



THE GOD WHO RECONCILES

Catholic
UPDATE
VIDEO

LEADER'S GUIDE

PLEASE NOTE: This leader's guide was originally written for those using this video program in its VHS format. Those now using this program on DVD may find some references that do not apply to their use (i.e., directions for locating segments, time notations, etc.). We trust that both VHS- and DVD-users will find this guide a valuable resource.

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Catholic Update Video

Introduction to the Series

Catholic Update Video is a video magazine resource designed for use in the RCIA, catechist formation, sacramental programs for parents, faith-sharing groups, study groups, and high school religious education.

Catholic Update Video is inspired by *Catholic Update*, the popular print resource from St. Anthony Messenger Press. Bringing that publication's popular approach to video, *Catholic Update Video* draws from Catholic life and practice to present a single topic in a "video magazine" format. An on-camera host guides viewers through four different approaches to the topic:

- 1) **the story segment:** a fiction or non-fiction story highlights the faith-topic;
- 2) **the witness segment:** real-life Catholics from all walks of life share their faith as lived in today's world;
- 3) **the teaching segment:** an expert in a particular aspect of Catholicism presents a concise approach to the topic;
- 4) **the musical reflection segment:** inspired by the popularity of the music video, Christian music and images re-present the theme.

The on-camera host provides a context for each segment, while on-screen graphics provide viewers with a question for group sharing.

How to Use the Programs

Catholic Update Video is a flexible resource for group or classroom use as well as for individual viewing. As with any multi-media resource, a preview of the video will help the facilitator determine the best use of the

program with a particular group.

- Each program stands alone and may be viewed from start to finish.
- The facilitator may stop the program after each segment. A question to use in personal or group reflection appears on-screen.
- Each of the four segments within a *Catholic Update Video* program is independent, and knowledge of material in an earlier segment is not presumed. The facilitator may show segments individually or even out of sequence.

(To view a particular segment, the facilitator can fast-forward the VCR in the “review” mode [i.e., while the VCR is in “play”] to find the gray screen and Catholic Update Video logo that indicate the start of a segment. This leader’s guide also gives approximate times within the program where each segment begins.)

- The *story segment* can lead off an instructional session or prompt a group to discuss a theological concept previously presented. The story in itself may offer ideas for discussion.
- The *witness segment* models individual sharing in a small group or classroom setting.
- The *teaching segment* briefly highlights aspects of the topic. It is not intended to treat a particular topic exhaustively nor substitute for a thorough presentation of Church teaching or practice. For this reason, the facilitator should preview the segment to plan their own content presentations. Careful preview will help the facilitator anticipate questions, consider ways to reinforce the on-screen teacher, and make plans to supplement the video material.
- The *musical reflection segment* need not be shown in sequence with the other segments. It might be used at the beginning of a group session to set the theme. It

can be repeated later to review and reinforce the theme or to surface ideas and feelings experienced during the session. It may also be used in a prayer setting (see example given below). In some cases, scenes from the story segment are included in the musical reflection, but the music and images can stand on their own. Viewers need not have seen the story to benefit from the reflection.

- This guide offers summaries of each of the segments of this *Catholic Update Video*. Accompanying the summaries are suggestions for using the segment in various settings.
- Questions for group discussion are suggested throughout this guide; facilitators should consider them as models for developing questions suited to their situations.
- Various resources for use with this video program are listed at the end of this guide.

THE GOD WHO RECONCILES

Overview of the Program

It has only been in recent years that the word *reconciliation* has come into common use in reference to God's forgiveness and the sacrament which was commonly called *Confession*. The use of the word reflects some new emphases in the celebration of sacramental reconciliation:

- Reconciliation means "coming together again."
- Reconciliation begins with God's action and God's desire that we "come together again."
- The focus is on the relationship rather than individual sinful acts.
- The emphasis is no longer primarily on the confession of sins or the penance given, although these remain significant parts of the ritual.
- It acknowledges that our "private" sins affect others.

Reconciliation can only come about when all parties who need to be reconciled desire this and work to bring it about. God is always ready to forgive and welcome us home. Many times people fail to seek reconciliation with God because they don't believe that they are forgivable or don't know how to ask for forgiveness.

Individuals have widely differing abilities and inclinations to ask for or offer forgiveness, yet each of us needs to be at one with God and in good relationship with those around us. These things are essential for a positive sense of self—being reconciled with oneself.

