



PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR FIRST RECONCILIATION



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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Catholic Update Video

Introduction to the Series 4

How to Use the Programs 5

Preparing Your Child for First Reconciliation

Overview of the Program 7

Audience 9

Program Plans for First Reconciliation

Parent Meetings 10

Story Segment

Summary 11

Suggestions for Use 13

PROGRAM PLAN A

Suggestions for Use 16

PROGRAM PLAN B

Questions for Sharing 18

Witness Segment

Summary 19

Suggestions for Use 19

Questions for Sharing 20

Teaching Segment

Summary 20

Suggestions for Use 22

Questions for Sharing 23

Musical Reflection Segment

Summary 24

Suggestions for Use 24

PROGRAM PLAN A

Suggestions for Use 26

PROGRAM PLAN B

Questions for Sharing 27

Additional Suggestions for Use 28

Resources for Further Study

Scripture references 30

Catechism of the Catholic Church 31

St. Anthony Messenger Press 31

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. This is designed to more fully engage today's learner by making use of the tools of our media culture. Through the use of video, catechists can share the Church's message—the Good News—in a way that involves more senses, may touch people on a deeper level, and makes use of a very popular and familiar medium.

An on-camera host guides viewers through four different approaches to the topic:

- 1) **the story segments:** a fiction or non-fiction story helps viewers connect to 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 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 multimedia 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 First Reconciliation preparation programs. 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.

PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR FIRST RECONCILIATION

Overview of the Program

Many parents today are challenged by the task of helping their child prepare for First Reconciliation. Good parents are concerned about being authentic teachers and role models for their children. But even the best-intentioned parents may struggle with helping their child prepare to celebrate something that they may never have experienced as a “celebration.”

There is no denying that Catholic practice regarding this sacrament has changed dramatically over the last few decades. Changes to the rite instituted in 1974 are still unfamiliar to many. At the same time, the renewed rite draws people in good numbers to parish Advent and Lenten communal services.

Parents come to First Reconciliation meetings looking for answers to a variety of questions—questions they anticipate their child may ask and for which many of them need answers as adults.

They want their child to have a positive experience of this sacrament from the start, yet many of them are still affected by their own less-than-positive memories of this sacrament.

They want their child to feel comfortable with the ritual, yet many of them are uncomfortable with their ignorance of the “new” ritual.

And most importantly, they want their child to know the loving and merciful God who is celebrated in this sacrament and need to be affirmed and challenged in their role of modeling God’s love and forgiveness to their child. A child’s preparation for First Reconciliation becomes a prime opportunity for adult formation within the context of parent formation.

This video program is a resource for the sacramental preparation coordinator responsible for the formation of parents whose children are preparing for First Reconciliation. This guide offers two single-session program plans for parish sacramental parent meetings. One plan (Program Plan A) offers a session for parents only. The other (Program Plan B) alters the first plan to allow children to participate with their parents. Both program plans use all four segments of this video program.

Catechists who use the *story segment* in a class setting with children preparing for First Reconciliation may want to make use of the activity and other lesson plan elements found in Program Plan B.

The *story segment* is an original children's tale entitled "The Festival Fabric." The artwork and music for the story are drawn from African culture. Two children in an extended family learn that their misdeeds affect the rest of the family and that they must seek reconciliation to restore harmony among all the members.

Parents are the intended audience for the *witness segment* and the *teaching segment*. In the *witness segment*, real-life contemporary parents reflect on their experiences of preparing children to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In the *teaching segment*, Father Tom Richstatter offers insights on the action of God in reconciling us in Jesus and in communicating this Good News to children.

The *musical reflection segment* is an original song entitled "Johnny's Tears." It models how Jesus extends God's forgiving love to the child in the sacramental moment. The folk style of the music, complemented by light-hearted illustrations, captures the poignant story.

This video program focuses on the needs of children and parents preparing for the first celebration of the

sacrament. Two companion programs in the *Catholic Update Video* series are available: “The God Who Reconciles” (D2001) offers further theological reflection on reconciliation. “The Church Celebrates the Reconciling God” (D2002) shows the historical development of the sacrament and how it is celebrated today.

