



## **What is the Church?**

---

### **Parent Leader's Guide: Unit 3**

## **We are People who Celebrate Forgiveness**



### **Main themes**

- ◆ Each time we gather for Mass we celebrate God's love for us and God's readiness to forgive us.
- ◆ On occasions we celebrate that forgiveness through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- ◆ Our children will learn more about what it is to forgive and be forgiven.

### **Link to the Mass - Penitential Rite & Sign of Peace**

***"We encourage every Catholic to make the sign of peace at Mass an authentic sign of our reconciliation with God and with one another. This sign of peace is also a visible commitment to work for peace as a Christian community. We approach the table of the Lord only after having dedicated ourselves as a Christian community to peace and reconciliation."***

(Cardinal Bernardin, *Guide to the Assembly*, pages 19 - 20)

### **During the meeting, parents will:**

- ◆ discover what the parish catechists or faith friends will do with the children
- ◆ be given details of the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, including their own role
- ◆ be offered suggestions for supporting their child at home
- ◆ explore the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation in everyday living
- ◆ appreciate the opportunity to celebrate God's forgiveness during every Mass
- ◆ grow in their own understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation
- ◆ be invited to pray together

## **Unit 3 – Approach A**

*Before the meeting begins: have the following clearly displayed -*  
*a crucifix*

*You will also need: an oil lamp or large candle*  
*copies of the parents' leaflets for those attending*  
*one large copy of the Cardinal Bernardin quotation*

1. Welcome the parents and invite any comments on the last celebration. Remind parents that in order to prepare our children for the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist we are considering different ways in which we can answer the question: What is the Church? In this unit we explore our identity as people who celebrate forgiveness.

Distribute copies of the parent leaflet for this unit and work through the main points which the catechists will be covering with the children, emphasising the focus on God's gift of forgiveness and his unconditional love for them.

2. You may now wish to present some or all of the following points:

- ♦ we celebrate reconciliation:
  - in our daily lives, with our families and friends
  - every time we forgive others or are forgiven ourselves, or mend a relationship which in some way is damaged
  - every time we share in the celebration of the Mass, at the penitential rite during the introductory rites, at the sign of peace before receiving communion
  - through the Sacrament of Reconciliation
- ♦ through each of these we can be reconciled to God and to one another, giving thanks for his love and forgiveness
- ♦ the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not a sacrament of initiation (these are Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) but it is an important part of the process: our children are becoming more and more a part of the reconciling community
- ♦ through the sacrament we are each invited to recognise anew the presence of God and his action in our lives
- ♦ the liturgical seasons of Lent and Advent are most appropriate times for celebrating this sacrament - they are the Church's times of reflection and preparation
- ♦ by our failures to respond to God's love for us, our relationship with God and with one another is weakened
- ♦ the sacrament has four main elements:
  - recognising the ways we have damaged our relationship with God and one another
  - asking for forgiveness
  - being reconciled
  - living in the renewed relationship with God and one another

- ♦ the symbol of the sacrament is the laying on of hands whilst the words of absolution are spoken: "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]
  - ♦ reconciliation involves actions as well as words and prayer; rather than looking backwards to the things which limit us and hold us back, we move forward by what we do and how we show God's presence in our lives. If we are to celebrate reconciliation we need to experience it in our lives.
3. At this point, invite some discussion centred perhaps on some or all of the following. For many parents this will be their first encounter with the sacrament for some time - maybe since they were a child. There may be many mixed emotions - fear, guilt, confusion, anxiety, hurt, but sharing with others can bring about relief and a new understanding if arranged sensitively and without any sense of criticism or judgement.
- (i) What a difference a word makes! Share your responses to the following ways of describing this sacrament: "I'm going to go to confession on Saturday." or "There's an invitation to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation next Thursday."
  - (ii) What memories have you of your 'First confession'? After some sharing of these, explain the changes that surround both the experience and the understanding of the sacrament (humour and personal stories are helpful at this point).
  - (iii) How do our children experience reconciliation in their lives? What example do we give them - at home, in school, in the parish?
  - (iv) How can we ensure our children grow with a positive experience of the sacrament and without the fear and guilt so many adults feel?
  - (v) God always forgives. Are there times we find it difficult to accept forgiveness?
  - (vi) Draw attention to the quotation from Cardinal Bernardin and ask:  
What is our experience of the sign of peace in our parish? How does the community aspect of reconciliation referred to here, strike us?
4. Details of the celebration of reconciliation should now be given and special encouragement to those who, for whatever reason, may be unable to receive the sacrament to come forward with their child and approach the priest for a blessing.
5. Closing prayer:
- Invite everyone to be still for a moment and be aware of God's promise to be wherever two or three gather in His name.
- Read aloud Matthew 18: 21 - 22.
- Invite everyone to pray the Our Father.

