

Reconciliation Lesson Plan Objectives

After this lesson/these lessons, students will be able to understand and express:

SACRAMENT

- What a sacrament is and does
- What the Sacrament of Penance is and its alternate names
- How the Sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, and Holy Communion tie together.

SIN

- What sin is and how we take part in it
- The different types of sin
- How the Sacrament of Penance addresses sin

RECONCILIATION

- Why the Sacrament of Penance is important in the life of the Church
- How to prepare for the Sacrament of Penance
- A general understanding of the Rite
- What happens to us after receiving the Sacrament of Penance

If time permits, you can do this all in one lesson or split it up over the course of 3 lessons.

SUGGESTIONS:

-Talk with your pastor (and sacristan) to arrange a tour of the reconciliation room in your church to get students.

-If possible, think about doing “**Reconciliation Charades**”.

This activity can be initially facilitated by catechists/adults, but should ultimately allow for the students to engage in peer groups.

- Use your classroom or the actual church if possible. Have the students practice what they do when they go to Reconciliation/Church.
- Focus on movements/gestures rather than words and responses. The goal is to get the students comfortable.
- Set up your classroom/space like a reconciliation room/Confessional. Have the students enter the room as if they were at church. Make sure they know the Sign of the Cross, make a gesture of reverence, and sit in chairs.

- Practice the greetings, responses, and prayers with the students. As a progression, have the students take the roles of people they see at Church/Confession: greeters, the priest, music ministers, etc.

- Look at the Rite of Penance and/or find a resource which contains alternate Acts of Contrition (nos. 85-92)

Online resource: <http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/p-6-rite-of-penance.html>

-Have a priest of your parish/school come to your class and talk about the Sacrament of Penance from his perspective.

NOTE: It would be highly encouraged if this priest was pastoral in nature and someone who can help an elementary school student see the importance in participating in the sacrament and doing so on a regular basis.

As a teacher or catechist, talk with the priest ahead of time and ask them to talk about:

- *In general terms, what he experiences in listening to people confess their sins.*
- *What he sees himself as through the Sacrament*
- *How it feels for him to offer absolution and forgiving sins in Jesus' name.*
- *Tips/suggestions for students as they prepare*

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

CATECHESIS

ELEMENTARY LEVEL [Grades K – 3]

OPENING PRAYER [See Opening Prayer Handout]

NOTE: Song listed is a suggestion. You can substitute the song for one that your students know.

PART I - SACRAMENT

VOCABULARY

SACRAMENT: A special sign given to us by Jesus.

SACRAMENT OF PENANCE: When we receive and celebrate God's forgiveness of our sins. Also called the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Confession or Forgiveness.

Have children answer the following question.

What are the signs that are a part of the following celebrations:

Valentine's Day Party: ex.: Candy/chocolates, valentine's, heart decorations, pink & red things, etc.

Mardi Gras Parade: ex.: King Cake, beads, doubloons, toys, purple, green, & gold things, etc.

Birthday Party: ex.: balloons, presents, cake/candles, games

(You can include other celebrations like: New Year's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Halloween, Easter, 100th Day of School, Christmas Day, etc. List their responses on the screen or board.)

The Church celebrates with signs, too. They differ from the other celebrations, though. There are seven special celebrations that the Church calls **SACRAMENTS**. A sacrament is a special sign given to us by Jesus. God makes us holy through these sacraments. Jesus gave us these sacraments so that we can share in God's own life.

We gather as a Church community to celebrate these sacraments. We become stronger in faith. We grow as followers of Jesus.

ASK: What are the 7 Sacraments of the Church? [See 7 Sacraments Handout]

Write them down on the board/screen.

Baptism: We become members of the Church after we are washed with holy water.

Confirmation: We receive the full power of the Holy Spirit through the bishop laying hands on us and making the Sign of the Cross on our foreheads with a holy oil.

Eucharist: We receive Jesus into our bodies when we eat the Body and drink the Blood of Jesus. Also called "Holy Communion."

Holy Orders: A man say "Yes" to taking care of the Church we love as a priest or deacon and the bishop lays their hands on their head anoints the priest or deacon's hands with holy oil.

Marriage: We say "Yes" to taking care of someone we love as a husband or wife by exchanging promises to love, honor, and cherish the other and exchanging rings.

Penance: God forgives us of the sins we tell to the priest and gives us God's peace.

Anointing of the Sick: When someone is sick or may be dying soon, the priest prays that they may be healed in body, mind, and spirit and puts holy oil on their hands.

Today, we're going to focus on one of the Seven Sacraments in particular: **THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE**. It is *the sacrament in which we receive and celebrate God's forgiveness of our sins.*

The Sacrament is also known as the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Confession, and Forgiveness.

