

The Sacrament of RECONCILIATION

(Penance / Confession)



Rationale

This programme is provided to assist local parishes in the Archdiocese of Wellington as they seek to prepare children to receive the Sacraments of Initiation (and Reconciliation). This First Reconciliation Preparation Programme forms part of the overall programme which includes materials for the preparation of 8- and 9-year-olds for the Sacraments of Confirmation and First Eucharist.

The materials here are intended to be adapted for local use by pastoral leaders and may be used elsewhere as found appropriate.

The First Reconciliation Preparation Programme is premised on the understanding that parents (guardians) are a child's 'first educators in faith'. This programme consists of four facilitated gatherings of parents and children (simultaneous but separate) plus joint activities for parent and child at home between sessions. Materials provided include children's worksheets and five short parent handouts (four topics plus a 'how to' guide).

Plan

- A. During each session, parents will be led in small group conversation exploring the designated key concept underpinning this sacrament. The three key concepts are:
- 1) Who is our God?
 - 2) Thinking about Sin
 - 3) Thinking about Forgiveness

At the conclusion of each session, a short summary is provided for each parent.

- B. Simultaneously, the children will gather with 2-3 minders who will keep them focused on the content of the children's worksheet. This will include conversation, discussion, questioning, colouring, other activity and writing down their own answers.

Children and parents will come together at the conclusion of each session for a quick show-and-tell by the kids and a concluding prayer centring on the concept covered.

❖ **Prayer:** Whether we are leading a parent session or working with the children it is important to centre our gathering in prayer. Prayer helps draw people in and focus them on what we are about to do.

- Each session should begin with a simple, spontaneous prayer of blessing on your time together. And...
- Each session should end with prayer (a 'prayer slide' is included) – sometimes recited, sometimes reflective and sometimes spontaneous.

A reminder is built into the PowerPoint.

Leaders are encouraged to model familiarity with prayer in these different forms and to encourage parents to pray with their children (and as a family) between sessions.

Leading an opening prayer need not be complicated and as a presenter, you are encouraged to be creative in how you lead the group. Start with an invitation to gather and reflect.

An example for a parent session might be:

“As we gather here this evening, let us take a moment to remember that we are in the presence of a God who loves us and calls us his children.”

(Allow a moment of silence, then make the Sign of the Cross)

“Loving God, you call us here to accompany our children on their journey of faith. Open our hearts and minds that we may receive and understand your Word today. We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen.”

Similarly, a closing prayer can follow the same format reminding us that this is a journey of faith:

“Loving God, we thank you for our time together tonight.

We pray that in this coming week, we may reflect on what we have learnt and turn to you with all our hearts.

We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen.”

(You may want to end with the Sign of the Cross)

But don't be bound to these formats:

- invite those present to pray, silently or aloud;
- pass a burning candle slowly around the group inviting each to pray as it comes to them (aloud or silently);
- use some reflective music or sing a locally loved hymn;
- invite prayers in other languages;
- ask each person to choose one word to describe how they are feeling tonight then invite prayer or lead a blessing on the evening.

In essence we pray to remember God is here and to welcome the Spirit of God amongst us.

❖ **Small Groups:**

- **Divide** - into small groups of about 3-5 persons. (Less than 3 or more than 5 will reduce group effectiveness).
- **Questions** – the session's questions/statements are part of the PowerPoint presentation. These can be printed out as necessary.

Let the adults self-select their group the first session but after that mix them up by counting them off (1,2,3,4; 1,2,3,4...) and then gathering the 1's, 2's, etc.

- **Sharing** - to encourage sharing, go round the group inviting each person to share on each question/statement. Leader - move around and join in as is helpful (but don't take over!).
- **Feedback** – Pause all groups and feedback or help move on as feels right. At the end share and discuss a little feedback in the main group identifying 2-3 key insights emerging from the groups' shared experiences.
- ❖ **Handout:** regather as a whole group, distribute the handout and read it aloud very clearly as everyone follows along.
- ❖ **Re-join:** the children for the brief concluding show-and-tell.