In this video, we will begin to address the topic of reconciliation with a look at the source of all forgiveness—our reconciling God. In other programs in this *Catholic Update Video* series we will look more closely at the Sacrament of Reconciliation (*The Church Celebrates*

the Reconciling God) and how to help children prepare for the celebration of this sacrament (*Preparing Your Child for First Reconciliation*.)

Jesus used the forgiving father in the Prodigal Son story to give us an idea of how ready God is to forgive us and how much God longs to be reconciled with us. In this video, viewers will see a moving story of human forgiveness—a modern-day Prodigal Son story—in the *story segment*.

Tom DeBacker’s story in the *witness segment* is yet another Prodigal Son story. As Tom tells of his estrangement from his family—the result of a selfish and uncaring act on his part—and subsequent reconciliation, viewers will hear how his relationship with God and his involvement in a Christian community helped to make this reconciliation possible.

In the *teaching segment*, Father Tom Richstatter talks about “God’s dream”—that we be in harmony with each other, God and our world. We learn about the effects of human sin on that dream and Jesus’ role in bringing God’s dream to completion.

This program ends with a *musical reflection segment* highlighting the song “No Longer Strangers” which celebrates our unity with God and each other—a unity made possible by God’s mercy.

Audience

This program is intended for an adult or teenage audience, which may encompass several groups:

- RCIA participants preparing to be baptized or received into the Catholic Church;
- Adults inquiring into the Catholic faith;
- Catholics looking for an “update”;
- Parents of children preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time;

- Catholics who are returning to active participation in the Church after some time away;
- Religious education program and school catechists for enrichment and formation;
- High school students in their religious education curriculum.

STORY SEGMENT

(Begins approximately 0:27 into program.)

Summary

The story segment of this video is entitled “Pardon and Peace . . . Remembered.” Viewers familiar with the catechetical film *Pardon and Peace* produced in 1983 by Franciscan Communications will recognize this story as an updated and expanded version of that classic program. The story echoes human stories of separation and reconciliation as old as the Prodigal Son and as contemporary as today’s headlines.

Our story opens with John receiving an unexpected visit from his teenage granddaughter, Jennifer. She has just had a big fight with her parents. She declares that she hates them, is never going back home, and will never speak to them again.

John listens to her story and begins to share a similar story of his own youth. He had had a big fight with his parents over a girl they didn’t approve of, Jennifer’s grandmother. He cut them off—a split that lasted 62 years. It wasn’t until his parents had been dead for some time that he made an attempt at reconciliation.

Jennifer is noticeably shocked and incredulous as she asks about how reconciliation finally took place. Her grandfather tells her that something he saw 15 years before changed his life. He was on his way home from a fishing trip when he picked up a young hitchhiker

named David. David too had left home after a fight with his dad, making a vow that he would never return. He traveled and bummed around until he hit bottom. Finally writing a letter to his mother saying that he would like to come home, he indicated when he would be coming through their town and asked if she would leave a lamp burning in the front window if he was welcome back. If there was no light, he would go on with no hard feelings.

David's desire to return home so impressed John that he shared his own similar story with the youth. David asked him why he didn't move back home, to which John replied, "Neither me nor my folks could ever say 'I'm sorry'—some folks never do."

It was dark when they entered David's hometown. David was so anxious that he couldn't look for the light himself but asked John to do so. When they reached the house—it was full of light! Every light in the house was turned on to welcome David home.

John sat in his car outside the house trying to "soak up that light," wishing that it was his house and that he was being welcomed home.

The "light" he saw that night was that it wasn't too late to reconcile with his folks and let go of his anger. He decided to do what David had done—he wrote a letter to his parents asking if he could come back and saying that he was sorry. He took the letter and some flowers to the cemetery and left them at their graves. There was no house ablaze with lights, but he felt some of the light in his heart as well as regret for the lost years.

Having been touched by her grandfather's story, Jennifer announces that she should probably get home—her parents will be wondering where she is. She thanks her grandfather and leaves him looking at a wedding photograph of his parents.

Suggestions for Use

This story can help viewers reflect on several different aspects of the process of reconciliation—our need to ask for or offer forgiveness, the fact that we are forgivable, and God’s generous mercy. The story is so personally touching that viewers will likely be able to relate some experience of their own to the story.

Some viewers may feel compelled to share with others, while others may feel inclined to quietly reflect. Sensitivity to these differing needs is important. One solution is to invite everyone to journal—writing down feelings, memories, prayers, resolutions for action—and then inviting sharing if desired.

Depending on the group’s comfort with one another, the facilitator may choose to share the witness and/or teaching segment before using this story segment.