Catechetical leaders will also find the guide, *Experience the Reconciling God: Program Plans for Using the Catholic Update Video Reconciliation Series* (B16500), a valuable resource. It offers several program plans for using the 12 segments of these three *Catholic Update Videos* in a more comprehensive plan for parent and catechist formation on the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Audience

The intended audience for this program includes:

- children preparing to celebrate First Reconciliation (story segment, musical reflection segment)
- parents of children preparing to celebrate First Reconciliation
- children learning about any of the following topics: responsibility; making choices; mistake vs. sin; forgiveness; honesty; how our actions affect others; family relationships; traditions and values; Church as a community or family (story segment)
- children learning about choices, sin, repentance, forgiveness, God’s mercy (musical reflection segment)

PROGRAM PLANS FOR FIRST RECONCILIATION PARENT MEETINGS

PROGRAM PLAN A

One Meeting, Parents Only

Advantages: limited time commitment asked of parents; high probability of good attendance; permits more time for addressing parents and their questions

Disadvantages: only allows time to address parents as parents and leaves little room for addressing their needs as adult persons of faith; provides no opportunity for parent-child interaction.

Objective: to affirm and challenge parents in their role in preparing their child for First Reconciliation.

PROGRAM PLAN B

One Meeting, Parents and Children

Advantages: limited time commitment asked of parents; high probability of good attendance; provides opportunity for children and parents to view video stories, discuss and pray together; assists parents in talking with their children about matters of faith

Disadvantages: allows time only to address parents as parents and little time to address them as adult persons of faith; time to answer parents' questions is further shortened by periods when children are present

Objective: to affirm and encourage parents in their important role in preparing their children for First Reconciliation and to provide opportunity for parent/child sharing on the topic

STORY SEGMENT

(Begins approximately 2:42 into program.)

Summary

The story in this segment is entitled “The Festival Fabric.” It is a tale about two children who learn something of the social nature of sin when it is revealed that their action affected many others.

The two children, Issa and Asha, are great-grandchildren of “Great Mother.” She was the queen of a small village known for the beautiful fabric woven there. She was renowned for being “kind and loving, honest and noble” as were her children after her.

The events of the story take place at the Family Festival, a yearly celebration for Great Mother’s family. Great Mother’s children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren would gather for eating, drinking, visiting, storytelling and for fashioning the special fabric woven for the occasion and distributed by Great Mother on the first day of the festival. During the five days preceding the closing feast, each of Great Mother’s children and their families would secretly work at cutting and sewing their own design from the common material. As the entire family gathered for the closing feast, the new articles of clothing were worn—each family’s design different yet fashioned from the same cloth.

The children’s contribution to their family’s creation was to sew on the trimmings—beads made from seeds and nuts they had gathered through the year. As Issa and Asha, members of the Masud family, were to begin this task on the fourth day of the festival, they discovered that they had left their sewing tools at home in their own village.

Fearing their mother would be upset with them

because of their irresponsible behavior, Issa and Asha decided to look in the woods for things that could serve as a cutting tool and needle. On the way to the woods they came upon the deserted workstation of some of their Mosi cousins. The very tools they needed were lying there unattended on a blanket in the grass! They decided to take them, rationalizing that there were more children in the Mosi family with more tools available for sharing.

The next day the families gathered for the closing feast, all wearing the designs they had made from the festival fabric. Issa and Asha noticed that the youngest Mosi cousins' sashes contained no trimmings and that the entire Mosi family was quiet and seemed unhappy. Issa and Asha began to realize that it was their action that had caused this unhappiness.

Great Mother opened the closing feast with an announcement about the missing tools. In turn, each of her children assured her that they had raised their families to be kind, loving, honest and noble. None of them would take another's belongings.

Issa and Asha now saw that their action had affected the entire gathering. They knew that they had to do something to set things right. They went to Great Mother to confess and ask for her forgiveness. She assured them of this and challenged them to ask forgiveness of others they had hurt—their Mosi cousins and their Masud family. Once they had asked for forgiveness, they saw smiles return to the faces of their family members.

