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## What is the Church?

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### **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*

*an oil lamp or large candle*

*You will also need: 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
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  - being reconciled
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- ◆ 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 ...'



## **What is the Church?**

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### ***Parent Leaflet: Unit 3***

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



## **Main Themes**

The children, with their catechists, are thinking about reconciliation with God and with one another.

They are being asked to think about:

- ♦ Jesus asking us to love God and each other
- ♦ The fact that we don't always do the right thing but that we can start again
- ♦ The way we celebrate reconciliation at Mass - through the Penitential Rite and the Sign of Peace
- ♦ The way we celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation

They are preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time. This will be in a special service involving the parish community, in preparation for the Feast of Christmas.



## From Your Child's Worksheet

### In the Sacrament of Reconciliation...

### ...we celebrate forgiveness

Sometimes we celebrate God's love and forgiveness in a special way through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Advent and Lent are very good times for this, as we prepare for the Feasts of Christmas and Easter.

We can celebrate this sacrament together with family, friends and other members of the parish community.

The hymns, prayers and readings for our special service will remind us of God's love and forgiveness.

We reflect together on how we have loved God and one another and we express our sorrow for the times we have not got this right.

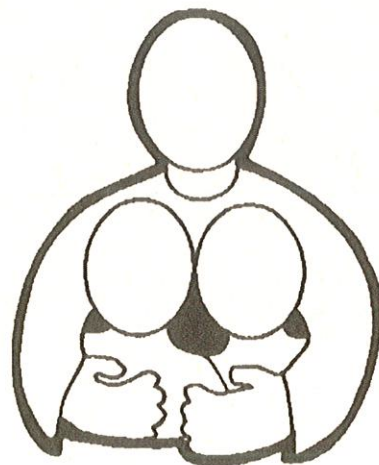


We tell the priest the things we have done wrong. There is no need to make a big list, or to worry if we forget to mention something. We are simply showing that we want God's forgiveness.

The priest gives us absolution. He tells us that God forgives our sins and that we are reconciled with God and one another.

We end our service with a prayer or hymn giving thanks to God for the love and forgiveness we have received.

*"The Lord has freed you from your sins,  
go in peace to love and serve the Lord."*





## **What You Can Do To Help Your Child**

We often hurt one another by our behaviour. Just as God loves and forgives us, ensure your home is a place of love and forgiveness.

Make use of quiet times at the end of the day (meal times or bed times) to share thoughts about each other's day. Did you hurt anyone? How could you do better?

Come to Mass each Sunday so that your child can experience the Penitential Rite when we celebrate God's readiness to forgive us.

Help your child to see that the Sign of Peace is when we acknowledge reconciliation with God and with each other and encourage your child to use this gesture when they have fallen out with you, or other members of the family, or their friends.

On occasions in the Church's year such as Advent or Lent, or at a particularly difficult time, encourage your child to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Help your child to complete their worksheet - especially the last page, where you can help them to prepare to celebrate this sacrament for the first time and to record the date and place of the celebration afterwards.

Please keep your child's worksheet safe, so that they can bring it back to the next meeting with their catechist.



## **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)



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## **What is the Church?**

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### ***Children's Worksheet: Unit 3***

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



## **Jesus wants us to love God and one another**

*When Jesus was asked which was the greatest of all the commandments, he said that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart and love our neighbour as we love ourselves.*

Jesus showed us how to do this:

- ♦He spent time in prayer
- ♦He did what God wanted him to do
- ♦He was kind and loving
- ♦He made people happy who were sad
- ♦He made friends with people
- ♦He loved people that no one else loved

Jesus wants us to be just like he was

**Sometimes things go wrong but we can always start again**

Mum or dad might be cross with you and shout at you when you are naughty and cause trouble but they still love you. Can you think of a time when you did something wrong at home?

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Sometimes you might have been unkind and mean and nasty to a friend and you fall out but then you make up and become friends again. Can you think of a time like this?

