.
- If possible divide participants among several liturgies to allow for a more personal and meaningful experience of First Penance and Reconciliation.
- Share with the priest who will be presiding at the liturgy some of the stories of forgiveness the children have heard during the course of their preparation. (Stories in *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace* include the parables of the Lost Son, the Lost Sheep, and the story of Zacchaeus.) This can guide you in the selection of the readings.
- Invite the children to list some things which could be included in the Examination of Conscience, or use the Examination of Conscience found in *A Little Catechism* in the child’s book.
- Convey to parents that First Penance and Reconciliation deserves to be celebrated as a special event by the whole family. They might invite grandparents, godparents, older siblings, and other relatives to attend. Encourage parents to take pictures that will remind them of this special day. Later, looking at these pictures, they will be able to remember and talk about what they experienced at First Reconciliation.
- Invite parents and family members to accompany the children to the place where the priest is hearing confessions.
- Arrange for someone to take pictures of the First Penance and Reconciliation service. On the Sundays following, display these pictures on a poster in the gathering area of the church. Include the names of the children who celebrated their First Penance and Reconciliation. In this way parishioners can be made aware of the celebration and offer their congratulations and prayers. Place an insert in the parish bulletin that lists the names of those who celebrated the Sacrament for the first time.

Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution

Use this worksheet for planning the liturgy of Penance and Reconciliation. Refer to the *Rite of Penance* for suggestions.

Outline of the Rite

Introductory Rites

Song _____

See *Rite of Penance* 48. Consider using reconciliation songs that the children have learned in the course of their preparation for Penance and Reconciliation. See RCL Benziger's *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace* music CD for possible selections.

Greeting _____

See *Rite of Penance* 49.

Collect _____

See *Rite of Penance* 50.

Celebration of the Word of God

Readings _____

See *Rite of Penance* 53.

Homily _____

See *Rite of Penance* 52.

Examination of Conscience _____

See *Rite of Penance* 53 or use the Examination of Conscience in *A Little Catechism* in the student book.

Rite of Reconciliation

General Confession of Sins _____

See *Rite of Penance* 54.

Litany or Song and the Lord's Prayer _____

See *Rite of Penance* 54.

Individual Confession and Absolution _____

See *Rite of Penance* 55.

Proclamation of Praise for God's Mercy _____

See *Rite of Penance* 56.

Concluding Prayer of Thanksgiving _____

See *Rite of Penance* 57.

Concluding Rite _____

See *Rite of Penance* 58–59.

With Open Arms: A Ritual of Welcome



Introduction

This ritual is celebrated at a liturgy prior to the children beginning their preparation for the Sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation and Eucharist. The wording of the ritual can be adapted if it is used just prior to the beginning of preparation for First Communion. The children are introduced to the parish by their parents or godparents and are affirmed by the assembly as they begin their formal Sacrament preparation sessions. The ritual occurs prior to the final blessing. As always, adapt the ritual to the needs of your parish community.

(Note: Reserve pews in the church for the children and their families.)

The Ritual

The leader (program director, catechist) begins with words of welcome to the children and their families.

Leader: Today we have with us a number of children who will soon begin their preparation to celebrate First Penance and Reconciliation and First Eucharist. Let us all welcome these children with open arms as they begin their Sacramental journey. As I call their names, will the children and their families please stand.

(Names are called and the children and their families stand.)

The priest presider continues with the ritual.

Presider: As we see these faith-filled families and their children standing among us, we are grateful to God for them. We pray that God will bless them as they begin to learn about God's forgiveness and peace in the Sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation and Eucharist.

Let us pray.

Blessed be God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, in his great mercy, has given us these children as a sign of hope in the world. By Baptism they entered into the new life of Christ Jesus. Now, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they desire to continue their journey of faith as they prepare for the Sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation and Eucharist.

Adapted from the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* 419, 420

Presider: And so I ask you, children, as you begin to prepare for the Sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation and Eucharist, are you ready to try to understand more clearly what your Baptism means to you?

Children: We are.

Presider: Are you ready to listen carefully to the words of encouragement and instruction given to you by your families and by your catechists?

Children: We are.

Presider: Are you ready to join more completely with us in a life of prayer and service?

Children: We are.

Presider: Parents, godparents, and families, you have brought these children to us today and have presented them as candidates for the Sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation and Eucharist. I now ask you: are you ready to help them prepare to celebrate these Sacraments?

Parents, Godparents, and Families: We are.

Presider: Are you willing to support your children, teach them, pray for them, and affirm them as they continue their Sacramental journey?

Parents, Godparents, and Families: We are.

Presider: Parents, godparents, and families, are you prepared to be living models of faith to these children?

Parents, Godparents, and Families: We are.

Presider: Then I ask you, parents, godparents, and families, to bless your children by tracing a sign of the cross on their foreheads and embracing them.

(Parents, godparents, and families do so.)

Presider: And now, I ask the rest of you gathered here today: As members of this assembly, are you prepared to offer your example, your support, your encouragement, and your prayers for these children and their families?

All: We are.

Presider: Then let us welcome these children, blessed by us and by their godparents and families, as they begin preparation for the Sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation and Eucharist.

All: Amen.

(Pause)

Presider: Let us pray.

Almighty and eternal God, whose love gathers us together as one, look kindly upon these children, already consecrated to you in Baptism, and draw them into the fullness of faith. Bless them and their families with peace, joy, and love, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.

The celebrant continues with the final blessing and Dismissal of the Mass.



Reconciliation

Pardon and Peace

Connecting to Families

Since the family is intimately involved with the formation of a child's moral conscience and ordinarily integrates the child into the wider ecclesial communities, parents should be involved in the preparation of their children for this Sacrament (Penance and Reconciliation) so that they can affirm and reinforce frequent participation in the Sacraments. They orient the child toward God and encourage continual growth in the understanding of God's mercy and love.

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Implementing the Family Experience Days



Purpose

“Since the family is intimately involved with the formation of a child’s moral conscience and ordinarily integrates the child into the wider ecclesial communities, parents should be involved in the preparation of their children for this Sacrament so that they can affirm and reinforce frequent participation in the Sacraments.”

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In order to involve the family more deeply in the preparation process, the following sessions gather the parents and children together for a day or evening of shared learning. The Family Experience Days for Penance and Reconciliation focus on

- Penance and Reconciliation—Sacrament of conversion, and its relationship to Baptism
- Penance and Reconciliation—a Sacrament of contrition
- Penance and Reconciliation—a Sacrament of forgiveness
- Penance and Reconciliation—a Sacrament of restoration

Who Should Attend

These sessions are intended for the parish children preparing for First Penance and Reconciliation and their families. If a parent cannot attend, ask that another family member accompany the child.

Scheduling

These sessions should be scheduled well in advance for families to adjust their schedules accordingly and attend. You may wish to consider a Saturday or Sunday session rather than a weekday evening session. Communicate the schedule for the sessions in written form and follow up with a reminder notice as each date comes closer. The suggested time for each session is two hours, but it may be adjusted according to your parish needs.

Note: Session Four invites the children and their families to return after the children have celebrated First Penance and Reconciliation. Their session is mystagogy—a reflection on the present with a look to the future.

Family Experience Day #1

Baptism and Reconciliation: With Hearts Renewed

Purpose

This session should lead children and their parents to an understanding of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation as a Sacrament of conversion and its relationship to Baptism.

Who Should Attend

This session is intended for the parish children preparing for First Penance and Reconciliation and their families.