Great Mother invited Issa and Asha, along with their Mosi cousins, to sit with her. She said, "We are like the festival fabric, all the same weave and thread, but cut differently. The pattern marks you as one of my children as do the values you have been taught. When you go back to your villages, remember it is important

to the family, it is important to the whole village, that you wear both with honor. Now, my little ones, let us celebrate. We are one family again.”

Suggestions for Use

PROGRAM PLAN A

Everyone loves a good story. Children’s lives are full of stories that entertain and teach. The words “Let me tell you a story” cause adults and children alike to sit back and open themselves to the story. If it is indeed a good one, the story and its accompanying message will be remembered, talked about and shared with others.

“The Festival Fabric” is a story written and illustrated for children, yet its ageless message is one adults will also benefit from hearing. It illustrates several points in the First Reconciliation curriculum and offers adults a non-threatening way to reflect on this sacrament. Parents will appreciate being able to see a story that will be used in their child’s class. This will allow them to talk about the story at home with their child. Give parents a copy of the Questions for Sharing found on page 18. Encourage them to discuss these questions at home with their children after the children have also seen this video story.

Use or adapt this **Session Plan** as needed.

1. Begin the session by introducing yourself and inviting those who can answer “Yes” to the following questions to stand.
 - a. How many are helping their first child to prepare for First Reconciliation?
 - b. How many have helped older children to prepare for and celebrate First Reconciliation?
 - c. How many of you are teachers? Acknowledge

those professional teachers who stand—ask where and what they teach, etc.

2. Read from the blessing in *The Rite of Baptism* that includes the words “first teachers of their child in the ways of faith” (#105).
3. Ask again “How many of you are teachers?” (Everyone should stand this time.)
4. Make the point that parents are involved in teaching their children lots of things—some by instruction, most by example. Parents teach their children about faith too—again, some by instruction, most by example.
5. Ask if someone can put into three words the message every faithful parent wants to share with their children? (God loves you.) Use or adapt the following script to meet your needs:

That’s the message of Jesus and our message to our children: God loves you. We teach this to them best by loving them and modeling our love on the love God has for us.

Loving involves forgiving. Children should already be learning, within the context of their family life, the essential things they need to know to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. “The Festival Fabric” illustrates the many facets of reconciliation that children learn within their family experience. As you watch the story, look for those things that you think your child needs to know (may know already) in order to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

6. Show the video.
7. Invite parents to share those things that they saw in the story that they expect their children need to know or understand as they prepare to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Things to note are:
 - Our actions affect others. Some of the hurt we

cause is obvious. Issa and Asha's choice to take the tools hurt their Mosi cousins. Some of the hurt we cause is less obvious. Issa and Asha hurt their grandfather Masud and their entire family by choosing to do what they had been taught was wrong. As Christians we are expected to act in certain ways. When we don't, it affects the entire Christian community.

- Church as community or "family"
- Responsibility
- Accident/mistake vs. intentional wrongdoing/sin
- We need to admit wrongdoing and seek forgiveness.
- Joy comes with reconciliation.
- The priest is the one who leads community prayer, especially the sacraments. Issa and Asha confessed their sin to Great Mother who then pointed them to the others in their family community who also needed to receive an apology.
- Parents offer their children values and principles on which to build their lives and by which to guide their choices.

This would be a natural place for the facilitator to expand on these themes and others the children are learning in their preparation curriculum. Stress that most children are taught these concepts within everyday family life. The role of the parish preparation program is to provide religious words and a larger faith context for the children's lived experience. The parish provides the structure—children learn how to go about celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The family provides much of the lived experience that gives practical meaning to this sacrament.

Suggestions for Use

PROGRAM PLAN B

As part of First Reconciliation preparation, this story fits in well at the point when children are discussing how their choices affect others. Children need to understand that our relationship with God is hurt when we choose to sin and that we also hurt others when we sin. Some of the hurt we cause is obvious. Issa and Asha's choice to take the tools hurt their Mosi cousins. Some of the hurt we cause is less obvious. Issa and Asha hurt their grandfather Masud and their entire family by choosing to do what they had been taught was wrong. As Christians, we are expected to act in certain ways. When we don't, it affects the entire Christian community. Reconciliation means coming back together again with all whom our choices have hurt.