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### **A Recipe for Happiness**

Jesus  
Others  
Yourself



# When we come together at Mass...

## ...we celebrate forgiveness

We begin by remembering that there are things we need to say we are sorry for. This is called the Penitential Rite.

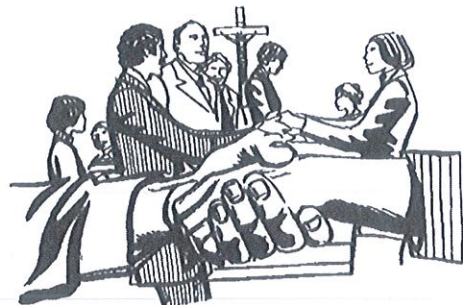
We tell God and one another (our brothers and sisters) that we have not always got things right:

- we have done things that we should not have done
- we have failed to do things we should have done

We are reminded that God still loves us and that God forgives our sins.

The priest says: 'May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life'. We say: 'Amen'.

Later in the Mass - just before Communion - we are invited to offer one another a sign of peace.



Through the Penitential Rite and the Sign of Peace we are reconciled with God and one another.

### Reconciliation is about...

*(Tick the ones you think are right)*

Making friends again ☐

Helping other people make friends ☐

Trying to win an argument ☐

Saying 'Sorry' ☐

Forgiving and being forgiven ☐

Always wanting your own way ☐

Not letting others join in and share ☐

Sulking and not making friends ☐

Showing you are sorry for spoiling a friendship ☐

Making peace ☐

Feeling happy and celebrating because you are forgiven ☐



# In the Sacrament of Reconciliation...

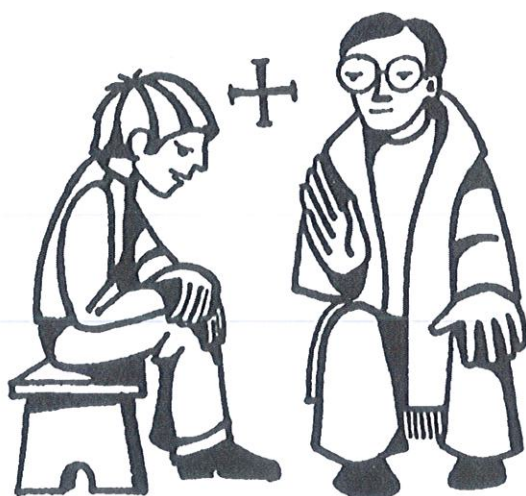
## ...we celebrate forgiveness

Sometimes we celebrate God's love and forgiveness in a special way through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Advent and Lent are very good times for this, as we prepare for the Feasts of Christmas and Easter.

We can celebrate this sacrament together with family, friends and other members of the parish community.

The hymns, prayers and readings for our special service will remind us of God's love and forgiveness.

We reflect together on how we have loved God and one another and we express our sorrow for the times we have not got this right.

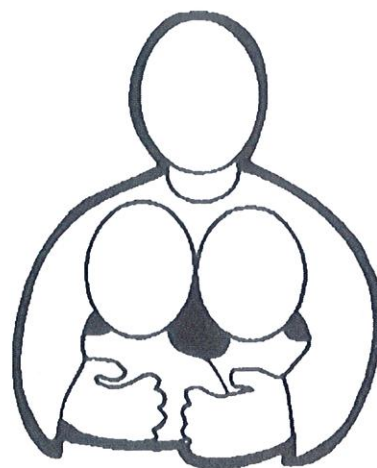


We tell the priest the things we have done wrong. There is no need to make a big list, or to worry if we forget to mention something. We are simply showing that we want God's forgiveness.

The priest gives us absolution. He tells us that God forgives our sins and that we are reconciled with God and one another.

We end our service with a prayer or hymn giving thanks to God for the love and forgiveness we have received.

