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Celebrate
and
Remember

Reconciliation

Program Director Manual



Celebrate and Remember Reconciliation

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David Galusha



saint mary's press

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Program Overview

Welcome!

This program, *Celebrate and Remember: Reconciliation*, marks the beginning of the preparation of children for full participation in the Catholic community and the Sacraments of the Church, especially the Eucharist. Most children received Baptism as infants, so they have no recollection of the event. They are familiar with the celebration of the Eucharist from their participation at Mass with family. But few have any familiarity with the rite of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. The catechesis for their first celebration of this Sacrament is crucial for their understanding of God's forgiveness and the need for reconciliation.

Parents may also feel the need for renewal regarding this Sacrament. Some may have been exposed only to individual confession and the listing of sins that was once so common in the Church. Some seldom take advantage of opportunities for reconciliation, and others lack familiarity with the rite. Most parents admit that they are not confident of their ability to help their children prepare for this Sacrament.

Celebrate and Remember: Reconciliation is a comprehensive program that will help you to prepare children, parents, catechists, ministers, and the entire community for the important event of children's First Reconciliation. Relying on the liturgical rite itself, Sacred Scripture, Tradition, and the teaching of the Church, this program promotes understanding and a positive, joyful attitude toward the gifts of the Sacrament.

The following additional components accompany this program director manual, each described in greater detail in the following pages, including how it supports a rich and fruitful Sacrament preparation program:

- The child's book follows the Rite of Penance and Reconciliation and presents content that is solidly rooted in Scripture and doctrine.
- The catechist guide provides detailed session outlines for each chapter of the child's book, as well as helpful background information.
- The home guide offers a specific teaching format for parents who want to teach the material presented in the child's book to their children.

In each of these components, you will find everything you need to create an effective and engaging Sacrament preparation program. Welcome to *Celebrate and Remember: Reconciliation*.

Overview of Program Components

Child's Book

The *Celebrate and Remember: Reconciliation* Child's Book is designed to help young children develop an understanding of forgiveness of sin and participation in the Rite of Penance and Reconciliation. It is the basis for the other *Celebrate and Remember: Reconciliation* components.

The child's book consists of eight chapters that are each ten pages long. Each chapter begins with a ritual prayer experience. This ritual prayer allows the learners to ground the chapter content in an experience of prayer that is directly related to the liturgy and to encounter the prayers and essential understandings that are linked to each part of the liturgy. The core content is then developed in the "We Listen," "We Learn," and "We Live" sections. The chapter ends with a closing prayer in the "We Pray" section.

We Listen is a two-page section that features Scripture tied to the focus of the lesson.

We Learn is a four-page section that presents the doctrinal and liturgical points of the lesson.

We Live is a two-page section that applies the lesson to the lives of the children.

We Pray is a one-page prayer that ends each lesson. It brings together all of the chapter content and allows the group to pray for growth in faith and for strength to live as disciples of Christ.

The chart below, using chapter 1 as an example, illustrates how each chapter is constructed.

Page 1	Opening Prayer Ritual
Pages 2 and 3	We Listen (Scripture)
Pages 4 through 7	We Learn (Doctrine)
Pages 8 and 9	We Live (Application)
Page 10	We Pray (Closing Prayer)

The chapters in the child's book contain the following features:

With My Family This feature appears three times in each chapter and provides quick and simple activities that a family can do together. Each activity reinforces the content in the lesson.

Faith Highlights This feature highlights points of Catholic doctrine the children should be familiar with as part of their preparation for the Sacrament.

Saint Spotlight This feature includes short biographies of saints and familiarizes children with people of faith who can be examples for their own lives.

Living Our Faith This feature explains specific teachings of the Church that affect our daily lives.

In addition to the lessons, the child's book also includes a resource section with the following special features:

Where We Celebrate Reconciliation This section illustrates the interior of a reconciliation room and describes a confessional, both of which are used for individual celebration of the Sacrament.

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation: The Communal Celebration This is an instructional outline of the liturgical rite of the Sacrament celebrated in community with the opportunity for individual confession.

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation: The Individual Celebration This is a step-by-step outline of the Rite of Penance and Reconciliation celebrated outside of a community setting.

An Examination of Conscience This feature provides an examination of conscience developed to guide young children as they prepare to receive the Sacrament.

Catholic Prayers and Practices This section provides key prayers, including the Sign of the Cross, the Lord's Prayer, the Glory Be, the Hail Mary, the Apostles' Creed, an Act of Contrition, an Act of Hope, and prayers from Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Richard of Chichester. It also lists the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, the Precepts of the Church, the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, and the holy days of obligation.