Adults and children alike often question the need to confess to a priest. They ask, "Why can't I just pray to God and ask forgiveness?" This story helps to illustrate the role of the priest in this sacrament. The priest presides at Reconciliation as he does at other sacraments. Issa and Asha confessed their sin to Great Mother who then pointed them to others in their family community also in need of an apology.

Use or adapt this **Session Plan** as needed.

1. As families arrive, instruct parents and children to sit together.
2. Introduce yourself and the meeting.
3. Invite everyone to think of a time when something they chose to do or say hurt someone else. (Parents should try to recall incidents from childhood.) Give parents and children a few minutes to share about their experiences.

4. Tell the group that they will be viewing a video story entitled “The Festival Fabric.” Make sure the children understand the word “fabric.” Take a piece of cotton cloth and show how strong it is. Cut a small hole in the fabric and show how easily it rips. Point out that one small hole can grow and weaken the whole piece of fabric. Point out that sin weakens relationships just like the hole weakens the cloth.
5. Show the video.
6. Give the parents and children some time to talk about the story. Offer them two or three questions to discuss modeled on those that follow.
7. While the parents stay to continue the adult portion of the meeting, dismiss the children for a “Festival Fabric” activity led by their catechists.

Activity for Children

1. Give each child a 10-inch by 10-inch square of woven fabric. Unravel one side of a square of fabric to show the children that each thread touches many others. Talk about how our lives touch others and our actions affect others.
2. Ask the children to name some choices to do wrong/sins that affect other people.
3. Have children offer names of individuals or groups of people who are affected by their choices to do wrong. Write these on the board, generalizing names of specific people to their relationship with the child, i.e., sister, father, friend, classmate, etc.
4. Give each child several self-adhesive address labels. Instruct the children to write the names of people and groups affected when they sin on the labels and stick them on their cloth.
5. Talk about Great Mother’s words at the end of the

story, “We are like the festival fabric, all the same weave and thread, but cut differently.” Make sure the children see that we all belong to groups that are like our own Festival Fabric (families, friends, class, school, Church, clubs, teams) and that we can help them or hurt them by the choices we make. We are also helped or hurt by choices they make.

6. If time permits, allow children to decorate their fabric with beads, colored paper shapes, seeds, feathers, etc.
7. At an agreed-upon time, return children to the place where their parents are gathered for a joint closing prayer (see sample on page 26).

Questions for Sharing

PROGRAM PLANS A AND B

1. Why didn't Issa and Asha have the tools they needed? Talk about how forgetting something is a mistake. Discuss the difference between a mistake and something you choose to do or say.
2. What did Issa and Asha do to cover up the mistake of forgetting their tools? Why was this a bad choice? What other choices could they have made?
3. Name all the individuals and groups who were hurt by their choice to take the tools. Who felt better after Issa and Asha confessed and asked for forgiveness?
4. What did Issa and Asha learn about the Festival Fabric? What does the fabric symbolize?

WITNESS SEGMENT

(Begins approximately 17:56 into program.)

Summary

The *witness segment* consists of excerpts from interviews with three ordinary Catholics couples. The individuals are real people, not actors. All have insights to share about preparing children to celebrate First Reconciliation. The participants share their own experiences; their responses were not scripted.

The interview excerpts include insights such as:

- 1) helping children distinguish between accidents and intentional wrongdoing;
- 2) parents as role models for their children;
- 3) finding “teachable moments” in daily family life and
- 4) children as models of God’s forgiveness.

Suggestions for Use

PROGRAM PLANS A AND B

The *witness segment* should be introduced as the experience of real-life Catholics—chosen precisely because they are ordinary persons of faith. Stress with participants that the adults interviewed shared their 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 hear the stories of others and reflect on and share their own stories, they get in touch with feelings and experiences that have shaped their understanding. This may open them to new insights shared in content presentations on the topic.