*"The Lord has freed you from your sins,  
go in peace to love and serve the Lord."*





## At home...

Spend a little bit of time preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation by thinking about how you have loved God and other people.

Have I said my prayers?

Have I always done what I should have done?

Have I fallen out with people and not made friends again?

Have I said sorry when I have hurt others?

Have I forgiven others when they have hurt me?

Draw a picture of yourself doing something to show you are sorry.

When you have celebrated the Sacrament, complete this Certificate:

On _____
in _____ Church
Father _____
and my family and friends celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation with me for the first time

This worksheet belongs to: \_\_\_\_\_



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## **What is the Church?**

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### ***Catechist's Guide: Unit 3***

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



You will need to gather in the children's worksheets from the previous unit (unless this has already been done or unless they are keeping them at home).

Spend a few moments seeing what the children remember from their last session with you - or from any celebration that took place.

Remind them that they are preparing to become full members of the Church family through Confirmation and Holy Communion.

The aim of this unit is to explore the ways in which we, as the People of God, celebrate God's love and forgiveness. This will be done by reflecting with the children on a number of themes:

- ◆ Jesus asking us to love God and one another
- ◆ The fact that we don't always do the right thing but that we can start again
- ◆ The way we celebrate reconciliation at Mass - through the Penitential Rite and the Sign of Peace
- ◆ The way we celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation

In preparation for this session, you will need to be clear about the arrangements for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, so that you can explain to the children what will be happening in your parish.

Please note that the emphasis in this unit is on the communal celebration of this sacrament, since that is the way in which the children should be introduced to it. The opportunity to introduce them to the individual celebration of the sacrament should be provided as they get older.



## We are People who Celebrate Forgiveness



### Jesus wants us to love God and one another

When Jesus was asked which was the greatest of all the commandments, he said that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart and love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

Jesus showed us how to do this:

- He spent time in prayer
- He did what God wanted him to do
- He was kind and loving
- He made people happy who were sad
- He made friends with people
- He loved people that no one else loved

Jesus wants us to be just like he was

**Sometimes things go wrong but we can always start again**

Mum or dad might be cross with you and shout at you when you are naughty and cause trouble but they still love you. Can you think of a time when you did something wrong at home?

Sometimes you might have been unkind and mean and nasty to a friend and you fall out but then you make up and become friends again. Can you think of a time like this?

#### A Recipe for Happiness

Jesus  
Others  
Yourself

## When we come together at Mass...

### ...we celebrate forgiveness

We begin by remembering that there are things we need to say we are sorry for. This is called the Penitential Rite.

We tell God and one another (our brothers and sisters) that we have not always got things right:

- we have done things that we should not have done
- we have failed to do things we should have done

We are reminded that God still loves us and that God forgives our sins.

The priest says: 'May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life'. We say: 'Amen'.

Later in the Mass - just before Communion - we are invited to offer one another a sign of peace.



Through the Penitential Rite and the Sign of Peace we are reconciled with God and one another.

### Reconciliation is about...

(Tick the ones you think are right)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| Making friends again <input type="checkbox"/>                                   | Helping other people make friends <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Trying to win an argument <input type="checkbox"/>                              | Saying 'Sorry' <input type="checkbox"/>                    |
| Forgiving and being forgiven <input type="checkbox"/>                           | Always wanting your own way <input type="checkbox"/>       |
| Not letting others join in and share <input type="checkbox"/>                   | Sulking and not making friends <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Showing you are sorry for spoiling a friendship <input type="checkbox"/>        | Making peace <input type="checkbox"/>                      |
| Feeling happy and celebrating because you are forgiven <input type="checkbox"/> |  |

## Page 1

Talk with the children about Jesus' command that we should love God and our neighbour. This sums up all the other commandments that we hear about in the Scriptures and should be the rule for our lives as followers of Jesus.

Take them through the list of things that 'Jesus showed us how to do' and see if they can think of ways they can do those things in their own lives.