Glossary This lists terms and definitions that are helpful to those who are preparing for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

Certificate The child's book contains a frame-ready certificate that can be signed and used to mark the date of First Reconciliation.

Catechist Guide

The catechist guide for *Celebrate and Remember: Reconciliation* was developed to support Sacrament catechesis in a parish classroom or parochial school setting. It consists of detailed teaching procedures for each lesson as well as directions for using the resource section in the back of the child's book.

A sample planner chart for chapter 1 is shown on the next page. A similar planner chart appears for each lesson and clearly details the objectives, teaching steps, activities, materials, and everything else that the catechist needs to know or assemble before class begins. Catechists can also use the planner to decide whether to use additional activities and to determine ways to enhance the learning, such as using a particular parish location or resources, inviting a speaker, and so on.

Each chapter begins with a detailed opening prayer that corresponds to the chapter's opening prayer in the child's book. The catechist guide includes prayer icons, music icons, and ritual icons as visual cues to help the catechist lead the opening prayer.

Each chapter also provides the catechist with to-the-point background information and suggestions on how best to incorporate the features of the child's book into a lesson. Boxed features for the catechist that appear throughout the guide include the following:

- A Prayer Ritual
- Scripture Background
- Additional Activity
- Liturgy Background
- FYI
- Teaching Tip
- More Saints and Holy People
- Cultural Connection
- Reviewing the Lesson

Planner Pages Chapter 1

	Objectives	Teaching Steps	Activities	Materials
Opening Prayer Page 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To pray the Sign of the Cross and to bless oneself with holy water as a sign of belonging to Christ and to the Catholic Church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the photo. Explain why Catholics make the Sign of the Cross. Pray the Sign of the Cross with large gestures. Follow the ritual directions for blessing oneself with holy water. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prayer table White cloth Bible Cross or crucifix White candle Glass bowl half filled with holy water Music selections
We Listen Pages 2 and 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To learn the Scripture story about the first sin and the need for forgiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the illustration. Proclaim the Scripture story about the sin of Adam and Eve, based on Genesis 2:7–9, 15–17; 3:1–24. Discuss the effects of Adam and Eve’s disobedience to God. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drawing a picture that shows a way of making peace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pencils and crayons or markers
We Learn Pages 4 and 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To realize that God loves us very much and is always ready to forgive us 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read aloud “Jesus Gives Us the Sacraments.” Discuss sin and ways the Sacraments help us. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drawing a picture of one’s family being peaceful <p>Additional Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Memorizing a psalm about God’s goodness based on Psalm 103:2–3,5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pencils and crayons or markers
We Learn Pages 6 and 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand that Jesus gives us the Sacrament of Reconciliation to bring us back to God when we sin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read and discuss the text about the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Discuss why we receive this Sacrament. Discuss the photos on pages 4 and 5. Discuss the stained glass art. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing and decorating a word for a way we might feel after receiving the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pencils and crayons or markers
We Live Pages 8 and 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To reflect on and share times when we need to forgive and be forgiven 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read the text about people’s feelings being hurt. Discuss the need for reconciliation. Discuss the photos. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drawing before-and-after Reconciliation pictures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pencils and crayons or markers
Closing Prayer Page 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To pray a leader / response prayer praising the Trinity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the photo. Follow the directions for praying “We Praise the Trinity.” 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Music selection

Home Guide

The home guide has been developed for home-based catechesis. It is designed to help parents share and celebrate their Catholic faith and traditions with their children. It gives parents encouragement and support in this undertaking and equips them to feel confident in presenting and discussing the lesson materials with their child. The home guide provides the following:

- an invitation for parents to claim their rightful place as first teachers of the faith
- an overview of the parental role in Sacrament preparation
- reassurance that today's Catholic families, though diverse, can pass on their beliefs to their children
- guidance in creating a family prayer and a promise for both parent and child to share faith time as they prepare for First Reconciliation
- a walk-through of both the child's book and the home guide to help parents get comfortable with the books they will be using
- an explanation of the teaching process used in *Celebrate and Remember: Reconciliation*
- background for parents, which will help them review and learn more about the content of the lessons
- complete lesson plans for all eight lessons
- a variety of activities parents can choose from to help their child integrate the lessons
- ideas for involving other family members in the teaching process
- practical tips for parents as the day for First Reconciliation draws near

Program Director Manual

This program director manual has been developed to provide an overall strategy and resources for catechizing the entire parish community as well as parents, catechists, and children, about the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. It offers the following resources:

- an introduction to the *Celebrate and Remember: Reconciliation Child's Book*, Catechist Guide, Home Guide, and Program Director Manual
- theological and historical background on the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation
- outlines of communal and individual celebrations of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation
- a discussion of forming faith within the Catholic community, with insights into the roles of the pastor, the parish, the director of religious education, parents, and catechists in the ministries of Sacrament preparation
- tools and guidance for creating a calendar, planning the First Reconciliation liturgy, recruiting and forming catechists, and organizing sessions for catechist and parent training
- an abundance of strategies, guidance, and teaching resources for use with catechists and families
- planning aids for catechist and family sessions, prayer celebrations, and retreats
- an overview of the catechetical methodology employed in the program
- options for implementing the program in a parish-based catechetical setting with family involvement and in a home-based catechetical setting with parish involvement
- guidelines for determining a child's readiness for Sacrament preparation and accommodating children with special needs
- ideas for nurturing a positive moral outlook in children
- additional resources and activities for use with the program, including ideas for Advent and Lenten celebrations of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation with children to promote ongoing reception of the Sacrament

Child's Book Contents

Chapter Title	Scripture	Key Church Teaching
1. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit	The first sin and the need for forgiveness. (Genesis 2:7–9, 15–17; 3:1–24)	Baptism washes away sin and gives us new life. Jesus gives us the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation to bring us back to God when we sin.
2. Trust in God's Mercy	Jesus teaches about the forgiving Father. (Luke 15:11–24)	The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is a gift of God's life that makes us new again.
3. We Follow God's Word	The Ten Commandments and the teachings of Jesus. (Exodus 19:20, 20:1–17, Mark 12:28–31, John 13:34)	Jesus came to show us how to follow God's rules and gave us the new commandment of love.
4. I Confess	Jesus is baptized by the Prophet John the Baptist. (Matthew 3:1–6, 13–17)	The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is a sacrament of conversion.
5. I Am Sorry	Jesus forgives the Sorrowful Sinner. (Luke 7:36–40, 47–50)	Sorrow for sin includes a resolve not to sin again.
6. Pardon and Peace	Jesus calls upon Zacchaeus to make up for his sins. (Luke 19:1–9)	In the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, we are reconciled with God and all his people, the Church.
7. His Mercy Endures Forever	The Good Shepherd cares for his sheep. (Luke 15:1–7)	Jesus loves us even when we sin, and he rejoices when we come back to him.
8. Go in Peace	Jesus promises his disciples that the Holy Spirit will help them to keep his word. (John 14:23–27)	The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation helps us to live as disciples of Jesus.

Liturgy	Prayer	Living Reconciliation
The priest welcomes us.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Sign of the Cross • We Praise the Trinity 	We need to forgive and be forgiven.
The priest prays that we trust God's mercy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We Pray for God's Mercy • We Pray for Forgiveness 	When we make bad choices, God is ready to forgive us in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.
We listen to God's Word.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We Pray with the Word of God • We Pray to Follow God's Word 	Jesus teaches us the new commandment of love.
We confess our sins.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return to the Lord • We Pray to God our Father 	The Holy Spirit gives us courage.
The priest gives us a penance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We Pray an Act of Contrition • We Pray the Hail Mary 	We try to make up for our sins.
The priest gives us absolution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We Sing a Song of Peace • We Pray to Jesus 	We have to work for peace.
With the priest, we thank God for his mercy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We Praise God's Mercy • We Pray to Jesus the Good Shepherd 	Jesus never stops loving us.
We go in peace, because we are freed from our sins.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus Blesses Us • We Are Easter People! 	We walk with Jesus along the "Conversion Road."

2

Preparing for the Program

As you begin planning the preparation program for First Reconciliation, keep in mind that you will most likely be helping the same families prepare for First Eucharist later in the year. Consequently, many of your decisions with regard to the Reconciliation program will have an effect on Eucharist preparation. In this section you will find resources to help you understand the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation and explain its theology to parents and catechists. There are also descriptions of the roles of parents and parish ministers in the preparation process. Finally, you will find handouts and models to help you plan and implement the program.

The Forgiveness of Sin

Abundant examples from the Gospels connect Jesus' mission on earth with forgiving sin and overcoming evil. Jesus was well known for eating and drinking with sinners, healing their illnesses, and forgiving their sins. Zacchaeus, Dismas, Mary of Magdala, and Saint Peter were among those well-known figures who were reconciled to God by Jesus' understanding and forgiveness. The Church has a long history of living the mission of Christ to forgive sins, first through Baptism and then through the continuous care and healing found in the Sacrament of Penance.