- This segment could be used in parish meetings for parents of children who are preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Parents are models of God’s forgiveness to their children. It is important that as parents help their children prepare for First Reconciliation they know personally the abundant love and mercy of God. This story could be used to help reiterate this message.
- The story segment might also be used in a prayer service at such a meeting, as a contemporary retelling of the Prodigal Son story in Luke’s gospel. A sample prayer service plan can be found in the Musical Reflection Segment of this guide.
- Facilitators of a welcome home program for inactive Catholics who are returning to the Church might find this story a beautiful way to express the Church’s and God’s delight about their return. It might also introduce or reinforce how helpful celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation may be for these people.
- RCIA facilitators may use this segment in the

preparation of participants for the celebration of Reconciliation. Instruction on this sacrament needs to begin with personal experiences of reconciliation as an introduction to the theme of God's forgiveness. This segment meets this need well.

Questions for Sharing

- 1) The older man in this story tells his young acquaintance that some folks never can say "I'm sorry." Why is saying "I'm sorry" so difficult for some people? Why is it so important?
- 2) How big a part does fear play in resistance to reconciliation? What other factors get in the way?
- 3) Have you ever waited for someone else to make the first move toward reconciliation? What happened? Why did you wait for the other to act first?
- 4) Have you ever been surprised by how willing another person was to forgive you? How did it make you feel? What effect did this have on your relationship?
- 5) Some people say that the story in scripture (Luke 15:11-32) on which this segment is based should be called *The Forgiving Father* rather than *The Prodigal Son*. What does this story tell us about God's mercy?
- 6) Do you need to ask/offer forgiveness to anyone now? What about God? Is God waiting to forgive you?
- 7) Have you ever refused to ask for/offer forgiveness? Has it hurt you or the other party more?

WITNESS SEGMENT:

(Begins approximately 18:13 into program.)

Summary

The witness for this segment tells a story of reconciliation. It is about a man whose story includes a time of estrangement from his family and the Church. His acceptance of Christ back into his life led to his reconciliation with his family. Tom DeBacker shares some of his difficult journey, which, through a process of reconciliation, brought him great peace.

A member of a large family, Tom lost two of his younger brothers during his adult years. At the time of the death of the first brother, Tom was active in the Church, concerned about setting a good example for his child and close to God through regular prayer. Despite the pain of that loss, he found that “being close to God makes death easier.”

Tom’s life had changed radically by the time a second brother died five years later. He had left the Church and was focusing on the pursuit of material wealth. His concern for others had diminished.

His brother, Eddie, had been in a hospital for four months after having scalded himself in the shower during an epileptic seizure. Tom had had a two-week vacation in Mexico planned for some time. He decided to go ahead with his vacation plans despite his knowledge that Eddie was likely to die while he was gone. He even went so far as to tell his family not to call him if Eddie died since there wasn’t anything he could do anyway.

Three days into his vacation he received a call from his sister telling him that Eddie had died. Tom refused to even consider going home for the funeral. For eight years Tom lived with the guilt of having “done my whole family wrong.”

His return to a relationship with Christ and involvement in a Christian community are the things he credits with making it possible for him to initiate reconciliation with his family. It was this reconciliation that finally brought Tom peace.

Suggestions for Use

The witness segment should be introduced as the experience of a real-life Catholic—a person chosen precisely because he is an ordinary person of faith. Stress with participants that the man interviewed shared his own thoughts and experiences, not scripted ideas.

Personal witness is important in most, if not all, groups where faith topics are being discussed. As participants share their stories, they can begin to shape a small faith community among themselves. By supporting the faith journeys of others, they can better reflect on their own journey.

This segment will be useful for small group sharing in a variety of settings:

- For RCIA participants, it will be helpful to hear Tom's testimony of the importance of a relationship with Christ and a supportive faith community in helping to bring reconciliation about.
- In learning about the Sacrament of Reconciliation, this segment may help candidates and catechumens grasp the connection between private and social sin. Tom's story is a good example of how sin hurts our relationship with self, others and God and how reconciliation also touches these relationships.
- Another use for this segment is within a sacramental program for parents whose children are preparing for First Reconciliation. Parents are key in modeling forgiveness to their children—in effect, they teach the

child about God's mercy by their acts of mercy. They may benefit from reflection on human reconciliation and God's role in it as well as the connection between private and social sin (see above).

- Participants in a welcome home program may benefit from viewing this segment as they deal with their own past hurts and need for reconciliation. It may be particularly helpful for them to hear how Tom's return to involvement with a Christian community helped to facilitate reconciliation in other areas of his life.

Sharing and discussion might be facilitated by use of the questions that follow.