Reconciliation means to come back together. Remember the Good Shepherd in our prayer? What did he do? He rejoiced because he had found his lost sheep. When we take part in the sacrament, we come back together with God, who loves us very much. He is as excited to be back with us as the Good Shepherd was with his sheep.

PART 2 – SIN AND FORGIVENESS

VOCABULARY

CONSCIENCE: God's gift to help us know if something we do is good or not good.

FREE WILL: The ability to choose what we want to do.

MERCY: God's immense love and forgiveness of us and our sins.

MORTAL SIN: Serious sins we commit. They *cut off our friendship with God and prevent us from sharing in God's life and God's grace.*

SIN: *A thought, word, or act that we freely choose to do even though we know it is wrong.*

SIN OF COMMISSION: Our choice to do something we should not.

SIN OF OMISSION: Our choice to not do something we should.

TEN COMMANDMENTS: Special laws given to us by God that are guides for what to do and what not to do in order to be in a loving relationship with God.

VENIAL SIN: Sins that are less serious than mortal sins. They *hurt our relationship with God, but don't completely break it off* like mortal sins do.

In creating man and woman, God gave us the gift of **free will**, or *the ability to choose what we want to do.*

If you could do anything in the world you wanted to, what would it be? (Get responses.)

Why can't we do anything we wanted to?

(Possible responses: There are rules and laws that prevent us from doing things that are harmful. Our parents tell us what to do and what not to do. Our conscience tells us what's good and what's bad.)

Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, chose not to listen to God and because they didn't listen, they lost the chance to share in God's life. This is called **original sin**. We are born with original sin and have it washed away when we are baptized.

To help God's people, God gave us special laws called the Ten Commandments. These can be found in the Old Testament and the Jewish people used these Ten Commandments as guides for what to do and what not to do.

They are:

1. *I am the LORD your God: you shall not have strange Gods before me.*
2. *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.*

3. Remember to keep holy the LORD'S Day.
4. Honor your mother and father.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery. (When you're married, don't love anyone else like you do your spouse.)
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. (Don't lie.)
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

Jesus learned and lived these laws growing up following the Jewish faith. During his ministry on earth, he combined them into two commandments:

1. Love the Lord God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength.
2. Love your neighbor as yourself.

These laws of God and Jesus help to train our **conscience**, which is God's gift to help us know if something we do is good or not good.

If we keep the commandments, then we are doing and what God asks us to do. If we don't, those are moments or occasions of sin.

What is **SIN**? A thought, word, or act that we freely choose to do even though we know it is wrong.

Sins can happen both by our choice to do something we should not (**sin of commission**) and by not doing something we should (**sin of omission**).

When these sins are serious, they are **mortal sins**. They cut off our friendship with God and prevent us from sharing in God's life and God's grace.

Sins that are less serious are **venial sins**. They hurt our relationship with God, but don't completely break it off like mortal sins do.

When we sin, we don't only hurt our relationship with God, but with our friends, our loved ones, and our Church family, too.

It's important to remember that, even though we may sin, God never stops loving us and God will always forgive us if we're truly sorry for what we've done. In both cases, the Sacrament of Penance restores our relationship with God. Through God's **mercy**, or his immense love and forgiveness of us and our sins, we will always be forgiven if we are truly sorry.

PART 3 – THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

VOCABULARY

ABSOLUTION: The action of the priest praying over us and forgiving us our sins in Jesus' name.

CONTRITION: When we feel sorry for having done what we did and promise not to sin again.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE: Time in silence and prayer taken before celebrating the Sacrament of Penance to think about the ways we have not shown God and others our love and sinned.

PENANCE: A prayer or kind act we are to do to make up for our sins we're sorry for.

RECONCILIATION ROOM: A special room in a church made for people to come and take part in the Sacrament of Penance. Also called a confessional.

What happens with the Sacrament of Penance?

The Sacrament of Penance takes place in one of two ways: one-on-one with the priest or as part of group with the chance to have each person tell their sins to the priest on their own.

SACRAMENT OF PENANCE FOR AN INDIVIDUAL

Takes place with a priest, who acts in the name of Jesus. Most times, it is going to take place in a special room in church made just for people to come for this Sacrament. It is sometimes known as a **reconciliation room** or a **confessional**. This room has a door you can close and is built in a way where only the priest hears your sins, not anyone else outside. Most rooms have a chair for you to sit in and talk with the priest face-to-face or, if you would prefer not to be seen, you can kneel in front of a screen.

Before we enter the room, though, we should take some time in silence and prayer to think about the ways we have not shown God and others our love and sinned. This is called an **examination of conscience**.

Let's take a look at one:

[see EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE handout]

We think about the times we have sinned. We feel sorry for having done what we did and promise not to sin again. This is called having **contrition**. When we are ready, we are welcomed by the priest and both make the Sign of the Cross.

The priest will then read a story from the Bible that tells us about God's forgiveness.