Use or adapt this **Session Plan** as needed.

1. Introduce the segment.
2. Show the video.
3. Ask participants to reflect on the following or similar questions. Invite participants to share their answers with one or two others sitting closest to them.
4. Ask for sharing of some insights and experiences in the large group after smaller groups have shared.

Questions for Sharing

PROGRAM PLANS A AND B

1. What do you remember of your first experience of this sacrament?
2. How has the celebration of Reconciliation changed in your lifetime?
3. How has your sense of sin changed over time? Does this reflect a change in your relationship with God?
4. What image or experience of God do you want your child to have?
5. What do you think “sin” means to your child?

TEACHING SEGMENT

(Begins approximately 21:23 into program.)

Summary

Father Tom Richstatter, O.F.M., teacher for this segment, points to a positive development in the Church during the last several years: the increased involvement of parents in sacramental preparation. Parents helping prepare their child for Reconciliation find that a profound change has taken place in our

understanding of the sacrament.

A story told about Father Bernard Häring, the German priest and world-renowned moral theologian, offers us insight into this profound change. While conducting the weekly religious instruction of his parish in the 1930's, Father Häring asked the question, "What is the most important thing about Confession?" Various parishioners offered answers such as confessing sins, contrition, examination of conscience and penance, but Father Häring wasn't satisfied with these. Finally a child offered the answer Father Häring was seeking. She said, "Father, I know what's most important. It's what Jesus does!"

The focus of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is on what God does for us. To help a child prepare for this sacrament, a parent needs to keep this focus and present the sacrament as a joyful celebration of God's mercy and love.

No one is ever forced to celebrate Reconciliation. Only those who are conscious of having committed grave sin are obliged to confess their sins to a priest (Canons 988-989). The celebration of Reconciliation is not a "necessary requirement" for the reception of First Eucharist.

Canon law expert Father John Huels comments, "In the years following Vatican II there was rather widespread experimentation with the practice of delaying first penance until after first Communion, but the Apostolic See repeatedly ordered that these experiments be halted. Nevertheless, canons 988 and 989, based on the discipline of the Council of Trent, require only those conscious of serious sin to confess before receiving Communion, and this also applies to children receiving first Communion. It does not seem that the intention of this canon is to subrogate this long-standing discipline but rather to suggest that the right of

children to the sacrament of penance can be served best when pastors and catechists offer formation for penance appropriate to the level of the child making first Communion and provide the opportunity for penance before first Communion for those children who need or desire the sacrament. Hence, children who do not approach the sacrament of penance should not be deprived of their right to make first Holy Communion.” (John M. Huels, O.S.M., in the Canon Law Society of America’s *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*, New York: Paulist Press, 1985, p.653. Used with permission.)

Child development experts help us understand how children celebrate the sacrament. A child’s conscience develops gradually; children grow and change at their own rate. God knows what to expect of us at each stage of our growth and development. A child’s moral code is more likely to be determined by how they see their parents act than by what they hear them say.

Parents need to help children reflect on their actions, teaching them to distinguish between mistakes and deliberate hurtful acts. Saying “I’m sorry” must be learned and is learned best when children hear their parents say it. Modeling God’s forgiveness by being a loving, forgiving parent helps children understand “what Jesus does” in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. When parents are the sign, the sacrament, of God’s forgiveness, then they are truly helping their child prepare to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Suggestions for Use

PROGRAM PLANS A AND B

This segment is not intended to give an exhaustive explanation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but it does highlight two significant points:

1. The focus of the sacrament is on “what Jesus does.”

2. Parents play a key role in modeling God's forgiveness for their children.

Use the following questions or ones you create to talk about Father Tom's presentation. This is also an opportunity to offer parents an updated explanation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Allow the parents' answers to the questions lead you to the additional teaching.