Although the format of the Rite of Penance and Reconciliation has been developed over the centuries, the Sacrament has its roots in the command of Christ to the Apostles to forgive sins: "[Jesus] said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' And when he had said this, he breathed upon them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained'" (John 20:21–23). The Catholic Church offers this unique sacramental grace, empowered by the Holy Spirit, that allows us to be forgiven and to be called to reform our lives—not once, but again and again. Through the grace of the Sacrament, we are called to virtue, the habit of doing good, as a sure way of warding off sin and becoming more conformed to the image of God, who created us.

Reconciliation in the Old Testament

In ancient times, as today, those who realized that they were sinners felt the need for reconciliation with God. In the eighth century BC, the Prophets Amos, Hosea, and Micah proclaimed that the suffering of the people of Israel at the hands of their enemies was directly related to infidelity to Yahweh, their God of love and compassion. The Israelites had turned to the false gods of their neighbors and had neglected the Law and the worship of God. The prophets called them to repent—to turn their lives around and return to the friendship with God that was promised in the Covenants with their ancestors.

In the Second Book of Samuel (chapters 11 and 12), the account of King David's sin mirrors the Genesis story of the Fall of Adam and Eve. David's sin, like Adam's, stemmed from a feeling that God's gifts were not enough. Being king, David could have anything he wanted. He was free to make good or sinful choices. He chose to sin. The Prophet Nathan confronted David and informed him of God's judgment. David would have to repent—to change his ways—or the entire kingdom would suffer. As punishment, the son that David had with Bathsheba would die, a harsh penalty, even though David did repent.

The stories of sin in the Book of Genesis, which include the Fall of Adam, the murder of Abel, the Tower of Babel, and the Great Flood, to name a few, have in common the element of selfishness, infidelity, and neglect of God's Laws and Covenants. Time and again, people chose to live their lives apart from God. The results always included signs of God's mercy, material punishment, and a call for repentance.

In the well-known book of Jonah, we see these themes plainly developed. For the Israelites, the name of the city of Nineveh was synonymous with sinfulness. The citizens lived their lives completely apart from God. In the biblical story, God called Jonah to prophesy to the Ninevites, commanding them to repent or be destroyed. Jonah sinned by disobeying God's call and attempting to escape, thus separating himself from God. As punishment, Jonah was swallowed by a fish, but he repented and went on to carry out God's mission to Nineveh. In response, the whole city did penance, repented, and was reconciled to God. In the end God told Jonah that divine mercy is stronger than divine anger.

Reconciliation in the New Testament

Jesus announced that his mission was the forgiveness of sins. The Gospels provide many illustrations through the accounts of events in Jesus' life

and parables taken from Jesus' preaching. In forgiving and healing, Jesus often admonished, "Go and sin no more." The clear message, as in the story of the paralytic lowered through the roof (see Mark 2:1–12), was that physical healing was a sign of God's power to forgive sins.

Perhaps the Gospel story most often used to illustrate forgiveness is the Parable of the Lost Son, also called the Prodigal Son (see Luke 15:11–32). Here the father is clearly meant to represent God. He shares all of his possessions and intends to bequeath everything to his sons. But this does not seem to be enough for the sons. The younger son cannot wait to inherit and asks for his share while his father still lives. He goes off and squanders his inheritance before coming to his senses. When he returns to humble himself, the father forgives him because the younger son has paid the price for his greed and envy and has repented, desiring only to be reconciled. Meanwhile, the older son expects his father to give him more because he has been faithful and worked hard, but we see that he does not really understand that he too has always had access to his father's gifts. The older son has focused more on his own obedience and righteousness than on his father's love and forgiveness.

A Short History of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

In the early Church, the Sacrament looked quite different from the way we celebrate it today. Only the most serious sins (mortal sins) were confessed to the bishop. Often the repentant sinner then had to join a group called "the order of penitents" and spent extended time in public fasting and prayer until the bishop decided that he or she had truly reformed. To emphasize the importance of avoiding serious sin, in some regions people could join the order of penitents only once.

Monks from Ireland brought into the Church the idea of individual and private confession. As part of a monk's formation, he was encouraged to confess his faults to a spiritual mentor. In the fifth century, the Pope encouraged the monks to be missionaries and converted the Germanic tribes to Christianity. The monks used their practice of individual confession with the new converts, and it became popular among the people. In fact, the people wanted to confess their sins to a priest repeatedly as an assurance that they were still loved and accepted by God. By the seventh century, the practice of private and frequent confession of one's sins was widespread.

Until the middle of the twentieth century, the common experience of Catholics was the call to frequent confession of sins and the need for absolution prior to receiving the Eucharist. There was little to connect reconciliation with the sacramental life of the Church in the minds of many of the faithful.