Questions for Sharing

- 1) What attitudes got in the way of Tom's reconciliation with his family? Do these attitudes cause problems in your relationships with others? With God?
- 2) Why is it so difficult for some people to say, "I'm sorry"? Rate your own difficulty with this on a scale of 1(easy) to 5 (very difficult).
- 3) Have you ever forgiven someone for something that seemed unforgivable? How did it make you feel? What effect did it have on your relationship?
- 4) Have you ever asked forgiveness for something you'd done that seemed unforgivable? Were you forgiven? How did it affect your relationship?
- 5) Our private choices have public consequences. Name some examples.

TEACHING SEGMENT:

(Begins approximately 24:46 into program.)

Summary

In this teaching segment, Father Tom Richstatter, O.F.M., describes what he calls “God’s dream” of harmony for the world, the effects of human sin on that dream, and Jesus’ role in bringing God’s dream to completion. We learn that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a celebration of the promise of that dream—a celebration of our God who reconciles. The following outlines his presentation:

A. In the Book of Genesis we find a description of God’s dream for the world.

1. God creates a beautiful garden where all is peace and harmony.
2. There is three-fold harmony:
 - a. Humans are at peace with each other.
 - b. Humans are at peace with the earth.
 - c. Humans are at peace with God.
3. God wants all creation to be reconciled and at peace.

B. Our ignorance and sin impede the fulfillment of God’s dream.

C. Jesus came to bring the dream of God to completion.

1. He healed sickness and division.
2. By his death and resurrection, he reconciled all things in himself.
3. Each sacrament is a celebration of the promise of the Paschal Mystery—that God’s dream for the world will be realized.

D. The Sacrament of Reconciliation celebrates God’s saving mercy.

E. Our view of sin is changing.

1. Formerly we viewed sin in legal terms as distinct acts that broke specific laws.
2. Now we think of sin more in terms of relationships—with God, others, the earth and ourselves.
3. The Bible compares our relationship with God to a marital relationship. Just as a marriage is seldom ruptured suddenly, mortal sin doesn't just happen.
4. Relationships and growth are complex realities. The way is seldom clear. Relationships can be harmed without our knowing it.
5. Sin is never private—my personal sins always have public consequences.
6. Our ability to have “full knowledge” and freedom to commit sin is influenced by family of origin, habits, addictions and relationships.
7. Healing of relationships can take time; reconciliation comes at the end of a process.

F. Our understanding of sinfulness and the Sacrament of Reconciliation grows in relationship to our understanding of God's mercy.

Suggestions for Use

Many of today's Catholics are in need of updated instruction on sin and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Many are uncomfortable with this sacrament since the changes instituted in the 1970's. The perceived “softening” of Church teaching on sin also troubles and confuses some people. This teaching segment is a good foundation for such an update—helping people see the spirit behind the changes in ritual and emphasis. Please note that a more comprehensive look at sin and morality is needed to supplement the material presented here.

- RCIA participants will find this segment helpful within instruction on both sin and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Before viewing the segment, participants might be asked to write down their idea of what “God’s dream for the world” might be. Sharing these ideas after viewing the segment could lead into discussion of how their varying ideas might fit into the larger dream.
- Parents of children preparing to celebrate First Reconciliation may be in need of an update on the current approach to sin and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. As adults, they will benefit from this knowledge and the opportunity to reflect on it during the period of their child’s preparation for the celebration of Reconciliation. As parents, they will be better equipped to explain and reinforce these concepts with their children. Catechists should use this segment within a more comprehensive approach to the topic— including such things as personal reflection on parents’ own experiences, instruction on the faith and moral development of children, the role of parents as models and guides, the process of the ritual, and details of the celebration itself. (See companion programs in the *Catholic Update Video* series.)
- Participants in a “welcome home” program, those who have left the Church and wish to return, may find this segment important for the reasons mentioned above as well as in specific connection to their circumstances. Their very act of coming to a “welcome home” program as a return to active participation in the Church is an attempt at reconciliation. They may also need to “ritualize” this by celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and may need updating on that process. In such cases, this teaching segment should be used after some initial sharing aided by both the story and witness segments.

- Catechists in school and religious education programs will find this segment helpful for their own enrichment and formation on the topics of forgiveness, sin and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Questions for Sharing

- 1) Fr. Tom refers to the sacraments as “celebrations.” Does this reflect your experience or perception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation?
- 2) How has your personal view of sin changed over time?
- 3) What do you think of the statement made that our “private” sins have public consequences?
- 4) Do you share God’s dream? What are you doing to bring it about? What more can you do?
- 5) What do you think of the comparison of our relationship with God to that of a husband and wife? Does this fit your experience?