Point out the 'Recipe for Happiness' (which they can colour in if they want) and explain that we can use the word JOY to remind us about putting Jesus first, Others second, and Yourself third.

Ask them to think about the two situations described at the bottom of the page, and the opportunities that are given to us to start again when we get things wrong. Remind them that God always loves them, whatever they do wrong, and always wants to be friends with them.

## Page 2

Ask them if they can remember what happens at the beginning of Mass, after the sign of the cross. Prompt them if necessary. The Penitential Rite is about preparing ourselves for this particular celebration of the Mass by reminding ourselves about God's love and our need for God's forgiveness.

We tend to think of sins as doing things wrong, so the children might very easily think of actions they have done that were wrong. However, we need to remember (as the 'I confess' reminds us) that we can also sin by failing to do what we should do. So, for example: Have they said their prayers regularly? Have they done anything kind for someone else?

Sometimes the Penitential Rite concentrates on reminding us of what God has done for us (i.e. God's love) rather than the things we have done wrong (cf. the Additional Material on this leaflet for some of the phrases we might hear).

The Sign of Peace is a symbolic way of showing that we are reconciled to God and one another before coming to Communion.

Give the children time to work through the exercise 'Reconciliation is about...' and then go through their answers with them. Perhaps take each phrase and ask who ticked that box? Why or why not?



## In the Sacrament of Reconciliation...

### ...we celebrate forgiveness

Sometimes we celebrate God's love and forgiveness in a special way through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Advent and Lent are very good times for this, as we prepare for the Feasts of Christmas and Easter.

We can celebrate this sacrament together with family, friends and other members of the parish community.

The hymns, prayers and readings for our special service will remind us of God's love and forgiveness.

We reflect together on how we have loved God and one another and we express our sorrow for the times we have not got this right.



We tell the priest the things we have done wrong. There is no need to make a big list, or to worry if we forget to mention something. We are simply showing that we want God's forgiveness.

The priest gives us absolution. He tells us that God forgives our sins and that we are reconciled with God and one another.

We end our service with a prayer or hymn giving thanks to God for the love and forgiveness we have received.

*"The Lord has freed you from your sins, go in peace to love and serve the Lord."*



## Page 3

Just as we prepare for Mass by reflecting on our need for God's forgiveness, so too we prepare in a special way for the major feasts of the Church's year - Christmas and Easter. The Church gives us the seasons of Advent and Lent to do this and these are appropriate times to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Celebrating the sacrament in a communal way reminds us that when we do things wrong, it doesn't just affect our relationship with God. It also affects our relationship with each other because we are not living as fully as we should be as part of the People of God. So, it is important for us to celebrate our forgiveness together - and be reconciled to God and one another.

Talk the children through the various aspects of the actual rite of celebration for this sacrament. Emphasise the idea of keeping it simple - concentrating on one or two things to tell the priest they are sorry for.

## At home...

Spend a little bit of time preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation by thinking about how you have loved God and other people.

Have I said my prayers?

Have I always done what I should have done?

Have I fallen out with people and not made friends again?

Have I said sorry when I have hurt others?

Have I forgiven others when they have hurt me?

Draw a picture of yourself doing something to show you are sorry.

When you have celebrated the Sacrament, complete this Certificate:

On _____
in _____ Church
Father _____
and my family and friends celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation with me for the first time

This worksheet belongs to: \_\_\_\_\_

## Page 4

Ask the children to complete this page of the worksheet at home but, if time allows, take them through the ideas that it contains:

The questions for preparing for the sacrament can be used on other occasions too - such as before they go to bed each night.

Drawing the picture will give them the chance to think about ways in which they show they are sorry for what they have done.

Get the children to write their name on the worksheet and remind them to bring their worksheet back to the next session. Thank them for taking part, or tell them how much you have enjoyed working with them.