Following the Second Vatican Council, the liturgical rites of the Sacraments were renewed and updated to promote greater and more informed participation. The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation became more recognized as a public rite, and opportunities for communal celebration (with individual confession of sins) were encouraged. Sacred Scripture has now become an integral part of the rite, followed by instruction by the priest to help the faithful make an examination of conscience. Greater emphasis has been placed on the aspect of reconciliation with God and the Church, along with the forgiveness of serious sin. It is hoped that these reforms will result in greater and more rewarding participation.

Sin and Absolution

The purpose of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is to celebrate God's forgiveness of our sins and to bring about our reconciliation with God and the Christian community. It has been the ancient tradition of the Church to distinguish between serious, or mortal, sin and less serious, or venial, sin. When one has intentionally caused serious harm to self or others, this constitutes *mortal sin*, and sacramental absolution is necessary in order to reestablish one's relationship with God. The absolution given through the Church by the priest is a gift of the Holy Spirit won for us through the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The less serious sins that we call venial sins are intentional thoughts, words, deeds, or omissions that do not cause serious harm yet should be recognized and regretted because they diminish our relationship with God and the Christian community. Venial sins do not break our ties with God or the Church, but they serve as indicators that we need to reform aspects of our lives if we are to grow ever closer to God. We are not required to confess venial sin, but the Church encourages us to do so because participation in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, with the reception of its grace, is an effective means of ongoing conversion in our lives.

The Grace of the Sacrament

The special sacramental grace of Penance and Reconciliation is both a gift and a challenge. As a gift, the grace of the Sacrament relieves us

of our guilt for sin and can bring us the peace that comes from spiritual healing. As a challenge, the grace of Reconciliation further encourages us to live lives worthy of Christ's redeeming life, death, and Resurrection. Those who have been forgiven mortal sin are restored to friendship with God, and those who have been forgiven venial sin are brought into closer relationship with him. A further gift of this Sacrament is the strength to avoid future sins as we call upon the Holy Spirit for guidance and courage.

The Rite of Penance and Reconciliation

The Rite of Penance and Reconciliation may be celebrated in two ways. Most common is the individual ritual, which usually takes place in a reconciliation room. Most parishes also celebrate the Sacrament in a communal setting during the seasons of Advent and Lent. The celebration of First Reconciliation usually takes place in a communal setting, with children and parents participating. Despite the differences in setting, the elements of the Sacrament remain basically the same in both kinds of celebration: a welcome from the priest, the proclamation of Scripture, a brief lesson or homily, the individual confession of sins, an Act of Contrition, a penance given by the priest, absolution, and dismissal. The following outlines show the words and actions that typically occur in each step of the communal and individual celebrations.

The Communal Celebration

1. Welcome and Introductory Prayer
 - The priest processes into the gathering, usually accompanied by an appropriate hymn.
 - The priest leads us in prayer together.
2. Liturgy of the Word
 - We listen to readings from Scripture, separated by the singing of a psalm.
 - The priest or a deacon reads the Gospel Reading and preaches a homily to help us better understand the Word of God.
 - We make an examination of conscience, and then together we pray the Lord's Prayer.

3. Confession and Absolution

- We confess our sins individually to a priest. The choir may sing hymns or psalms during this time until all have had a chance to confess, be given a penance, and receive absolution.
 - We confess our sins and say an Act of Contrition.
 - The priest gives us a penance.
 - The priest prays the prayer of absolution, reconciling us to God and the Church community.
- Once all have completed an individual confession and received absolution, we pray and sing together in thanksgiving. The priest or deacon blesses the gathering. We go in peace.
- We do our penance as soon as possible.

The Individual Celebration

1. Welcome and Prayer

- The priest welcomes us. We make the Sign of the Cross together.
- The priest prays an opening prayer.

2. Liturgy of the Word

- The priest reads the Scripture.
- The priest comments on the Scripture reading.

3. Confession and Absolution

- We confess our sins to the priest.
- We say an Act of Contrition.
- The priest gives us a penance.
- The priest prays the prayer of absolution, reconciling us to God and the Church community.
- The priest blesses us. We go in peace.
- We do our penance as soon as possible.

Receiving the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

Catholics are obliged to receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation whenever they are aware that they are guilty of serious

sin. Without absolution for serious sin, Catholics may not receive the Eucharist worthily. Catholics are also encouraged to receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation at least once each year. Many take this opportunity during the holy seasons of Advent and Lent.