## **Unit 3 – Approach B**

*Before the meeting begins: have the following clearly displayed -*

*a crucifix*

*an oil lamp or large candle*

*You will also need:*

*the room arranged ready for group work: 5/6 chairs around a table*

*1 copy per person of 'Reconciliation List' sheet*

*1 copy per group of Reconciliation 1 & 2, photocopied back to back*

*copies of the parents' leaflets for those attending*

*one large copy of the Cardinal Bernardin quotation*

1. Welcome the parents and invite any comments on the last celebration. Remind parents that in order to prepare our children for the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist we are considering different ways in which we can answer the question: What is the Church? In this unit we explore our identity as people who celebrate forgiveness.

Talk for a few minutes about the change in language around the sacrament we now call 'Reconciliation' or 'Penance' but which we used to call 'Confession'. Some or all of the following points may be useful:

- ♦ 'confession' emphasises what we do in the sacrament
- ♦ 'reconciliation' enables us to emphasise what God does
- ♦ Jesus came to live among us to reconcile us to the Father and to one another
- ♦ God's love for us is unconditional
- ♦ God's forgiveness is always available
- ♦ God never breaks God's relationship with us but we damage our relationship with God and with one another
- ♦ Our children's understanding of forgiveness and of an all loving and forgiving God, will depend much on their experience of forgiveness at home; of wrongs being 'forgiven and forgotten'
- ♦ To say 'sorry' is to say we will genuinely try our best to move forward in God's ways
- ♦ the Sacrament of Reconciliation is one of the ways in which we can celebrate forgiveness

2. Ask the parents to look now at 'Reconciliation 1' and the 'Reconciliation List'. Invite them to discuss their experience of reconciliation choosing the words from the 'Reconciliation List' which best describe their collective experience and writing them around the 'Reconciliation 1' sheet.

After about ten minutes, or when you feel they are ready to move on, invite them to share their choices, stressing that of course there are no 'rights or wrongs'. Alternatively, in order to add variety and pace to the meeting, invite everyone to stand up and move around the different groups looking at what has been chosen.

Either way, there will probably be more emphasis on the 'confessing' and negative understanding of the sacrament. Take a moment here to explain again that the children's teaching in school will emphasise the wonder of God's love and forgiveness and that the sacrament is a way of celebrating this gift.

Invite parents to turn over their 'Reconciliation 1' sheet and for about ten minutes to discuss in their groups which of the words from the 'Reconciliation List' they would choose for their children's experience of the sacrament. As with the first activity, they should write them on, adding any others they may come up with.

Once finished, either go round the groups asking each to share their choices or invite them once again to stand, move around and see for themselves. It should be possible from the choices they have made to reassure them that what they want for their child is exactly what the Church wants for them.

3. At this point it would be good to deal with the details for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in your parish. Then distribute copies of the parent leaflet and work through what the children will be doing with their catechist, emphasising especially the ways in which they can continue to support and encourage their child at home. Some or all of the following may be useful at this point:

- ◆ the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not a sacrament of initiation (these are Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) but it is an important part of the process: our children are becoming more and more a part of the reconciling community
- ◆ through the sacrament we are each invited to recognise anew the presence of God and his action in our lives
- ◆ the liturgical seasons of Lent and Advent are most appropriate times for celebrating this sacrament - they are the Church's times of reflection and preparation
- ◆ by our failures to respond to God's love for us, our relationship with God and with one another is weakened
- ◆ the sacrament has four main elements:
  - recognising the ways we have damaged our relationship with God and one another
  - asking for forgiveness
  - being reconciled
  - living in the renewed relationship with God and one another

- ♦ the symbol of the sacrament is the laying on of hands whilst the words of absolution are spoken: "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]
  - ♦ reconciliation involves actions as well as words and prayer; rather than looking backwards to the things which limit us and hold us back, we move forward by what we do and how we show God's presence in our lives. If we are to celebrate reconciliation we need to experience it in our lives.
4. Draw attention to the quotation from Cardinal Bernardin, and invite the groups to reflection the following:
- What is our experience of the sign of peace in our parish?  
How does the community aspect of reconciliation referred to here, strike us?  
Invite the groups to share one or two points from their reflection.

## 5. Closing Prayer

Read aloud Luke 15: 1 - 7

Allow a few moments for silent reflection, then pray:

God, you heap your love upon us  
like a mother providing for her family's needs,  
embracing her child with tenderness.

Forgive us  
when like spoilt children,  
we treat your generosity as our right,  
or hug it possessively to ourselves.