Scheduling

This session may be offered prior to the children beginning their preparation or after they have completed the first chapter in their books.

Environment

Participants should experience a warm, friendly environment upon their arrival. Have nametags, greeters, a sign-in sheet, and refreshments available as everyone arrives.

Create a prayer table as a focal point in the room. Cover the table with a cloth reflecting the liturgical season. Place symbols reflecting the day's theme on the table: a crucifix, a Bible or *Lectionary for Masses With Children*, a candle, bowl of water, and a green plant.

Advance Preparation

- Position chairs in groups throughout the room.
- Ask a capable parent and child to role-play the story in the Life Experience segment.
- Ask capable volunteers to role-play or do a dramatic reading of the parable of the Lost Son, (see Luke 15:11–32).
- Prepare a discussion/questions handout. Also prepare the activity instructions as a handout.

Materials needed

- nametags and markers
- prayer table décor
- CD player
- music CD
- RCL Benziger's *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace*
- handouts
- Bible or Lectionary for Masses With Children
- refreshments
- red construction paper hearts
- crayons or markers

Welcome and Introduction

Welcome the parents and children. Let the children know that as they begin their journey of preparation for First Penance and Reconciliation they have the interest and support not only of their parents, but of the whole parish community. Invite the children to stand so that they can be acknowledged and welcomed.

Briefly describe the purpose and the outline of the session. Assure the parents that specific details about the celebration of the Sacrament will be provided at another time.

Opening Prayer

Invite the group to quiet themselves for prayer.

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: Let us pray.

Loving God, you give us the gifts of Baptism and Penance and Reconciliation for the forgiveness of sins. Help us to be faithful to our baptismal promises. Be with these children and their families who are beginning their preparation for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation and guide them on their journey. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reader: (Proclaims Acts 2:37–38)

(Silent Reflection)

Leader: In the reading we hear Peter urging the people of Jerusalem to be baptized and to follow Jesus. Our parents made the decision to have us baptized. They wanted us to be part of a bigger family—God’s family, the Church. We want to continue growing in God’s family and as children of God.

Leader: Parents, I invite you to spend a few minutes telling your children about their Baptism.

(Ask the parents to tell about their reasons for wanting Baptism for their child. Who were selected as Godparents? Why? Why was the child’s name chosen? After this conversation takes place, ask children to share with the large group something that impressed them in hearing about their Baptism. Close the sharing with a song, such as “Water of Life” by Jaime Cortez (on RCL Benziger’s *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace* music CD.)

Leader: Let us pray. God of love and forgiveness, you have made us your own through the waters of Baptism. Grant that these children and their parents may come to know your love and mercy more deeply through this time of preparation. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Life Experience: A Story of Conversion

Presentation

Briefly make the following points about the Sacraments of Baptism and Penance and Reconciliation:

- Baptism is a Sacrament of conversion. *Conversion* means *change*. Our old life is changed to a new life in Christ.
- All sins are forgiven in Baptism.
- You were given a white garment to symbolize your new, pure, clean life.
- Even though we are made wonderfully new at Baptism, sometimes we still make mistakes. We make bad choices that hurt others. We sin.
- God promises to always forgive our sins, but first we must be sorry and want to change.

Story

Tell the group you are going to tell them a story. Then in your best storytelling manner, read the story *A Mother's Forgiveness*. You may want to ask in advance a parent and child to role-play this scene.

A Mother's Forgiveness

Andrew couldn't wait to get home from school. Finally, he had a copy of *Skateboarder's Revenge*. It was the most popular video game and all his friends were playing it.

Usually Andrew was expected to do his homework and house chores as soon as he got home from school. But that didn't happen this time. Andrew thought he could skip his work just this one time.

"I always do my work like mom and dad expect," Andrew thought to himself. "I deserve a day off."

So Andrew took a day off.

When his mother got home from the store, she asked, "Andrew, did you do your homework and finish your chores already?"

"Uh, no mom. I'll do that later," Andrew said.

Andrew's mom was not happy. In fact, she was a little sad. She wondered how a computer game could keep her son from doing the right thing.

"Andrew, please put that video game away and do your work," Andrew's mom said. And when Andrew didn't listen, his mom turned the game off for him.

Andrew became angry. He said something mean to his mom. "This is not fair! Why can't you be like my friends' moms and just let me play?"

Then Andrew's mom sent him to his room.

As Andrew lay on his bed, he heard his parents talking. He heard his little sisters playing. He really wanted to be with them. But soon Andrew fell

asleep. When Andrew awoke, he saw a peanut butter and jelly sandwich on his table. His favorite. Next to the sandwich was a note from his mom.

Discussion

- Ask parents to discuss with their children the Conversation Starters, on page 73. (Have the questions prepared as a handout.)
- After the small group discussion, ask volunteers to share their thoughts.

Activity: Heart of the Family

Distribute the hearts (one to a family), the crayons or markers, and the instructions (page 73). Tell the families that they are going to make something that can serve as the note or peanut butter sandwich in their family.

In closing, tie the hearts the families made to the note the mother left in the story. Then emphasize the following:

- God's grace changes our hearts.
- God calls us to celebrate our change of heart in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

Break: Provide refreshments.

A Bible Story: The Son with a Change of Heart

Here is a story from the Bible about another parent and child. Ask the families to listen for how the boy in this story has a change of heart.

Do a dramatic reading or role-play the parable of the Lost Son (see Luke 15:11–32).

After the reading, ask each small group to discuss the second set of Conversation Starters.

After the family discussion, give a brief, simple talk on the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation as a Sacrament of conversion.

- Relate the parable of the Lost Son to Penance and Reconciliation.
- Reconciliation starts with a change of heart (conversion).
- The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is the Sacrament of God's love and forgiveness. Relate God to the father in the story.
- Baptism is the first Sacramental forgiveness of sin.
- A Sacrament is a celebration of God's love.

Lastly, ask the children to tell their parents how they feel about beginning preparation for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Recognize that children may know very little about this Sacrament. Parents should encourage children to describe what they do know.

Closing Ritual (Song: "Agua de Vida/Water of Life," Jaime Cortez)

Leader: We gather as God's people, united to Christ and one another by the waters of Baptism.

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.

(Proclaim Mark 10:13–16)

Leader: Parents, at Baptism you were asked what you asked of the Church for your child. I ask you again now, What do you ask of the Church for your child?

Response: Penance and Reconciliation.

Leader: Will you help your child prepare for this important Sacrament of mercy and forgiveness?

Response: I will.

Leader: At Baptism you were asked to trace the sign of the cross on your child. I ask you now to trace the cross on your child and in your own words pledge to him or her that you will help them and be with them as they begin this important journey.

Prepare each of the following as separate handouts.

Conversation Starters

Set One: The following questions are for parents and children to discuss after the story, A Mother's Forgiveness.

1. What do you think was written on the note?
2. What was the peanut butter and jelly sandwich a sign of?
3. Imagine the conversation Andrew and his mother had after this episode. Talk about what they might have said to each other. How did Andrew feel about what had happened? How did Andrew's mother feel?
4. Andrew's mother reached out to her son and forgave him before he had apologized. Why did the mother do this? Do you think Andrew should have apologized first? Why or why not?
5. If someone has hurt you, what can you say to that person?
6. If someone has apologized for hurting you, what can you say or do?