A sense of obligation, however, should not be the main reason for participating in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. The opportunity to admit our sins, ask forgiveness, and pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our struggle to do good should lead us frequently to the reconciliation room in our parish. Like Christ, our Church welcomes sinners and is eager, through the ministry of the priest, to heal us of the effects of sin and reunite us with God to begin anew the covenant of love that God has with each of us.

Ministries of Sacrament Preparation

From this loving knowledge of Christ springs the desire to proclaim him, to “evangelize,” and to lead others to the “yes” of faith in Jesus Christ. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC], 429*)

The Role of the Pastor

Since the celebration of the sacraments continually integrates children into the Body of Christ, preparing children for reception of the sacraments should always be undertaken in collaboration with the local pastor and catechetical leader. (*National Directory for Catechesis, 61.3*)

Kyrie eleison, Greek for “Lord, have mercy,” is among the oldest prayers of the Church. Traditionally, it is prayed at the beginning of every Eucharistic liturgy. It indicates a public acknowledgment of our sinfulness and a recognition that our hope for redemption lies with God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Individual sins are not mentioned, but they are held in the hearts of each member of the community present. Without exception, we know that we are all in need of God’s mercy.

In what, then, does God’s mercy consist? Clearly we pray for God’s forgiveness. We pray for redemption in our lives. We cannot expect God to remove all the difficulties in our lives, but we know that we can expect forgiveness and redemption from him in the Church, which is the Body of Christ, who lived, died, and rose from the dead to conquer sin in the midst of God’s children. This redemption is a call to righteousness and holiness found in the Scripture and Tradition of the Church. We do not

expect to escape God's judgment, but we hope to live our lives as people worthy to be called "images of God."

The pastor, the leader of our Catholic community, is called to embody the message of the Gospels by promoting a spirit of peace and harmony among the members of the community and by becoming a model of healing and forgiveness. When the community members see these virtues in the pastor, they better understand his preaching of the gospel of love and forgiveness. Consequently, all parish priests are encouraged to embody this spirit.

One of the more serious responsibilities of a pastor is to help people understand their relationship with God and with one another. And one of the main ways a pastor accomplishes this, in addition to preaching, is through catechesis. The pastor is charged with overseeing the catechesis of everyone in his parish at every stage and, in particular, determining if the faithful are properly prepared for the Sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation, the Eucharist, and Confirmation.

The pastor, through his own ministry, can support those preparing for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation in the following ways:

- make every effort to help the children move toward readiness for the Sacrament
- provide Sacrament preparation for all children of his parish, including those with special needs
- respect the right of parents to teach the faith to their own children
- meet with catechetical leaders regularly, keep up to date about progress and developments, and maintain pastoral guidance and prayerful support
- ensure that the program is theologically and catechetically sound and that it is in conformity with the directives of the local bishop
- take part in Sacrament preparation meetings, retreats, and parent education opportunities whenever possible
- visit with the children shortly before the celebration of First Reconciliation to answer questions, calm nerves, and remind them of the importance and meaning of what they are about to celebrate
- communicate with the Sacrament coordinator, the liturgy director, and all others who are involved in the celebration of First Reconciliation
- sign the First Reconciliation certificates that will be given to the children after celebrating the Sacrament

- speak to the children directly in a short homily at the celebration of First Reconciliation, mindful that parents, other adults, and older children in the community are also receiving the teaching and direction he offers to the children

In what ways does your pastor best support the Sacrament preparation process in your parish?

What are some ways your pastor could be encouraged to further support the Sacrament preparation process?

The Role of the Parish Community

The most important task of the catechesis of children is to provide, through the witness of adults, an environment in which young people can grow in faith. (*National Directory for Catechesis*, 48 E2)

Welcome the Children

Jesus said, "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them" (Mark 10:14). It is important to keep his words in mind as we look at how the parish is called to take an active role in our Sacrament preparation programs. Welcoming children in Jesus' name is perhaps the most crucial role of the parish in preparing children for their reception of First Reconciliation. As disciples in tune with the Word of Our Lord, a parish community must welcome every child with open arms and hearts. Only then can we bring the children to Christ so he can bless them and fill them with his life and grace.

One Sunday morning, as a pastor walked with the entrance procession to celebrate the Eucharist, a preschool-aged boy was overheard asking, "Is that Jesus?" His father replied, "No, but he is a very good friend of Jesus." Children identify their parish church with God's house, and they assume that what they experience in their parish church reflects God's hospitality. They know that when they are in a friendly and caring home, people treat them with respect, make them feel at ease, and help them to have an enjoyable visit. Hospitality is the first step in Christian love. If we expect children to embrace the Sacraments and the teaching of the Gospels, we must always make them, and all adults as well, feel welcome.