Questions for Sharing

PROGRAM PLANS A AND B

1. In what ways does the story of Father Häring help you better understand the change in focus in the Sacrament of Reconciliation?
2. Why does the term *Reconciliation* better express our current approach to the sacrament than do the words *Penance* and *Confession*?
3. What can parents do to model "what Jesus does" to their children?
4. How can you help to make your child's experience of Reconciliation the "joyful celebration of God's mercy and love" that Father Tom speaks of?
5. What words, actions and/or attitudes might you need to change in order to become a more authentic sign of God's forgiveness for your child?
6. A child was the one to answer Father Häring's question correctly. How has your child taught you about God's love and forgiveness?

MUSICAL REFLECTION SEGMENT

(Begins approximately 31:03 into program.)

Summary

“Johnny’s Tears,” a children’s story set to music, tells of Johnny, a young boy who is sometimes “bad and mean.” Johnny’s sorrow about the bad things he has done eventually brings him to tears. In a dream, the tears form a puddle that grows into a stream. The stream takes Johnny out to sea where he finally voices his sorrow. “I’m so sorry,” he repeats.

As he struggles to keep himself afloat, he sees a boat and swims toward it. The occupant of the boat is a “fishing man” who helps Johnny aboard. The gentle fishing man waits patiently for Johnny to speak. Johnny shows his broken heart to the man and says, “I’m so sorry.” The fishing man invites Johnny to tell him all of his sins. Johnny recognizes this as the way to heal the hurt he has caused and confesses his sins to the man.

The fishing man assures Johnny of forgiveness for his sins and encourages him to try to do better. The man patches the broken heart, kisses it and gives it back to Johnny. Peace and calm now replace Johnny’s fears.

Johnny awakes from his dream to a sunny day. His friend invites him to play, and Johnny, now light-hearted, joins him.

Suggestion for Use: Prayer Service

PROGRAM PLAN A

Now is the time to pull your meeting to a close with a prayer experience that sends the parents home to their children enlightened about the Sacrament of Reconciliation and affirmed in the important role they play in their children’s preparation to celebrate this sacrament.

Give parents a copy of the Questions for Sharing on page 27. Encourage them to discuss these questions at

home with their children once the children have also seen this video story.

This is a good time to introduce or practice music that will be used at the First Reconciliation celebration. Using one of the same Scripture readings is also appropriate. See *The Rite of Penance* for Scripture suggestions and music guidelines.

Preparations: Have a small table in the front or center of the room. Place an open Bible, a lit candle and a large, clear bowl on the table. In the bowl, put enough large paper tears with the word *Peace* printed on them for everyone.

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

Our lives are about relationships—with others, ourselves and God. Sometimes relationships are strained. Sometimes we falter in carrying out our commitments and responsibilities to others. Our children learn of God's love and forgiveness through our relationships with them. We realize that the best effort we can make still falls short of the depth and abundance of God's love and mercy. We gather as parents, realizing anew the importance of this task and asking God, our heavenly parent, for assistance.

2. Opening Song
3. Opening Prayer
4. Scripture Reading
5. Short Homily or Reflection on Scripture
6. Watch "Johnny's Tears."
7. Invite everyone to come forward to take a paper tear out of the bowl. Tell them that the tear is to serve as a reminder to go to God for forgiveness and help in being models of forgiveness.
8. Exchange a sign of peace.
9. Closing Song

Suggestion for Use: Prayer Service

PROGRAM PLAN B

Now is the time to bring the children back from their Festival Fabric activity with their catechists. Have the children join their parents for a closing prayer.

This is a good time to introduce or practice music that will be used at the First Reconciliation celebration. Using one of the same Scripture readings is also appropriate. See *The Rite of Penance* for Scripture suggestions and music guidelines.

Preparations: Have a small table in the front or center of the room. Place an open Bible, a lit candle and a large, clear bowl on the table. In the bowl, put enough large paper tears with the word *Peace* printed on them for everyone.