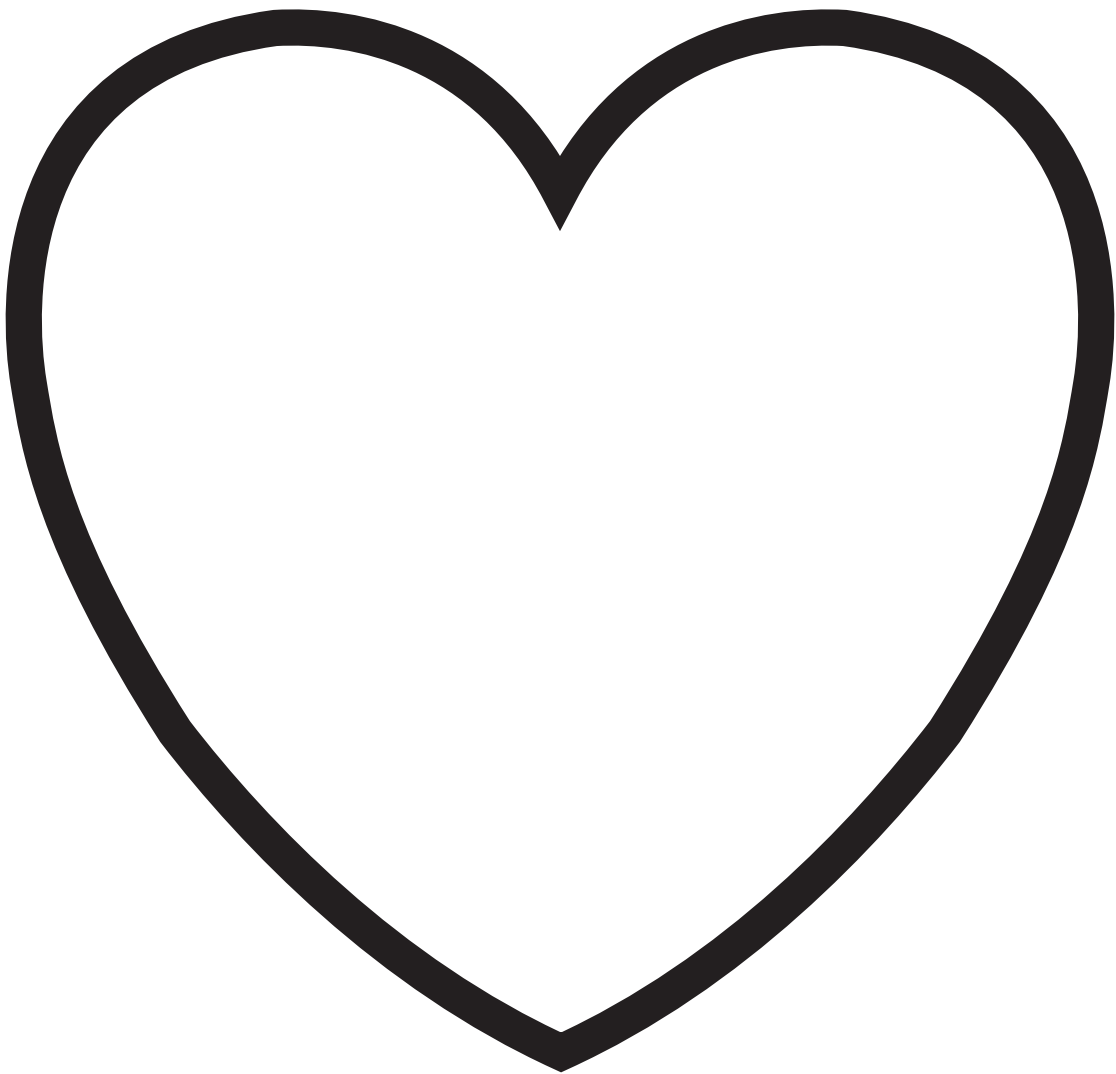
Set Two: The following questions are for parents and children to discuss after the parable of the Lost Son, Luke 15:11–32.

1. Why did the boy leave home?
2. What does it mean to change your heart? Why did the boy have a change of heart?
3. What did the father do after the boy had a change of heart and came home?
4. What is Jesus trying to tell us about God?
5. Where do you need to change your heart? What will you do?

Heart of the Family

Sometimes family members find it hard to admit when they need to have a change of heart. This simple activity will help you take action to facilitate forgiveness and reconciliation within the family.

Decorate the red construction paper heart and write the names of all your family members on it. When you get home place your heart somewhere for all to see. Family members can give this heart to each other when someone is in need of forgiveness and reconciliation. Family members also can take the heart when they realize on their own that they need to be reconciled with the family.



Family Experience Day #2

Penance and Reconciliation: A Sacrament of Contrition

Purpose

The purpose of this gathering is to raise awareness of both personal and social sin; to lead to an understanding of the need to express sorrow for sin and walk as children of the light.

Who Should Attend

This session is intended for the parish children preparing for First Penance and Reconciliation and their families.

Scheduling

This session may be offered after the children have completed chapter two in their books.

Environment

Prepare the meeting space in such a way to make it warm and inviting for families. Position chairs in a U-shape format; leave a small space between chairs so participants will not be too close for the meditation.

Set up a welcome table with name tags.

Set up a prayer table in the front or center of the room. Cover the table with a cloth reflecting the liturgical season, and place on the table: a large candle; symbols of light, such as photos of light streaming through a window or someone walking down a sunlit path; a Bible or *Lectionary for Masses With Children*; and a figure or image of the risen Christ.

Advance Preparation:

- Become familiar with the process of explaining and leading a guided meditation. (See pages 134–137 of the Catechist Edition of *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace*.)
- Ask a capable adult to prepare and proclaim the Scripture.
- Practice reading the story, A Prickly Challenge.

Materials needed

- nametags and markers
- prayer table décor
- handouts
- refreshments
- reflective music
- CD player
- music CD
- Bible

Welcome and Introduction

Warmly welcome the families. Briefly describe the purpose and outline of the session. Invite family members to form pairs; ask for a volunteer to be your partner. Teach the words and hand motions to the song, A Little Bit of Forgiveness, found on the session's Handout #1. Teach it in echo form first, and then sing it once. Mention that it will be part of the closing prayer.

Opening Prayer

Leader: In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let us pray: Loving God, you created us in love. You gave us Jesus to show us how to live in the light. Send your Holy Spirit to be with us this day as we look at ways to make better choices in our lives. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Story: A Prickly Challenge

Invite everyone to listen carefully as you read the following story/poem.

A Prickly Challenge

Fat snowflakes fell on the frozen brook.
Pamela Porcupine shivered and shook.
The tree that she had lived in for many winters had been flattened by the winds.
It was now only splinters.
Pamela shuddered and trembled. She needed somewhere to stay.
Then, Pamela spotted a group of squirrel children at play.
“Could I go home with you?
I’m freezing, and I’m afraid that I’ll turn blue.”
“You are too prickly and spiny. Your quills are sharper than pins!” the squirrels said.
“They will stick in our elbows and stick in our chins!
‘No’ is what we say!
Just be on your way!”
The squirrel children continued on, but they thought about what they had said.
“Maybe we were not kind to Pamela,” said the smallest squirrel Ned.
The squirrel children called on their Grandma Emma.
She would help them work out their prickly dilemma.
“What you did doesn’t sound right.
She’ll freeze alone out there tonight!”
The squirrel children ran out. They searched high, and they searched low.
They found Pamela crouched down in the snow.

“We’re sorry we left you, we’ll take you in. Don’t feel rejected. With us as your friends, you’ll be protected.”