## **Additional Suggestions and Resources**

### **1. I Confess**

I confess to almighty God,  
and to you, my brothers and sisters,  
that I have sinned through my own fault  
in my thoughts and in my words,  
in what I have done,  
and in what I have failed to do;  
and I ask the blessed Mary, ever virgin,  
all the angels and saints,  
and you, my brothers and sisters,  
to pray for me to the Lord our God.

### **2. Penitential Rite**

Sometimes, instead of saying the 'I confess', the priest will say some short phrases followed by 'Lord, have mercy' or 'Christ, have mercy'. These phrases remind us of what God has done for us, or what God wants for us, in terms of our being reconciled. Some examples are:

- ♦ You were sent to heal the contrite
- ♦ You came to call sinners
- ♦ You plead for us at the right hand of the Father
- ♦ You are mighty God and prince of peace
- ♦ You came to reconcile us to one another and to the Father
- ♦ You heal the wounds of sin and division
- ♦ You raise the dead to life in the spirit
- ♦ You have shown us the way to the Father
- ♦ You give us yourself to heal us and bring us strength

### **3. Outline of Celebration**

- ♦ Introductory Rites
- ♦ Liturgy of the Word
- ♦ Homily and Examination of Conscience
- ♦ Act of Contrition and Repentance
- ♦ Individual Confession and Absolution
- ♦ Concluding Prayer of Thanksgiving

### **4. An Act of Contrition**

O my God, because you are so good, I am very sorry that I have sinned against you and, by the help of your grace, I will not sin again. Amen.



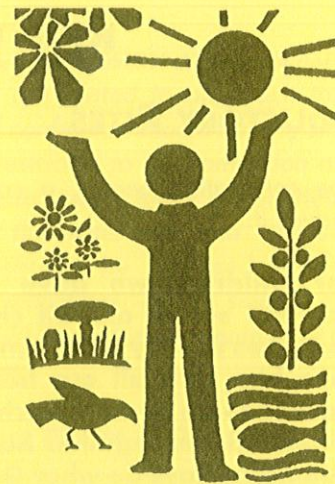
## What is the Church?

### Celebration Guide: Unit 3

## We are People who Celebrate Forgiveness

**Our children will experience the mystery of God's forgiveness. This will be a celebration of that forgiveness - not a celebration of sin! Nevertheless, the children will have to be prepared to own up to sin, as we all do, so that the real gift of forgiveness can be experienced.**

1. In this celebration of the Rite of Penance, the emphasis is placed on the idea of the community of the Church gathering together to celebrate the gift of forgiveness. Together we listen to the Word of God; together we acknowledge our need of forgiveness; together we give thanks for that forgiveness. The only "individual" part of the Rite is confession and absolution, where each person meets the Lord Jesus, and through the person of the priest is able to put their need of forgiveness into words, and hear the gift of absolution.
2. The importance of gathering as a Parish Community cannot be over emphasised. It is by our presence and prayer together that we support each other in what can be a difficult and challenging celebration. It is recommended that, if possible, this celebration be open to all members of the Parish, as part of their Advent journey.
3. Since the celebration takes place in Advent, the figure of John the Baptist will accompany us. His call to "turn back to God" invites us to prepare to meet Christ, in our celebration of Christmas, when he comes to us day by day, and in his Second Coming at the end of time. It is hoped that this celebration will be an important part of the Parish journey of Advent.
4. Of key importance in the effective celebration of this Rite is the time of *individual confession and*



*absolution.* Those approaching the priests should be told that they simply state their sins - why they ask for forgiveness. Anyone who simply wishes to come to a priest for a blessing or a prayer should be encouraged to do so. It can work well if priests and penitents remain standing through this part of the Rite.

During this part, careful thought will have to be given to what the rest of the assembly is doing. Meditative music, Taize chants, reflections and prayers can all be useful. Try to vary the activity, in order to keep the whole assembly united in prayer.

Throughout the whole rite, brevity is to be preferred.