Give us enough trust to live secure in your love  
and to share it freely with others  
in open-handed confidence  
that your grace will never run out. Amen

[Jan Berry, Sheffield, 1990]

## Reconciliation List

Judgmental

Washing the soul clean

Penance

Forgiveness

Frightening

Sinning

Making friends with God

Coming together

Listing my sins

Moving forward

Saying sorry

Going through the Ten Commandments

Reflecting on my relationship with other people

Reflecting on my relationship with God

Making amends

Anything else?

*First:*

*Choose from this list the words or phrases which best describe **your experiences** of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and write them on the sheet headed 'Reconciliation 1'.*

*Then:*

*Choose from this list the words or phrases you would like to describe **your child's first experience** of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and write them on the sheet headed 'Reconciliation 2'.*

# **RECONCILIATION 1**

## **MY EXPERIENCE OF THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION (CONFESSION)**



## **RECONCILIATION 2**

**WHAT I WOULD LIKE  
MY CHILD TO EXPERIENCE IN  
THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION**

## **Unit 3 – Approach C**

*Before the meeting begins: have the following clearly displayed -*

*a crucifix*

*an oil lamp or large candle*

*You will also need:*

*a flip chart or large paper for writing up*

*one or two newspaper cuttings referring to stories of peace/forgiveness/reconciliation*

*copies of the parents' leaflets for those attending*

1. Welcome the parents and invite any comments on the last celebration. Remind parents that in order to prepare our children for the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist we are considering different ways in which we can answer the question: What is the Church? In this unit we explore our identity as people who celebrate forgiveness. Invite the parents to think about the word 'forgiveness' for a moment and then to call out anything that comes to mind; whatever is offered should be written up on the flip chart or on paper under the heading 'Forgiveness'. Now do the same but this time using the word 'Reconciliation'. Once complete, use the thoughts offered to begin to make some basic points about forgiveness and reconciliation. These might include:

- ♦ forgiveness and reconciliation are essential for healthy relationships and normal family life
- ♦ making use of current news items, refer to some of the situations or places in the world where there is a real struggle to forgive and be reconciled (Kosova, Northern Ireland, South Africa)
- ♦ as Christians we believe that forgiveness and reconciliation are central to the way we live our lives
- ♦ we are first and foremost, loved unconditionally by God, and know that God's forgiveness is always available to us; this is the Good News that Jesus came to announce

2. Invite the parents to form small groups (5 or 6 per group). Distribute copies of the parent leaflet and ask them to look at the quotation from Cardinal Bernardin and consider the following questions:

(i) What strikes you about this quotation?

(ii) What are some of the ways in which we can work for peace?

(iii) What difficulties surround forgiveness and reconciliation?

After about ten minutes, invite feedback, taking one point from each group in turn. Summarise the feeling of the group and lead into the work the catechists will be doing with the children as they become more fully a part of a forgiving and reconciling people (linking this with the points which have already been raised). Spend a little time working through the suggestions for further support and encouragement which appear on the leaflet.

3. You may now wish to present some or all of the following points:

- ◆ we celebrate reconciliation:
  - in our daily lives, with our families and friends
  - every time we forgive others or are forgiven ourselves, or mend a relationship which in some way is damaged
  - every time we share in the celebration of the Mass, at the penitential rite during the introductory rites, at the sign of peace before receiving communion
  - through the Sacrament of Reconciliation
- ◆ through each of these we can be reconciled to God and to one another, giving thanks for his love and forgiveness
- ◆ the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not a sacrament of initiation (these are Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) but it is an important part of the process: our children are becoming more and more a part of the reconciling community
- ◆ through the sacrament we are each invited to recognise anew the presence of God and his action in our lives
- ◆ the liturgical seasons of Lent and Advent are most appropriate times for celebrating this sacrament - they are the Church's times of reflection and preparation
- ◆ by our failures to respond to God's love for us, our relationship with God and with one another is weakened
- ◆ the sacrament has four main elements:
  - recognising the ways we have damaged our relationship with God and one another
  - asking for forgiveness
  - being reconciled
  - living in the renewed relationship with God and one another
- ◆ the symbol of the sacrament is the laying on of hands whilst the words of absolution are spoken: "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]
- ◆ reconciliation involves actions as well as words and prayer; rather than looking backwards to the things which limit us and hold us back, we move forward by what we do and how we show God's presence in our lives. If we are to celebrate reconciliation we need to experience it in our lives.

4. Details of the celebration of reconciliation should now be given and special encouragement to those who, for whatever reason, may be unable to receive the sacrament to come forward with their child and approach the priest for a blessing.

5. Invite everyone to be still for a moment and to remember that God loves each one of us without any conditions.

Read aloud Luke 6: 37 - 38.

After a pause for silent reflection, invite all to pray together: 'Our Father ...'