After reading the story, ask the participants to discuss the story in family groups. Provide each family with a copy of the following questions.

What was the choice that the squirrel children made?

Why did they say no to Pamela?

Do you think it was a good or a bad choice? Why?

How did the squirrel children make things right?

Who helped the squirrel children make a better choice?

Presentation

After giving the families time to discuss the questions, invite feedback from the whole group.

Then give a brief talk about sin being times when we deliberately decide to do something we know is wrong. Sometimes we make bad choices and we sin. Our conscience tells us that we have done something wrong, just like the squirrel children began to have second thoughts or doubts about what they had done.

When we make a bad choice by ourselves, we commit a personal sin. But when we act with a crowd to do something wrong, we commit a social or communal sin. Social sin, as defined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, is the effect of sin over time which can affect society and its institutions. Structures and policies which oppress others is social sin. Ask for the adults to name some examples of what might be considered social sin. (For example, workplaces where employees are paid less than minimum wage; factories that employ children yet are allowed to exist; wasting our natural resources without regard for future generations; and racism, ageism, violence and injustices toward a group of people.)

In small groups ask the participants to come up with some examples of what might be social sin. The adults will have to guide the children on this. Children can understand social problems, such as ecological issues, racism, and discrimination against a group of people because of their nationality or race.

After the discussion, invite volunteers to share their thoughts.

Break. Provide refreshments.

Presentation

Offer a brief presentation on sin, both personal and social. Let this lead into saying that before a person or a society can change, there needs to be an awareness of sin and a desire to make better choices. A person's conscience helps a person to recognize sin. Sometimes a wise person, such as Grandma Emma in the story they heard, or a prophet like Isaiah, calls people to change. Sometimes it's the modern-day prophets like Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day, Mother Teresa, or Pope Francis that serve as a nation's or the world's conscience. The Church calls us to do good. The voices in Scripture do as well.

Tell the group to listen to what Jesus has to say about how we should live our lives.

Proclaim Ephesians 5:8–14.

Invite the groups to come up with three concrete ways we can show that we are living in the light of Christ.

Segue into the guided meditation, which is a form of examination of conscience.

Guided Meditation

(Begin background music.) Today you will meet Jesus in your imagination.

Begin by sitting quietly. Let your whole body relax from the top of your head to the tip of your toes. . . . Just relax. . . .

You are safely alone in your favorite place. It can be inside or outside. It is peaceful here in your favorite place. The peacefulness will help you to examine your conscience.

In the distance a man's gentle voice calls out your name. . . . You hear it again! . . . Someone special is coming. It is Jesus! . . . Hear him tell you how happy he is to find you here . . . Make room for Jesus in your favorite place.

Jesus says gently that he would like to help you examine your conscience. . . . He asks you to tell him what you can do to be closer to God. . . . Take this time to tell Jesus what you could do to love God more. (Lengthier pause)

Now Jesus asks, "How do you treat your parents or others who care for you? . . . Do you respect them? . . . Do you obey them? . . . What should you do differently?" . . . Answer Jesus. . . . Tell him what you will do to treat others with more care and respect. (Lengthier pause)

Hear Jesus ask you to tell him about the way you treat others at school, home, or work . . . Are you selfish? . . . Do you tell the truth? . . . Do you gossip? . . . Tell Jesus about anything in your heart that you are not proud of. (Lengthier pause)

Jesus places one of his hands on yours. . . . He reminds you that when you make mistakes and choose sin, you hurt yourself, too. . . . He tells you he does not want that for you. . . . Then, Jesus says gently, “Do not hold onto guilt or shame. . . . Let it go. . . . I will always forgive you if you are sorry.”

Jesus asks you to stand up in front of him. . . . He places his hands on your shoulders and says, “My Spirit is within you and will help you.” . . . Now, Jesus places his two warm and gentle hands upon your head. . . . Jesus blesses you with the power of his Spirit to help you to love God, others, and yourself more. . . . He prays that you will make good decisions. Listen as he prays for you. (Lengthier pause)

Thank Jesus for his blessing. Jesus smiles at you. He says your name and tells you that he loves you very much.

It is time for Jesus to go now. Say your good-byes. . . . Watch Jesus leave. . . . Stay in your favorite place and remember the ways you will try harder to love God, others, and yourself more deeply. (Lengthier pause)

When you are ready you may open your eyes, but stay very quiet.

Now, take a moment and share with your family member how you feel, or share one special thing from your time with Jesus.

Dismissal

Review the Points to Remember on Handout #2.
Close with the song, “A Little Bit of Forgiveness.”

Handout #1

Sing this song again with your child and teach it to the family.

“A Little Bit of Forgiveness” (tune: “Itsy Bitsy Spider”)

A little bit of forgiveness (Circle palm on heart)
Goes a long way (Extend arm out wide)
You can say, “I’m sorry” (Trace tears down cheeks)
Or, “That’s okay!” (Shake hand outward)
Maybe you can shake hands (Shake hand with partner)

Or, maybe you can hug (Place arm on shoulder)
But a little bit of forgiveness (Circle palm on heart)
Is a lot like God's love! (Extend arm high 'toward God')

A Child's Examination of Conscience

Do I love God enough to remember to talk to him each day? Do my prayers include saying thank you, I love you, and I'm sorry? Do I use God's name in a wrong way when I'm mad? Do I behave when I'm in church?

Do I show respect for and obedience to my parents and other adults who are responsible for me? Am I kind to all the kids or just to some of them? Am I honest in what I do or say? Do I talk meanly about others? Do I take things without asking or paying? Do I stay busy with my own things when it is time to help?

Do I keep doing something that makes me feel bad and hurts me?

Handout #2

An Adult's Examination of Conscience

In my relationship with God: Do I adore God and place God first in my life? Do I refrain from using God's name as an expletive? Am I faithful to worshipping at Mass with my community?

In my relationships with others: Am I sensitive and helpful to my parents or to others who are aging? Are there strings attached when I give? Am I honest in financial matters? Do I possess integrity in my relationships in all of my life areas?

In my relationship to myself: Am I authentic in the "face" I show others? Do I engage in practices that are harmful to myself, such as drugs, pornography, alcohol, gambling, self-mutilation?

Points to Remember

- Sin is saying or doing what is wrong or not doing or saying what is loving and helpful. Sin hurts God, others, and us.
- Social sin happens when the personal sins of people are being done by a group. When we examine our conscience, we must include reflection on personal and social sin.
- Penance and Reconciliation is about contrition. God will always forgive us if we show sorrow for our sins. God does not want us to hold onto guilt or shame. We may make bad choices and mistakes, but we are not bad or a mistake.

Family Experience Day #3

The Gifts of Pardon and Peace

Purpose

The purpose of the session is to explore the reality that forgiveness brings peace to the one forgiven and the one forgiving; to appreciate more deeply our responsibility for the examples we set; and to celebrate God's limitless capacity to lovingly pardon us and give us his peace.

Who Should Attend

This session is intended for the parish children preparing for First Penance and Reconciliation and their families.

Environment

Prepare the meeting space in such a way as to make it warm and inviting for families. Set up the space with tables and chairs for the families. Have pens or pencils and paper on each table. Set up a welcome table with name tags. Provide drinks and refreshments for the end of the session.

Place the prayer table with the theme's centerpiece in the center or front of the room. Include signs that read, *pardon*, *peace*, *forgiveness*, and *reconciliation*, an image of Jesus, a candle, and the Bible opened to Luke 19:1–10.