We then confess our sins. We can be open and honest with the priest because he represents Jesus, who we want to be in a loving relationship with. He cannot tell anyone the sins that we confess to him.

The priest then has a discussion with us about what we can do to make better choices and avoid these sins in the future. He then gives us a **penance**, or a **prayer or kind act we are to do to make up for our sins** after we celebrate the sacrament.

We then say an Act of Contrition. Let's look at our step-by-step sheet for a popular example:

[ACT OF CONTRITION handout]

While this prayer is most commonly used, it is acceptable to make an Act of Contrition using your own words to describe that you are sorry for the sins you have committed and that you promise, as best as you can, to avoid sinning in the future.

If you were to use your own words for an Act of Contrition, what would you say?

We then receive **absolution**, or **forgiveness from our sins**. The priest stretches out his right hand or hands and says the following words to us:

"God the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God grant you pardon and peace and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Together with the priest, we praise and thank God for his love and forgiveness. The priest then tells us to "Go in peace."

You just heard about the steps of the Sacrament of Penance. How does that make you feel?

SACRAMENT OF PENANCE WITHIN A GROUP

Sometimes, our parish may hold a Penance service where we pray for God's forgiveness together, then to go by ourselves to confess our sins to the priest one at a time, and finally celebrate God's mercy as members of God's family.

When this takes place:

- We begin with a song and are welcomed by the priest.
- We listen to readings from the Bible about God's love and forgiveness.
- The priest then talks to us about the readings.
- We listen to questions that are part of an examination of conscience and help us to think about the times that we have sinned that we are asking for forgiveness for from God.
- We say a prayer together to tell God that we are sorry for having sinned. Then we pray the Our Father together.
- One by one, we go to the priest and confess our sins. He gives each of us a penance. We receive absolution from the priest for our sins.
- When everyone has finished, we praise and thank God for his mercy.
- The priest blesses us and sends us out to "Go in peace."

You just heard about the steps of the Sacrament of Penance with a group. How does that make you feel?

What happens after the Sacrament of Penance?

Remember, after we confess our sins, the priest gives us some sort of penance to do. It can be a prayer, prayers or some sort of kind act. Once we have been absolved, it is a good idea to complete our penance right away. If we are given prayers to pray, it is best to pray them right in church. Looking at Jesus on the crucifix while you pray can help remind you how much God loves you. Looking at images of Mary or the saints while you pray can remind you that there are people in heaven who can help pray for us to not sin again in the future. If we have some act to do, it is best to do it as soon as you can.

When the priest **absolves** us, he **in a way washes away our sins**. When we complete our penance, our souls are clean and we are back to our loving relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters in our Church family. We know how much God loves us and how important it is to be forgiven by God and it reminds us how we should act the same way to others.

Jesus once taught his disciples: "Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles." [Mt 5:41] **Is there something you can do to right the wrongs of**

the sins you confessed? For example, if you were mean to someone or spread gossip about them, can you tell them the truth and ask them to forgive you? Or, if you broke something and lied about not doing it, can you work to get the money to replace or repair what you broke? While we are forgiven by God when we confess our sins, “going the extra mile” through our actions helps us to be fully forgiven and re-accepted by our family in faith.

Why is it important to ask other people for forgiveness? Why is it important to forgive others?

Any questions?

CLOSING PRAYER [See *Closing Prayer* Handout]

OPENING PRAYER

SONG: *Suggested - Hosea*

READING: *adapted from Luke 15:1-7*

Leader: One day, tax collectors and sinners were coming to listen to Jesus teach. The leaders of the Temple weren't happy with this, and said,

Reader 1: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Leader: So Jesus told them this story.

Jesus: "Every sheep is important to a shepherd. If you were a shepherd with one hundred sheep and you lost one, wouldn't you leave the other ninety-nine behind to find the missing one? When you found it, what would you do? You would be so very happy, pick it up, carry it back to the herd, and tell all your friends,

Reader 2: 'Let's celebrate! I found my missing sheep!'

Jesus: I tell you, God is even more excited about one person who says 'I'm sorry' and asks for forgiveness than over ninety-nine people who don't need to say 'I'm sorry' for anything."



*Take a minute or two and think about
your answer to this question:*

**How does this story help me
to know more about God's love?**

PRAYER

Leader: Jesus, you are our Good Shepherd.

All: **And we are the sheep of your flock.**

Leader: Jesus, you watch over us with love.

All: **Help us to hear your voice when you call.**

Leader: Jesus, you rejoice when we come back to you after we do not follow you or the Father.

All: **Forgive us and guide us back to you. Amen.**

THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH

Connect the names of the seven sacraments to what happens in the sacrament and then to an item or action used in the sacrament.

BAPTISM

A man say "Yes" to taking care of the Church we love as a priest or deacon...



CONFIRMATION

We say "Yes" to taking care of someone we love as a husband or wife by...