Live the Faith

Each year at the celebration of the Easter Vigil, and regularly during the celebration of Baptism, the community members present are asked to renew their baptismal promises. The Church includes this renewal in these rites to reinforce the teaching that, once washed in the waters of Baptism, we are called to live as people born again in Christ. Through our Baptism, we are also included in the Church, the People of God, the mystical Body of Christ.

We celebrate and renew this life in Christ by participating in the sacramental liturgy of the Church. We reinforce our membership in God's Church by the way we live out the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes and other teachings of Christ in our daily lives. As a community of believers, we journey together to witness to God's Kingdom. The parish is a model of what it means to be Christ for others. All of the works of the parish—from Sunday worship to the parish picnic, from preschool to adult catechesis, from service within the parish to outreach to the larger community—give witness to the children and their families who are involved in the Sacrament preparation process.

Pray and Learn

Sunday liturgy is an optimal time for the parish community to welcome children and lead them to Jesus. It is a key place where the parish community assumes its important role as a model for young parishioners. With that in mind, the period of immediate preparation for First Reconciliation presents an ideal time to remind the members of the parish community that they are living examples to the children who are present at Mass. Parishioners can be encouraged to reflect on how they are fulfilling this role through actively participating in the liturgy, showing

reverence when approaching and receiving the Eucharist, and taking time to acknowledge the children around them.

Many parishes also use the time of Sacrament preparation to offer catechesis in the Sacraments for the whole community. This way the whole community is focused on Sacrament preparation and learning at the same time. It is not only the children and families who are going through the process; the entire parish is acknowledging its own continuing sacramental journey and need to grow in faith and understanding.

Ways a parish can take an active role in supporting those preparing for First Reconciliation include the following:

- Have a welcoming ceremony during Sunday liturgy when the children begin their preparation for First Reconciliation. This provides an opportunity for the assembly to show its support. (See resource 2–E, “Parish Welcome for First Reconciliation.”)
- Create a prayer card with the names of all children preparing for First Reconciliation. Distribute the prayer cards to the children and to the assembly during the welcoming ceremony, to students in the religious education program and the Catholic school, and to other groups in the parish.
- Distribute a list of prayers that families can use each day during the week leading up to the celebration of First Reconciliation. (See resource 2–F, “Family Prayer before First Reconciliation.”)
- Make a poster that features the names (and possibly even photos) of the children preparing for First Reconciliation. Display the poster in a place where the whole parish will be able to view it.
- Encourage the whole community to pray for those preparing for First Reconciliation by including petitions in the Prayer of the Faithful at Mass each week during the preparation process.
- Feature one or two children who are preparing for the Sacrament of Penance in the bulletin each week.
- Ask members of various parish groups to include the children preparing for the Sacraments in their prayers.
- Create an exchange program with older children from the parish school or faith-formation program. These older children can partner with the younger children for various activities. They may share lessons, attend school or parish Masses together, or exchange notes and prayers. (See resource 2–G, “Community Notes of Support.”)

- Provide catechesis on the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a column or insert in the bulletin or on the parish Web site.
- Feature updates on the children’s program in the parish’s bulletin or on its Web site.

In what ways does your community best support the Sacrament preparation process in your parish?

What are some other ways your parish community could be encouraged to show support to those in the Sacrament preparation process?

The Role of the Program Director

The coordination of catechesis is not merely a strategic factor, aimed at more effective evangelization, but has a profound theological meaning. Evangelizing activity must be well coordinated because it touches on the unity of faith, which sustains all the Church’s actions. (*General Directory for Catechesis, 272*)

As the program director, you have the primary responsibility to bring together families, children, pastoral staff, catechists, the parish community, and appropriate outside sources who will contribute to a thorough understanding of, and preparation for, a joyful and rewarding celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

Your task is that of a facilitator, inviting, recruiting, encouraging, and supporting the best talent available to make the program work and monitoring the progress of the program throughout the weeks or months of preparation. To accomplish this, you will have to be conscious of building

community among volunteers and serving as the contact person for parents as they strive to participate in their children's Sacrament preparation.

As the program director, you have many components to coordinate and many tasks to carry out.

Select Materials

It is your responsibility, and that of your pastor, to choose catechetically sound and age-appropriate materials. That is likely why you have chosen *Celebrate and Remember: Reconciliation* for your parish preparation for First Reconciliation. After you become familiar with the various pieces of the program, you will need to decide what format or design works best for your parish.