Advanced Preparation

- If necessary amend the content of this or the extended session to fit the needs of your program.
- Ask a capable adult to prepare and proclaim the reading.

Materials Needed

- nametags and markers
- pens or pencils
- flip chart or whiteboard
- markers
- prayer table décor
- refreshments
- copies of the Closing Prayer
- handout
- music CD for prayer and closing ritual
- CD player
- Bible

Welcome and Introduction

Warmly welcome the families. Ask participants to introduce themselves to those sitting around them. Briefly describe the purpose and outline of the session.

Opening Prayer

Invite all to quiet themselves. Play the song “Change Our Hearts” by Rory Cooney (RCL Benziger’s *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace* CD), or another hymn suitable for quiet prayer.

Leader: Let us pray. God of all goodness, how blessed we are that you will always offer us your pardon and give us your peace when we are sorry. Be with us as we learn more about the importance of asking for forgiveness. Help us to discover that we must be loving and sincere when we forgive others. Teach us to recognize the power our example has on others so that we will make better choices. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Reader: (Proclaim Luke 19:1–10)

Interactive Reflection

- Why do you think Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus?
- Why were people angry that Jesus was going to Zacchaeus’ house?
- What does Jesus say when he forgives Zacchaeus?
- In what way does Zacchaeus show he is sorry (contrition)?
- How do you know when you are sorry for your sins?
- What would Jesus say to you if you were up in that tree?

Leader: Let us pray. Lord our God, you bless everyone whose sins you forgive and wipe away. Through your Son, Jesus, you show how much you love us. Grace us always with your Spirit so that we will recognize our sinfulness and express true contrition. We want to love and forgive as you do. We ask this in your holy name. Amen.

Life Experience

Direct families to the tables. Begin a discussion about Penance and Reconciliation by asking, *How do you make peace in your family?* Ask family members to write down some examples. Tell them examples may include saying “I’m sorry” or a simple gesture like a hug. Give families sufficient time to share. When finished ask volunteers to share some examples. List these examples for all to see. Lead participants to understand that establishing peace in their families is synonymous with the concept of reconciliation. It is crucial for the health and well-being of the family.

Next tell participants how the importance of being reconciled with God and our Church family often is overlooked. Perhaps one of the casualties of modern-day society has been the loss of a sense of sin. Venial sins often are excused as acceptable acts. This appears especially true of sins that many consider to be private—that is, only the sinner is affected by the sin. Explain to participants that the Church teaches, however, that there are no private

sins. In the Letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul stresses the oneness of the Church, reminding Christians that all members of the Church are like one body, working together. He urges us to show that the Church is one and holy by the way we lead our lives (see Ephesians 4:1–6). Ultimately, our misunderstanding about the need to reconcile ourselves in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation weakens our faith, tears at the unity and holiness of the Church, and impairs our ability to receive God’s grace.

Step One: Contrition

Tell participants that contrition is at the core of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. The Church teaches that there can be no reconciliation without genuine sorrow for one’s sins and the intention of sinning no more. Explain that contrition is the most important act of the penitent in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

To get across the idea of contrition, briefly sketch out a family case scenario. Ask parents if they use time-outs as a behavioral modification method for their children. Most should be familiar with this method. For those who are not, briefly discuss the purpose and nature of time-outs. Then provide each family with the following scenarios.

Scenario 1—A child fights with a sibling and is given a time-out. To get out of the time-out, the child is required to say “I’m sorry.”

Scenario 2—A child fights with a sibling and is given a time-out. In this time-out, the child not only is required to say “I’m sorry,” but also is required to remain in the time-out for a ten-minute period.

Have families discuss:

What do you think the purpose of the time-out should be?

Which scenario do you think will have the best results and why?

After a brief discussion ask for feedback. Lead them to understand that the first scenario may fail in its goal to reinforce appropriate reflection and contrition on the part of the child. This method can become formulaic because the child realizes that saying, “I’m sorry,” is all that is required to avoid further punishment. In this case one can avoid an opportunity for reflection that can lead to contrition.

Step Two: Confession

Next begin a discussion about the nature of confession. Tell the families that we as Catholics are required to tell our sins to a priest in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Some may wonder why this is necessary, if a person feels true contrition for sins. Address this by asking if it is easier to tell ourselves we are sorry or if it is better to admit we are sorry to another. Ask them which is more rewarding and why. Invite participants to share their

reservations and other feelings about confessing their sins to the priest. Explain that the priest is a minister of God and, as such, is an instrument of God's love and mercy.

Step Three: Penance

Ask the group why they think a penance is given after they have confessed their sins. What do they think is the purpose of the penance? Explain that the Rite of Penance suggests that true conversion takes place by making up for the sin or repairing the injury sin has caused. It says that the penance should be suited to the personal condition of the penitent. Ask the group to respond to that idea. Ask them if they can suggest a type of penance to fit a particular sin or situation. Have them share their expectations or concerns.

Step Four: Absolution

Move participants to a brief discussion on absolution, the last part of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Tell them that the words and actions carry meaning, much like a hug or a handshake as a sign of peace and reconciliation.

Break (10 minutes)

Invite participants to enjoy some refreshments and conversation with each other. Encourage them to talk to people they don't already know.

After the Break

Gather the families once again. Remind everyone that we understand our relationship with God from our relationships with each other. Therefore we must give second chances to our family members and others. We must always be ready to forgive as we are forgiven.

Review the Steps for Conflict Resolution (page 93). Share that having a common phrase for the family can be helpful to slow down a conflict, keep it from happening, or suggest a time-out to discuss things. Give an example, such as, "*peace is needed here*, or *May Christ's peace be with us*." Ask families to take a few minutes to discuss what their helpful phrase might be.

Family Sharing

Invite family members to share something that they did, said, or did not do for each other for which they are really sorry. Tell them to ask forgiveness and to pardon one another.

Teaching

Review the Points to Remember (on page 93).

Closing Prayer

Distribute copies of the closing prayer. Ask for volunteers to read the parts of the prayer. Light the candle on the prayer table. Play music appropriate for quiet prayer. Then invite participants to reflect on their sins.



We Pray for Pardon and Peace

Leader: Brothers and sisters, let us confess our sins and pray for each other, that we may be healed.

All: I confess to almighty God
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have greatly sinned,
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done and in what I have
failed to do,
through my fault, through my fault,
through my most grievous fault;
therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin,
all the Angels and Saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me to the Lord our God.

Reader 1: Lord you are merciful. You give us clean hearts and lead us into your freedom when we acknowledge our sins. We ask for your forgiveness.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Reader 2: Give us the grace of true sorrow.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Reader 3: Renew in us your spirit with the hope of eternal life.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Reader 4: Renew love in our hearts, and help us to show it in our daily lives.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: Let us now pray to God our Father in the words Jesus gave us, and ask him for his forgiveness and protection from all evil.

All: Our Father, who art in heaven . . .

Leader: Let us offer each other a sign of peace.

Points to Remember

- Reconciliation is about repairing our relationship with God, our Church, and each other.
- There can be no reconciliation without contrition for one's sins and the intention of sinning no more.
- We are responsible for the examples we set for each other.
- If we are to believe that God gives second chances, then we need to give second chances to each other.
- Maintaining peace in our homes takes effort. Finding a common phrase to say out loud during a conflict can be helpful.
- Forgiveness brings peace to the person being forgiven and to the person who is doing the forgiving.
- God's desire is to forgive his children whose hearts are full of contrition and to restore their peace and joy.
- In the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, the priest offers the words of absolution: ". . . I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." The words of absolution say that God gives us pardon and peace.