MUSICAL REFLECTION SEGMENT

(Begins approximately 33:40 into the program.)

Summary

“No Longer Strangers,” from *Glory Day: David Haas & Friends in Concert* (St. Anthony Messenger Press, V5000, \$24.95), is the song featured in this *musical reflection segment*. Based on Ephesians 2:19, it is meant to be a spirited celebration of our relationship with God who is present to us in all things and who helps us break down the walls separating us from God and each other.

This song celebrates our hope in Jesus who finds us when we are lost or led astray and brings us home; draws us near when we are cut off; makes us whole

when we are broken; and saves us from death—raising us to new life. In the refrain, we rejoice in the fact that “now we are saints! We are one in the house of God.” (from “No Longer Strangers,” ©1993 GIA Publications, Inc., Chicago, IL 800-442-1358 Used with permission.)

Concert footage is accompanied by visuals that make a link between this song and this program’s theme. The visuals primarily emphasize communal and sacrament situations. The spirit of unity celebrated in the song is also evident in the footage of people in attendance at the original concert.

Suggestions for Use

This musical reflection can be used to open or conclude a study or faith-sharing session. It could be shown alone or in conjunction with a reconciliation prayer service—possibly even within a communal penance service as the Song of Thanksgiving. An outline for a prayer service follows:

- 1) The leader introduces the prayer experience in these or similar words:

God wants all creation to be reconciled and at peace—men and women at peace with each other, the earth and God. This is God’s dream of harmony for our world. Our sin affects this harmony and the realization of this dream. We need to be reconciled—to come together again—with those with whom we are at odds. Let us reflect for a moment on the areas where reconciliation is most needed in our lives . . .

- 2) A time of silence follows.
- 3) Read Luke 15:11-32.
- 4) Invite the group to reflect on and share which of the characters in the Prodigal Son story best reflects their personal need or attitude based on the following distinction:

Younger Brother—asking for forgiveness
Older Brother—unwilling to forgive
Father—offering forgiveness

- 5) Preface an invitation to share petitions with the following or similar words:

Two of God's great gifts to us are free will and God's abundant mercy. We know that we may choose to sin, but we also know that we can be forgiven for our sins and begin again. Just as God forgives us, we need to offer each other forgiveness.

Sometimes asking for or offering forgiveness is difficult for us; we cannot do it without God's help. Sometimes the temptation to sin is great; we cannot resist it without God's help.

Let us voice aloud our needs as we share our personal petitions, asking for God's help.

(Model one or two petitions for the group.)

- 6) Pray together the Lord's Prayer
- 7) Conclude the service with the musical reflection segment from this program, "No Longer Strangers." Encourage the group to join in on the simple refrain and share a sign of peace when the song ends.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

1) Scripture references:

Scripture references to support both the *story segment* and *witness segment* include the Parable of the Prodigal Son (or Forgiving Father) in Luke 15:11-32 and other parables of divine mercy: the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:1-7) and the Lost Silver Pieces (Luke 15:8-10).

Examples of Jesus forgiving sins appear in Luke 19:1-10 (Zacchaeus); Luke 7:36-50 (Penitent Woman) and Mark 2:1-12 (Paralytic at Capernaum).

Support for the Sacrament of Reconciliation can be found in John 20:19-23 and 2 Corinthians 5:16-21.

Guidance in right living appears in Matthew 5-7; Galatians 5:7-26; 1 John 1:6-10; Ephesians 4-6; Romans 12-15:13 and Exodus 20:1-17.

Prayers of repentance can be found in Psalm 51; Luke 11:1-4 and Matthew 6:9-15.

Old Testament invitations to repent are found in Joel 2:12-13; Isaiah 1:16-18 and Ezekiel 36:25-32.

2) *Catechism of the Catholic Church* references:

The *Catechism* addresses several of the topics found in this video: The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation (1422-1498); Reconciliation with God (980); The Role of the Holy Spirit (1099-1103); Obligation to Receive the Sacrament (2042); Preparation to Receive Communion (1385) and Sacramental Seal of Confession (2490).

3) Available from St. Anthony Messenger Press:

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<http://Catalog.AmericanCatholic.org> for additional print (magazine, newsletter, book and pamphlet), audio (book and presentation) and video (DVD and VHS) resources to support your efforts in faith formation and personal spiritual growth.

Leader's Guide written by:
Joan McKamey

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28 W. Liberty St.
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