1) Why Reconciliation?

[Start with a short spontaneous prayer of blessing on our time together.]

Sometimes called 'Confession' or 'Penance', this sacrament is all about fixing damaged relationships. Reconciling – forgiving, healing, bringing back together, restoring peace...

- My earliest memories of this sacrament are...
- This sacrament took on real significance for me at one stage because...
- Today I feel... _____ about the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Why?

Reconciliation includes four parts – confession (naming the problem), contrition (expressing remorse/regret/sorrow), absolution (accepting forgiveness) and penance (following up, making amends to some degree).

- One of these that I find a bit challenging is...
- Share a personal experience of being 'reconciled' (making up) with others in everyday life.

Read the story of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32 from a contemporary bible).

- How is the father's love 'unconditional'?
- Do I really accept that God loves me unconditionally?

[PRAY TOGETHER TO END SESSION]

2) Who is our God?

[Start with a short spontaneous prayer of blessing on our time together.]

The very concept of 'God' is actually quite challenging! We don't necessarily all agree who God is and what God is like. It's pretty important that we sometimes share and compare our understanding of God.

- When I really stop and think about it, for me God is... (what?)
- What stops me accepting that God really does love me no-matter-what?

Read the story of the Lost Sheep and Coin (Lk 15:1-10) from projector screen or bible.

It is easy enough to differentiate between our own child (as a person) and his or her bad actions/behaviour. i.e. We might be furious at something they did but we know it's just a bad

choice or action. God is like that with us only much more so. Christians believe that nothing can separate us from God's love.

- How does this change my attitude to my own self-worth?
- How can we help our children to know this love of God?

[PRAY TOGETHER TO END SESSION]

3) Thinking about Sin

[Start with a short spontaneous prayer of blessing on our time together.]

Sin isn't a popular topic! We don't like focusing on what's going wrong in our lives. But we know we need to. Sin is less about breaking rules than about damaging relationships. God is hurt only in that we hurt others and ourselves. That is what sin is.

- For me, 'sin' makes me think of ... (what? why?)
- Equating 'sin' with 'breaking rules' is too narrow. What does God's unconditional love mean here?

In the past when preparing for Reconciliation, Catholics would often create a list of 'sins' – mostly little things that were selfish or mean. Today we try to think about the bigger relationship challenges that face us – the persistent attitudes we hold and reactions we often use that hurt those around us.

- Thinking about the people in my life, what does 'sin' look like if understood as how I hurt them (or myself)?
- To turn away from sin is to treat others better. What are one or two examples of how this can happen in my life?

[PRAY TOGETHER TO END SESSION]

4) Thinking about Forgiveness

[Start with a short spontaneous prayer of blessing on our time together.]

Forgiving someone can be the hardest thing to put into words. When someone says sorry, our default response is often, "nothing to forgive; don't worry about it!" But when I am sorry for something, it helps to know that I am actually forgiven! Asking for and receiving forgiveness are among the most loving of human responses because they cannot be assumed. In this, we reflect our God who forgives us by default, and in this Sacrament, the Church (God's People) assures us of that forgiveness.

- It is so hard to say "I'm sorry" or "forgive me" without adding a "but..." followed by a partial excuse. Why do you think we find it so hard?
- When we get there and actually admit our failure, mistake or weakness, we hope – we need to hear that we are forgiven. What story of forgiveness impresses you?

We all get it wrong – not one of us escapes this part of being human. Jesus assured us, “I have not come to call the virtuous, but sinners” (Lk 5:32). That’s what we mean by unconditional love – can I accept that forgiveness and move on to better things?

- God doesn’t forgive us because of the Sacrament – Reconciliation is the sacramental way of convincing us that we are forgiven! What difference does it make to know for sure that someone forgives you?
- There’s a freedom that comes with real forgiveness – a clean slate. How can we channel that freedom in our lives to do better?

[PRAY TOGETHER TO END SESSION]

Contact

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