Steps for Conflict Resolution

1. Take a moment to step back from the conflict.
2. Use "I" messages to state the problem. Avoid accusations and generalizations.
3. Restate what you heard the other person say.
4. Take responsibility.
5. Brainstorm solutions together that satisfy both parties.
6. Affirm, forgive, or thank the other person.

Our family's phrase to maintain peace is: _____

Reflecting on the Mystery of Penance and Reconciliation

Purpose

The purpose of this session is to reflect upon the meaning of the Sacramental experience and to enable participants to articulate a basic understanding of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Participants will be empowered to be reconcilers of others.

Who Should Attend

This session is intended for children and their families who have recently celebrated the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

Scheduling

This mystagogy session takes place *after* the celebration of First Penance and Reconciliation. The session is based on the family's experience of the Sacrament. For a review of the meaning and purpose of mystagogy, please see the article on page 43 of this guide.

Note: This session is similar to the child's session found in Chapter 8 of their book. The process of reflecting on the Sacrament is the same. However, this session has more of an emphasis on restoration and the reconciling nature of Penance and Reconciliation. The dynamic also will be different with parents present. You may opt to do the session that best fits your parish setting, rather than doing both.

Environment

Create an environment conducive to quiet reflection. Allow for comfortable seating so children and adults alike can relax.

Set up a welcome table with name tags.

Set up a prayer table in the front or center of the room that recalls the parish celebration of First Penance and Reconciliation.

Instrumental music should be soft, audible and easy to access. Use candles to help set a mood of quiet reflection.

Advance Preparation

- Notify parents to bring a dish for a potluck meal, if that is what you have planned, and set up accordingly.
- Set up the meeting space and area for the potluck.
- Set up the prayer table.
- Read through the whole process until you feel comfortable with the format.

Materials Needed

- prayer table décor
- music for quiet reflection
- CD player
- RCL Benziger's *Reconciliation* music CD
- nametags and markers
- refreshments
- dishes and cutlery for potluck meal

Welcome and Introduction

Begin by expressing the joy the parish feels over the children's reception of the Sacrament. Ask the children to stand and be recognized.

Next, briefly explain the purpose of this mystagogical session as one of remembering First Penance and Reconciliation and talking about what the Sacrament means. Describe the reflection portion of the session.

Prayer: Remembering First Penance and Reconciliation

Step One: Introduction

(Begin reflective music.) Invite all participants to make themselves comfortable. Spread out and use all the space in the room. Then, ask participants to relax and clear their minds of distractions. Next, ask them to close their eyes and ask the Holy Spirit to enter their hearts and hold them close during this meditation.

Step Two: What did you experience?

Note: This guided reflection is based on a communal celebration of the Rite of Penance and Reconciliation with individual confession and absolution.

Once the group is quiet and relaxed, ask them to think back to the days when they were preparing for First Penance and Reconciliation.

The questions are merely a guide to help participants recall the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Time for reflection is allowed between each question.

Guided Reflection

Think back to the time when you began the preparation for First Penance and Reconciliation.

Remember sitting with your mom or dad or child. Remember talking about God's love . . . about good and bad choices . . . about sin and forgiveness. What do you most remember? . . .

Remember your favorite Bible story . . . Maybe it was the Lost Sheep, or the Lost Son, or maybe Zacchaeus . . . What are some of the parts that you picture in your mind?

Now, move forward in time to the day we celebrated First Penance and Reconciliation . . . Remember getting ready at home . . . and coming to church as a family . . . Remember how you felt on that day.

(Introductory Rites) Picture yourself sitting in church, waiting for the celebration to begin . . . Who do you see around you? . . . What does the church look like?

Now, the celebration begins. We stood and sang a gathering song. . . . Imagine being in this moment again.

(Celebration of the Word of God) We sat down to hear the Word of God. . . . Remember the Scripture story. (Give them a brief scenario from the Scripture proclaimed.)

Remember Father speaking to us about _____. (Give a brief summary of his talk.)

(Rite of Reconciliation) Soon it was time to approach the priest for confession. How were you feeling as you walked toward where the priest was sitting? . . . Did you feel differently as you were talking to the priest? . . . Remember what was going through your mind.

When the priest raised his hand and said, “I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” how were you feeling?

What was the feeling in your heart as you returned to your place?

(Concluding Rite) Finally, remember the feelings you had as the celebration ended.

What did you and family do after you left the Church?

How were your relationships with God and others restored (made new) by this Sacrament?

After a moment of silence, ask the participants to open their eyes and return their thoughts to the present time and place.

Understanding the Sacrament

The next step in the session is to connect the liturgical experience with the meaning of the Sacrament. You may begin this segment with a questions such as, “What do you remember most from the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation?”

Take this opportunity to talk about the purpose and meaning of a penance. (In this way the theology of the Sacrament flows from the participants, rather than the leader giving a lecture on the theology of the Sacrament.)

Your responsibility as leader is to see that the major elements of the Sacrament are brought forth from the group.

They include the following:

- Contrition (heartfelt sorrow for sin committed)
- Introductory Rites (community gathers)

- Celebration of the Word of God (God's Word calls us to conversion)
- Rite of Reconciliation
 - Confession (admission of sin)
 - Penance (to help live your new way of life)
 - Absolution (God grants forgiveness)
- Dismissal (to be in restored relationships; to be reconcilers of others; to be ambassadors of Christ)

From the reflection on the liturgy the following points should come forth:

- Penance and Reconciliation is a Sacrament of conversion.
- Penance and Reconciliation is a Sacrament of contrition.
- Penance and Reconciliation is a Sacrament of forgiveness.
- Penance and Reconciliation is a Sacrament of restoration.
- Penance and Reconciliation is a communal celebration of pardon and peace.

Step Three: Accepting God's Grace

After remembering the experience and connecting the meaning to the experience, the final step in the mystagogical process is to determine a response. Mystagogy helps us determine what our response to the Sacramental encounter will be.

Explain to the participants that they have received God's grace through their Sacramental experience. God's grace will help them live out the Sacramental experience in their daily lives. Accepting God's grace in this way helps them restore relationships with others and also be "ambassadors of Christ" in the ministry of reconciliation (1 Corinthians 5:17–21).

Ask participants to form family groups for discussion. Provide each group with a copy of the questions.

Questions for the children to answer:

- Can you think of a time at school or at home when you forgave somebody or someone forgave you? What was that time? How do you think the experience of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation helped you in that time?
- Do you think it is important for you to tell others about forgiveness? Why?

Questions for the parents to answer:

- How have your relationships with God and others been restored?
- How will you bring the gift of reconciliation to others?
- How will you help others to be reconciled to God?

After time for discussion, use examples given by the group to point out how reconciliation begins in the home. Then, discuss how the Church believes the Eucharist, our family meal, is the ordinary means of reconciliation. Point out that:

- Baptism is the primary means of reconciliation.
- Eucharist is the ordinary means of reconciliation.
- Penance and Reconciliation is the extraordinary means of reconciliation.

Now, ask them to think about a family meal. Ask participants to continue their discussion using the following questions:

- How does “ordinary” reconciliation take place at your family table?
- Parents, how can meals promote pardon and peace in your home?

Close with a final prayer and shared meal.

A Meal with Jesus

Call the participants together for prayer.

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: Jesus has reconciled us to himself. He has found the lost and invited them to dinner. Let’s listen to the story of Jesus going home to have dinner with one who was lost.