5. The atmosphere of the Church should be considered; a dimming of lights during the time of individual confession and absolution can be most effective, as can the use of candles. A Parish community may wish to invite each person to light a small candle after visiting the priests, or use some similar sign to express the joy of forgiveness and the light of Christ.

6. While the Gospel reading should be proclaimed by the priest or deacon, there is nothing to prevent a semi-dramatic presentation of the Gospel while it is being proclaimed - dance or movement may help to emphasise the proclamation.

7. In this Rite, the musical priorities are slightly different from normal. An opening hymn, a chant of repentance, a thanksgiving hymn and a final hymn can all be used, though none are necessary. Music chosen should emphasise genuine sorrow for sin, and the joy of receiving forgiveness.



# RITE OF RECONCILIATION

## INTRODUCTORY RITES

*Before the celebration begins, a commentator may introduce it:*

**My dear children, we have all been baptised, and so we are all children of God. God loves us very much, and he asks us to love him with all our hearts. God also wants us to be good to each other, so that we may all live together happily. But people do not always do what God wants. They do what they like, and don't listen to God. Sometimes we act like that. This is what is called sin.**

**When we sin we turn our backs on God. So what does God do when someone turns away from him? Does God turn away from us? No, of course not! Remember, God loves us. So God is always there for us. All we have to do is turn back to God, say "Sorry" for what we have done, and be forgiven.**

**Let us now stand to sing together**

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*The Opening Hymn is sung. The priests and ministers enter in the usual way. When the hymn is over, the priest says:*

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**

*All reply:  
Amen.*

*The priest greets the congregation in these or similar words:*

**My dear children, parents, and all members of God's Family here at (name of Church). I welcome you with great joy. May the Lord God, who blesses us with forgiveness, be ever with you.**

*All reply:  
And also with you.*

*Priest:*

**In this Season of Advent, we are looking forward to celebrating Jesus's coming to us on the feast of Christmas. Today we celebrate God's forgiveness, so that we will be ready to welcome Jesus our Lord.**

**Let us pray.**

*All pray in silence for a short while.*

**Lord our God,  
maker of the heavens,  
as we look forward  
to the coming of Jesus, our Redeemer,  
give us forgiveness for our sins.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ,  
your son, who lives and reigns with you and  
the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.**

*All:*

*Amen.*

## LITURGY OF THE WORD

*There is only one reading, from the Gospel:*

The Beginning of the Holy Gospel according to Saint Mark.

This is the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It began just as God had said in the book written by Isaiah the prophet:

"I am sending my messenger to get the way ready for you. In the desert someone is shouting, 'Get the road ready for the Lord! Make a straight path for him!'"

So John the Baptist showed up in the desert and told everyone, "Turn back to God and be baptised! Then your sins will be forgiven."

From all Judaea and from Jerusalem crowds of people went to John. They told how sorry they were for their sins, and he baptised them in the River Jordan.

John also told the people: "Someone more powerful is going to come. And I am not good enough even to stoop down and untie his sandals. I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit!"

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

## HOMILY & EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

*The Homily should invite the children and all present to consider the gift of forgiveness which is celebrated in this Rite, and how we should all respond to the call of the Baptist to "Prepare the Lord's way." It would be suitable for the Homily to flow into an examination of conscience, which may be led by someone other than the priest.*



# LITURGY OF RECONCILIATION

## ACT OF CONTRITION AND REPENTANCE

Priest:

**Let us kneel.**

*All kneel*

**Together we admit that we need God's forgiveness as we say:**

**I confess to Almighty God, and to you...**

*(Another form of an Act of Contrition may be used.)*

*The following meditation is more effective if the response is sung.*

Reader:

**God our Father,  
sometimes we have not behaved as your  
children should,**

*All:*

*Hear our prayer, have mercy.*

**If we have been bad at home or at school,**

*Hear our prayer, have mercy.*

**If we have fought or called each other  
names,**

*Hear our prayer, have mercy.*

**If we have not been helpful to our  
families and friends,**

*Hear our prayer, have mercy.*

**If we have been selfish and only thought  
of ourselves,**

*Hear our prayer, have mercy.*

**If we have told lies,**

*Hear our prayer, have mercy.*

Priest:

**Let us stand.**

*All stand*

**Now with Jesus, our brother, we come  
before God our Father and ask him to  
forgive us, using the words Jesus taught us:**

*All:*

**Our Father...**

## INDIVIDUAL CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

*All present are invited to approach the priests. The form of confession should be very simple, and should be restricted to the confession of sins (all other elements used in Rite 1 are omitted). During this time, the attention and prayer of the assembly should be focussed, using music, meditative reflections, or the singing of hymns. People should be invited to remain after they have seen a priest.*

## CONCLUDING PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

*After all have seen the priests, a hymn of thanksgiving may be sung. Then the priest says the final prayer:*

**Lord our God,  
on the first day of Creation  
you made the light  
that scatters all darkness.  
Let Christ, the light of lights,  
hidden from all eternity,  
shine at last on your people  
and free us from the darkness of sin.  
Fill our lives with good works  
as we go out to meet your Son,  
so that we may give him a fitting welcome.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**

## BLESSING AND DISMISSAL

Priest:

**The Lord be with you.**

*All:*

**And also with you.**

Priest:

**May Almighty God bless you, the Father, +  
and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.**

*All:*

**Amen.**

Priest:

**Children, we have shared the gift of  
forgiveness with you; go forward now, to  
continue preparing for your Confirmation  
and first sharing in Holy Communion. Our  
love goes with you. Let us all go in peace,  
to love and serve the Lord.**

*All:*

**Thanks be to God.**

*The Final Hymn is sung.*



# IDEAS FOR THE CELEBRATION

## SUGGESTIONS FOR MUSIC

### Hymns

Turn to me...  
On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's cry...  
Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us...  
God forgave my sin...  
Come back to me with all your heart...  
Oh the love of my Lord is the essence...  
Vaster far than any ocean...  
Abba, Father...  
Hark, a herald voice is calling...  
O come, O come, Emmanuel...  
Like a sea without a shore...  
Walk with me, O my Lord...

### Music for the Act of Repentance

Response to Paul Inwood's "Communion Song" ("Hear our prayer, have mercy, give us your peace")  
Chorus of "Look around you, can you see..."  
Remember, remember your mercy Lord...  
Taize: O Lord hear my prayer...  
Any chorus with the words "Lord, have mercy" or a similar refrain.

### Taize Chants for the Time of Individual Confession and Absolution

Confitemini Domino  
Misericordias Domini  
In the Lord I'll be ever thankful  
O Christe, Domine Jesu  
Bless the Lord, my soul

### Thanksgiving Hymns

My soul is filled with joy...  
Glory and praise to our God...  
God fills me with joy...  
How lovely on the mountains...  
Now thank we all our God...  
O Lord my God, when I in awesome...  
Sing to the mountains

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## A PRAYER OF BLESSING FOR THOSE NOT SEEKING ABSOLUTION

**May God, our loving Father,  
through the power of the Holy Spirit,  
bless and protect you  
in all you say and do,  
so that you may live with Christ,  
and rejoice in his friendship for ever.**

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## A SUGGESTED BULLETIN INSERT

On \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_, our children will be celebrating the Sacrament of Forgiveness for the first time. All members of the Parish are invited to take this opportunity to celebrate this sacrament before Christmas.

We journey through Advent (as we journey through life) as a family of faith. Just as we always begin Mass by standing together for a moment and admitting we need God's forgiveness, so we are invited to celebrate forgiveness *together*. The message of Advent is "Be ready!" As we prepare for Christmas in all sorts of other ways, let us not forget to prepare ourselves.

Please join our children as they come to the sacrament of God's forgiveness for the first time. Your presence and your prayers will help them and their families to feel part of the family of God.