You also want to provide resources that are useful and accessible to families and catechists. Picture books, prayer books, children's Bibles, books of saints, prayer charts, games, music CDs, and DVDs are just some of the resources that can be used effectively.

Gather Information

If your parish is small, you will probably know the families and children who will be preparing for the Sacraments. If your parish is mid-size or large, however, or if you are new to the parish, you may need to do some initial research in order to identify the children who may be ready to prepare for First Reconciliation. If your parish is large, you might use your parish database to run a report identifying all five- to seven-year-olds in the parish.

Call the identified families to introduce yourself and outline the scope of your Sacrament preparation program. Invite these families to an informational meeting scheduled after one or more well-attended Sunday Masses. This meeting not only gives you a forum to explain your preparation program and answer questions but also puts these families in contact with others who have children the same age. If only a few families are new to the parish or to you, you might instead invite them to your office to get acquainted or visit them at home. It can be helpful to invite your pastor to help with this welcoming process.

Contact all families with children in kindergarten and acquaint them with your parish's requirements, such as completion of a first-grade faith formation program before beginning Sacrament preparation in second grade. Ask parents to provide a copy of their child's baptismal certificate. If the children were baptized at your parish, this will be quite easy, as

the parish should have these records on file. However, you may have children who were baptized in other parishes or even in foreign countries, in parishes that have since closed, or in hospitals during emergencies. These records can take some time for parents to locate, so be sure to start requesting information early.

Plan the Calendar

When you start developing the calendar for the preparation process, you may find it helpful to begin at the end. Start your calendar with the dates for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist. It is advisable to schedule these dates a year in advance so that “save the date” cards can be sent to families and catechists who will be participating in the preparation for, and celebration of, these Sacraments.

When determining these dates, keep in mind that First Reconciliation is to precede First Eucharist. Allow sufficient time between these celebrations so that they are distinct and so that children will become comfortable with Reconciliation before they receive First Communion.

Consult parish and school calendars to be sure dates do not conflict with any other school or parish events. Your parish may find it helpful to establish a consistent way to determine the date for the celebration of these Sacraments. For instance, First Reconciliation could always be scheduled for the Thursday before Thanksgiving or the first Saturday of Advent. First Eucharist could be celebrated on the last weekend of April or the first weekend of May. In larger parishes, it may be helpful to schedule more than one celebration date for each Sacrament, to give parents a choice and to allow for greater participation by the children’s extended families.

Plan the Liturgy

One of the most important responsibilities of the parish is to celebrate liturgy. As the program director for the First Reconciliation preparation program, you will need to start planning early for the First Reconciliation liturgy. Work with your pastor and liturgy committee to prepare for this liturgy, and consider inviting parents and catechists to work with the liturgy committee. Make sure to check with your diocese to learn about any specific local guidelines for the celebration of First Reconciliation.

Active and fruitful participation in the liturgy may depend on preparation and reflection with the assembly. Though the pastor may include some catechesis on the Sacraments in his homilies during the

weeks of preparation, you may wish to provide other opportunities for whole-community catechesis. This can help to reinforce the significance of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation for your community of faith.

Recruit Catechists

Recruiting catechists for First Reconciliation preparation is a critical part of the planning process. A catechist's role involves much more than simply conveying some basic knowledge. The goal of catechesis is to bring people into a living, personal relationship with Jesus Christ. So, in addition to the teachings of the Church, a catechist shares faith, the Gospel, prayer, Sacraments, morality, and what it means to be a Christian disciple.

In short, a catechist must be a person who loves children and loves the Catholic faith, lives by and desires to teach what the Church teaches, and wants to serve others in Christ. In the case of catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, a catechist must have a good understanding of the theology and liturgy of Sacraments in general and this Sacrament in particular.

It is important to do your work in the area of recruitment, while at the same time trusting the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit blows where it will, knows our hearts and minds, and can prompt us into action. Be open to the inspiration of the Spirit. You may find that as you welcome a new family to your parish you feel the urge to ask if the parents would be interested in being catechists. Go with it.

Here are some additional ideas to consider in your role as a recruiter of volunteers for the Sacrament preparation program:

- As you get to know the parents of the children that will enter the Sacrament preparation program in the future, invite some to consider being catechists. Oftentimes parents are interested in journeying together with their children by leading a preparation class.
- Do not limit your team of catechists to one per group of children. Inexperienced volunteers often begin their catechetical ministry as part of a team working with a more seasoned teacher.
- If you spot someone who demonstrates potential as a catechist for the Sacrament preparation program, have the courage to ask that person if she or he is interested. Most people become involved as a catechist because of a personal invitation rather than a general announcement.