Reader: Luke 19:1–9

(Pause for silent reflection.)

Leader: Let us ask God to bless us and the food we are about to share.

All: Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Closing Song: “Go Make a Difference,” from RCL Benziger’s *Reconciliation: Pardon and Peace* music CD

Invite all to enjoy the shared meal.

Sacraments

by Sister Catherine Dooley, O.P.



The sacramental celebrations of your children are always special days because they mark milestones in the child's life of faith and point to the growth of the child from infancy to childhood to the teenage years to adulthood. The celebration of Sacramental rites is an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of Sacraments and particularly your role in the preparation and celebration. The school or parish provides the immediate preparation, but it is the parents who have been readying them for a long time. The lived experience of the family makes a deeper impression than the concepts learned in a textbook because it is the ordinary everyday actions that are the foundation of the Sacramental life. Your child comes to know God's love through your love.

In the context of the liturgy when we give thanks, when we ask pardon, when we praise, these words take on meaning because of the experience of thanking, forgiving, and affirming that takes place in family life. It has been said that parents should not worry because their children never listen to them but rather should worry because their children are always watching them!

Sacramental Actions

How willing are you to share your faith with your children? Children love stories, and stories from the life of Jesus told again and again are foundational to faith and prepare the children for the liturgical proclamation of the Gospel. Tracing the cross on the forehead of a child before he or she leaves the house or before going to bed teaches him or her the meaning of the cross as the sign of God's love and care and develops a child's sense of identity. To give thanks before a meal or even a simple Sign of the Cross before eating calls to mind the presence of God in your child's life. Even if the child may not yet be able to articulate meaning, the action provides an intuitive way of knowing that is foundational for reflection and integration in the future.

Sacraments are about relationships with God and with one another. Sometimes we place so much focus on our part in the celebration that we forget that Sacraments are God's actions in our lives. Liturgy has special significance as a way of relating to God or responding to God's relating to us. It is important to help your child realize that the purpose of a Sacrament is

to give worship and praise to God, to grow in holiness, and to build up the Reign of God.

The Sacrament is not limited to the moment of celebration but is lived out in the future and is in continuity with all that has gone before. Anyone who is married would not say that their wedding day is their marriage; rather it is the beginning of a day-to-day commitment throughout the years that is their marriage. Nor did the couple decide they loved each other on the day of the wedding; that happened long before the wedding. So it is with all Sacraments. Our actual Baptism may have been a long time ago; yet to be a Christian is to continually live out the meaning of the baptismal promises in daily life. With children (and others) it is important to stress that Sacramental celebration is part of the fabric of their lives.

A Call to Action

Because the Sacraments involve more than the moment of celebration, each of the Sacraments calls us to action. As children, when we fought on the way home from Mass our mother would often say, “Well, the Mass didn’t do you much good!” One purpose of the Sacraments is to build up the Reign of God. If we are reconciled in the Sacrament of Penance, then we are called to be reconcilers. The Eucharist commissions us to go in peace and to glorify the Lord by our lives. The Sacraments achieve their effect when they take root in our lives and move us to a greater service of God and neighbor. The question that we might ask our children and ourselves whenever we celebrate a Sacrament is: “What does this Sacrament ask of me?”



Preparing Your Child for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

by Sister Catherine Dooley, O.P.



The preparation for your child’s celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation started years ago when you began to teach your child about God, prayer, and about right and wrong. Telling your toddler that they could not take what did not belong to them, when you taught your child to say, “I’m sorry,” and when you taught them to share, are all part of the conscience formation that you continue today as your daughter or son prepares to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. The process of Sacramental reconciliation—examination of conscience, confession, contrition, determination to change, and reconciliation—is already familiar to you in everyday occurrences. When you know your child has done something wrong, you help him or her to admit wrongdoing, see the implications of his or her own words and actions, come to sincere regret and apology, promise not to repeat the action, and finally make amends and reconcile. When you correct your child, it is always in the context of your love. It is the action that is unacceptable, not the child. Similarly, the child needs to know that he or she is loved by God and that God is faithful and forgiving. God only asks a response of love.

In helping the children to examine their motives and actions, it is important to enable them to see the effects of their action on themselves and on others. The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes are guides in the examination of conscience. Jesus told his listeners to keep the Commandments. The greatest of these is “[L]ove the Lord your God with all your heart, . . . and your neighbour as yourself” (Luke 10:27).

Reading and talking about the Gospel stories of forgiveness, such as the Lost Sheep, the Prodigal Son, Zacchaeus, and the Last Judgment, also help in shaping your child’s vision and choices, and in influencing him or her to act in positive ways. Help your child connect these stories to attitudes and events in life. The practice of praying with your child before bed is also a good time to help the child reflect on the day. What were some good things that the child did during the day to help others or to share? What were some actions that he or she wished had not been done? With your child, thank God for

the help to do good; together ask God for forgiveness and the guidance to be better tomorrow.

In preparation for the Sacrament, the child learns that some actions are sinful actions. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (see CCC 1849–1850) defines sin as an offense against God. Sin turns our hearts away from God’s love. Sin prevents us from being the person God has created us to be. Moreover, sin affects others and is detrimental to the Christian community.

Strictly speaking, only mortal sins need to be confessed and forgiven in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. For a sin to be mortal, three conditions need to be met: grave matter; the word, action or omission is seriously wrong; and the individual knows that it is seriously wrong and chooses to do it anyway. Thus it is not likely that a child will commit mortal sin. So why is it important that children celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation? One reason is that the Sacrament is first of all prayer. The children are learning to give praise and thanks to a merciful God. Secondly, celebration of the Sacrament helps the children come to a continuing awareness and renewal of the meaning of their Baptism and their identity as Christians. It also provides children, as well as adults, with the opportunity to think about who they are and who they want to become. They must ask themselves, *Am I becoming the person that God intends me to be? Are these little lies and deceptions so habitual that they are defining me and against what God has created me to be?* Through frequent celebration of the Sacrament, children and adults can learn to be accountable for their own actions.

If children have a sense of God and know peace in their own lives, they will be peacemakers. The *Rite of Penance* (5A) states that the Sacrament truly achieves its purpose when it takes root in our lives and moves us to a greater service of God and neighbor. In other words, the grace of the Sacrament is the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God and others, but it is manifest in becoming a reconciler and bringing God’s love and hope to others.



Gather 'Round the Good Stuff: Reclaiming the Sunday Sabbath!

by Timothy Mullner



Jesus said to the disciples, “Come away to a deserted place and rest awhile” (Mark 6:31). Yet for today’s disciple, it seems to be “Come away to a busy place and shop awhile.” So goes the offering up of Sunday to modern culture.

Reclaiming the Sabbath

In our fast-paced lives of doing, producing, and succeeding, we’ve forgotten how to pause and rest. There is a Hebrew word, *menuha*, which is an intentional and deliberate pause that is active with reflection and space for God’s unmerited grace. This imperative to stop, reflect, breathe, and ponder our place in the universe, sounds un-American. Yet that’s exactly the role the Sunday Sabbath ought to play in our lives. Although the Sabbath and Sunday hold a different meaning for Christians and Jews, our Sunday practice has its roots in the Jewish Sabbath. There is a lot we can learn about Sunday by understanding the nature of the Sabbath.

Sunday, or The Lord’s Day, is precisely *not* ours! By pausing to reflect on the week, gather in the local parish assembly, and celebrate the Eucharist together, we make time to remember (literally recall and make present now) who we are and to whom we belong. The Hebrew *Shabbat*, means “to stop, rest.” According to early biblical laws (see Exodus 23:12; 34:21; Leviticus 23:2–3) no work is to be done on the Sabbath.