EUCCHARIST

God forgives us of the sins we...



PENANCE

We become members of the Church after we are...



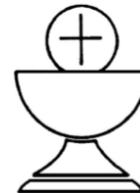
ANOINTING OF THE SICK

We receive Jesus into our bodies when we eat and drink...



MARRIAGE

When someone is sick or may be dying soon, the priest...



HOLY ORDERS

We receive the full power of the Holy Spirit through the bishop...



EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

As you prepare for the Sacrament of Penance, think about the questions below:

Responsibilities to God:

Have I prayed every day?

Have I prayed my morning prayers and night prayers?

Have I prayed with my parents and family?

Have I been moody and rebellious about praying and going to church on Sunday?

Have I asked the Holy Spirit to help me whenever I have been tempted to sin?

Have I asked the Holy Spirit to help me do what is right?

Responsibilities to others:

Have I been obedient and respectful to my parents?

Have I lied or been deceitful to them or to others?

Have I been arrogant, stubborn or rebellious?

Have I talked back to parents, teachers or other adults?

Have I pouted and been moody?

Have I been selfish toward my parents, brothers, and sisters, teachers, or my friends and schoolmates?

Have I gotten angry at them? Have I hit anyone?

Have I held grudges or not forgiven others?

Have I treated other children with respect or have I made fun of them and called them names?

Have I used bad language?

Have I stolen anything? Have I returned it?

Have I performed my responsibilities, such as homework and household chores?

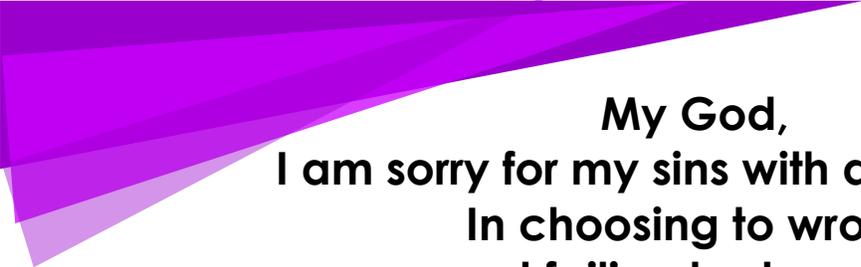
Have I been helpful and affectionate toward my family?

Have I been kind and generous with my friends?

If the answer to a question is something that wasn't the right thing to do, why is that? These could be sins that you want to talk to the priest about and ask God to forgive you for.

STEP-BY-STEP WITH THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

- 1 Take some time in silence and prayer to think about the ways we have not shown God and others our love and sinned. This is called an **examination of conscience**. [*If you need help, see the EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE sheet in this lesson.*]
- 2 As you think about the times we have sinned, do you feel sorry for them? This is called having **contrition**.
- 3 When you are ready, you are welcomed by the priest and both make the Sign of the Cross.
- 4 The priest will then read a story from the Bible that tells you about God's forgiveness.
- 5 You then **confess** your sins. You can be open and honest with the priest because he represents Jesus, who wants to be in a loving relationship with you. He cannot tell anyone the sins that you confess to him.
- 6 The priest then has a discussion with you about what you can do to make better choices and avoid these sins in the future. He then gives you a **penance**, or a prayer or kind act we are to do to make up for your sins after celebrating the sacrament.
- 7 To show that you are sorry for the sins you have confessed, the priest asks you to make an **Act of Contrition**. You can say something that comes from your heart or recite a prayer from the *Rite of Penance*. Here is an act that many people use:



**My God,
I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.
In choosing to wrong
and failing to do good,
I have sinned against you
whom I should love above all things.
I firmly intend, with your help,
to do penance,
to sin no more,
and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.
Our Savior Jesus Christ
suffered and died for us.
In his name, my God, have mercy.**

8

You receive **absolution**, or forgiveness from your sins. The priest stretches out his right hand or hands and says the following words to you:

"God the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God grant you pardon and peace and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

9

Together with the priest, you praise and thank God for his love and forgiveness. The priest then tells you to "Go in peace."

10

Do the penance that the priest offers you to complete the sacrament. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you not to sin again.

CLOSING PRAYER

READING: *adapted from Matthew 18: 21-22*

Leader: One day, Peter asked Jesus:

Reader 1: “Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?”

Leader: Jesus answered:

Jesus: “Not seven times, Peter, but seventy-seven times.”



**When we receive God's
forgiveness in the Sacrament of
Penance, we must remember to
forgive others and be peacemakers.**

*Let us be peacemakers and offer a
Sign of Peace to each other.*

PRAYER

Leader: Let us pray the Our Father together, remembering that Jesus taught us to ask God to forgive us, to help us forgive others, and to avoid sin.

**All: Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**

Amen.

SONG: *Suggested – Amazing Grace*