1. Opening Song
2. Opening Prayer
3. Scripture Reading
4. Short Homily or Reflection on Scripture (Tie in the theme of how our choices affect others. Invite the children to share the names of some of the individuals and groups listed on their fabric squares.)
5. Watch “Johnny’s Tears.”
6. Invite everyone to come forward to take a paper tear out of the bowl in the front of the room. Tell those gathered that the tear is to serve as a reminder to them to go to God for forgiveness.
7. Exchange a sign of peace.
8. Closing Song

Questions for Sharing

PROGRAM PLANS A AND B

The following list of questions can be sent home with parents to facilitate family discussion about “Johnny’s Tears” and the Sacrament of Reconciliation:

1. Johnny felt bad about himself because he’d chosen to do bad things. How do you feel about yourself after you’ve done something you know is wrong?
2. Johnny’s tears led him to a gentle fishing man. Who did that man remind you of? Do your tears ever lead you to Jesus/God?
3. Johnny kept saying, “I’m so sorry.” Why is it so important to say, “I’m sorry?”
4. Johnny was afraid to tell his sins to the fishing man, but he knew that admitting the wrong he had done was an important part of being forgiven. How do you feel about admitting/confessing your sins? How do you feel after you’ve been forgiven?
5. What does Johnny need to do now?
6. What do you think Johnny will do the next time he is tempted to sin? What things can you do to help you make good choices?

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

STORY SEGMENT

This story may be used:

- in any setting where children are learning about responsibility, making choices, sin, forgiveness, honesty and how our actions affect others;
- throughout the early years of grade school as these themes come up in the religious education curriculum and in the events of life;
- when family relationships and traditions are discussed;
- when the topic of Church as a community or family is covered; and
- as part of a parish Lenten program.

Family Value Activity

This segment may be used in a family activity that focuses on the values that identify each family and guide its members. Great Mother and her family were known for being kind and loving, honest and noble. Parents offer their children values and principles on which to build their lives and by which to guide their choices. As Christians we are called to be counter-cultural, to live according to Christian values rather than society's values. Children will more likely "catch" these Christian values if they are intentionally lived and discussed within the family.

A family's rules point to that family's values. Children may still balk at rules set by parents but will understand them better when they have had an opportunity to explore the family value behind the rule or restriction. The following activity could be used within First Reconciliation preparation or as a gathering on "Family Values."

1. Allow each family an opportunity to introduce itself to the others by sharing one thing that makes the family special or unique.
2. Talk about the fact that each family is unique and special. A very important part of what makes a family special is its values. Elicit definitions of “values” from the group.
3. Explain that the family of Great Mother in the video story has strong values that show in their actions. Have viewers look for evidence of their values as they watch the video. Show the video.
4. Ask “What were some of the values of Great Mother’s family? How can you tell what someone’s values are?”
5. Talk about the fact that rules often point to our values. We make rules and live by rules to protect the things that are important to us—things that we value.
6. Invite each family to write down their family rules. Have them discuss within their family groups the values behind each rule.
7. Give each family a large sheet of paper, markers and crayons. Invite them to print “Our Family Values” in the middle of the sheet in large letters. Around the words, have them print the names of and/or create symbols for the values they have identified. As time permits, they may decorate their sheet.

TEACHING SEGMENT

Another use for this segment is in a presentation to adults or even older children and teens on God’s forgiveness as celebrated in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The story about Father Häring, at the beginning of this segment, might be used as a short but

effective way to illustrate the essence of this sacrament.

MUSICAL REFLECTION SEGMENT

This simple children's story is appropriate for children to view in a classroom setting or for children and adults to view together. Some possible uses include:

- communal celebrations of the Sacrament of Reconciliation at which a significant number of children are present (First Reconciliation, school or religious education program services)
- children's classes dealing with the topics of choices, sin, repentance, forgiveness and God's mercy.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

1) Scripture references:

Scripture references to support the theme of this program 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 is 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); Sacramental Seal of Confession (2490) and Duties of Parents (2221-2228).

3) Available from St. Anthony Messenger Press:

PLEASE SEE OUR CATALOG AT
<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

Copyright ©1999 St. Anthony Messenger Press
All rights reserved.

For more information: (800) 488-0488

A FRANCISCAN COMMUNICATIONS RESOURCE FROM



ST. ANTHONY MESSENGER PRESS

28 W. Liberty St.
Cincinnati, OH 45202-6498

Visit our web site: www.AmericanCatholic.org