Sunday is our day to be still, to know that we are *not* God. After all, it is God who is the center of our worship together. In a wonderful cartoon, Garfield the Cat enlightens us with two important theological premises: 1. There *is* a God, and 2. You are *not* that God! Sunday is the day above all days when we are invited to surrender and empty ourselves to that truth.

Let’s Table This Discussion

In the catechetical community today, there is talk about lifelong faith formation for the whole parish community. Flowing from the renewal of the Second Vatican Council, an aspect of this formation is breaking open the Word and faith sharing around a question of the week.

Years ago I worked in a parish similar to a church that the humorist Garrison Keillor lovingly dubbed, Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility. The faith formation staff at that time had a grand vision of making faith sharing

and ongoing adult formation a parish priority. Every parish meeting, every catechetical session began with reflection on the Lectionary readings and a Question of the Week. The intent was to connect the Sunday assembly with lived faith in the marketplace. The results were amazing.

Parish council and committee meetings began to take on renewed energy. Confirmation groups and small faith sharing groups grew deeper in faith as they gathered around the table in homes and cafes to break open God's Word. The parish staff even learned to collaborate like none I've seen since.

Sunday is the time and the Eucharistic assembly is the place where we are nourished by the Lord to become bread broken and wine poured out for others. But first we must stop, pause, and let ourselves become the reality that we have experienced in the Sacrament. By gathering around the Table of the Word and the Table of the Eucharist, we remember that this gift of faith is meant to be lived at home and in our daily lives.

Pause and Reflect

1. Is your living space truly a home, a place you enjoy coming back to? What could you add to make it more inviting and life-giving?
2. By staying busy and "shopping 'til you drop," what might you be avoiding at home?
3. How often does your household break bread together each week?
4. When was the last time you invited friends, neighbors, or an enemy to dinner?
5. What ritual does your household share around the table? Where did it come from and what does it symbolize?
6. When was the last time you actually prepared a meal *together* with your family, neighbors, or close friends?
7. Could you take five to ten minutes to recall or read the Sunday Gospel and share a Question of the Week?
8. Are you doing justice to your kitchen table? Could you get involved in the growing movement to slow down and celebrate local food producers and efforts to support healthy, fair trade products?
9. Eat slowly. The simple action of a fork to the mouth can be an extrovert meditation of gratitude to God.
10. After gathering to worship in the Sunday assembly, make Sunday the day when you stay at home. Singles, consider gathering with friends or neighbors. Parents, your kids may scream, but even a couple of hours together will create room for the Spirit of God to break in, renew your hearts, and reconnect your household.

Now take a *deeeeeeep* breath, prepare to worship, and practice your Sunday mantra, "Be still and know that you're *not* God. Be *still* and know that you're *not* . . ."

Including All Children

by Rose Wilkins



To the Program Director: Including Children with Special Needs

“We want your child in our sacramental preparation program. What will it take to make it work?” The role of the program director is not only to make all feel welcome within the program but also to demonstrate within the program a true sense of biblical hospitality and Eucharistic welcome.

On the next page is a handout for parents of children with special needs. This article for parents is meant to convey the awareness and care the Church has for these children and their families. At the same time, it offers some suggestions for building a partnership that will help to make their child’s experience of preparing for the Sacraments a successful and happy one.

This note to you is meant to serve as a reminder of what the Church says about persons with disabilities and their preparation for the Sacraments. Additionally, it offers some practical advice for including all children in parish Sacramental programs.

The *National Directory for Catechesis* states: “All persons with disabilities or special needs should be welcomed in the Church. . . . All baptized persons with disabilities have a right to adequate catechesis and deserve the means to develop a relationship with God” (NDC 49).

Children with special needs should be integrated into the regular Sacrament preparation program as much as possible. The *National Directory for Catechesis* affirms that children with disabilities should not be treated separately, but should be included as much as possible in preparation sessions with the rest of the children.

Implementing this vision for children with physical or mental challenges calls for a partnership between the pastor, catechetical leaders, catechists, parents, and the parish community. Participants should read and discuss the care of the disabled as set forth in the *National Directory for Catechesis* and in *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*. Out of this dialogue will emerge true pastoral care for all children.

Sometimes catechists are fearful that a child with special needs in the class will be too much work or will be too disruptive to the class. As program director you can help alleviate these fears by fostering communication between parents and catechists on what is best for the child. Read the following handout for parents which offers suggestions for giving the catechist information and tools that will ensure a successful catechetical experience.

To the Parents: Building a Partnership

The Church has spoken great words of love and care for children with special needs, and their families. Once baptized, persons with disabilities have a right to be full members of the community of faith that is the parish. “All baptized persons with disabilities have a right to adequate catechesis and deserve the means to develop a relationship with God” (*National Directory for Catechesis* 49). This includes preparation for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation and the Sacrament of Eucharist. The Church encourages pastors, catechetical leaders, catechists, and parents to include children with special needs in the regular parish program of Sacrament preparation.

Here are some suggestions for building a partnership between you, your child, and the catechist:

- Meet with your child’s catechist prior to the beginning of the parish preparation program for First Penance and Reconciliation. Share the story of your child’s birth. Talk about how you learned to cope with and manage your child’s disability over the years. By nurturing a partnership from the beginning, apprehension about teaching a child with special needs can be greatly reduced.
- Consider preparing a thumbnail sketch of your child to share with the catechist. It is important for your child to be involved in this process, too. Share the following details about your child:
My child’s favorite activities are _____.
My child is good at _____.
My child’s friends are _____.
My child’s favorite foods are _____.
My child’s favorite color is _____.
My child’s favorite prayer is _____.
- Share with the catechist any effective methods or techniques often used in your child’s regular classroom. This includes ways your child learns best. (Examples include using visual aids, hand gestures, and musical instruments; encouraging group work or tactile activities; having the child sit up front or close to the teacher.) You might want to give the catechist the name and number of your child’s teacher in school, provided this has been cleared beforehand with the teacher.

These are but a few ways to begin to share information and start a constructive dialogue. Once the relationship has been established, others will be more comfortable with making accommodations for your child. Your contribution and suggestions are a vital part of the partnership.

Information for Parents

Practice:

Seating:

**First Penance and Reconciliation Day
(What to Bring, When to Be There):**

Pictures:

Procedure for Private Confession:

Prayers to Know

Act of Contrition

My God,
I am sorry for my sins with all my
heart.
In choosing to do wrong and
failing to do good,
I have sinned against you,
whom I should love above all
things.
I firmly intend, with your help,
to do penance, to sin no more,
and to avoid whatever leads me
to sin.
Our Savior Jesus Christ
suffered and died for us.
In his name, my God, have mercy.
Amen.

The Hail Mary

Hail, Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women
and blessed is the fruit
of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death.
Amen.

Our Father

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass
against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
Amen.

If you have *any questions* about anything regarding the First Penance and Reconciliation celebration, please call:

Reconciliation Bibliography for Families



The following books and media for families can be obtained by contacting the publishers or online from www.barnesandnoble.com and www.amazon.com.

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Video

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Endnotes

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⁴²² 1 John 1:8.

⁴²³ Cf. Sacred Congregation on Divine Worship, *Rite of Penance* (1973).

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⁴³⁵ Cf. *General Catechetical Directory*, Addendum, no. 5.