

Preparing to Celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the First Time

A Short Guide for Teachers



Grow in Love, the new Religious Education Programme for schools, suggests that the word 'Reconciliation' is used instead of 'Confession' or 'Penance.' The use of the word 'Reconciliation' puts the focus more on reuniting and reconciling with others and with God than on penitence and sin. This is a more helpful and fuller understanding of the sacrament particularly when working with younger children. (Grow in Love; Second Class, Teacher Book p160)

The child's celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time usually happens during the season of Lent. The children are now being prepared using the Grow in Love programme and in it the child is offered a chance to explore their understanding of God's love and forgiveness. This is done during the themed lessons on Reconciliation in both first and second classes. **(Theme 5)** The context in which the child prepares to celebrate this sacrament for the first time is always rooted in a sure knowledge that they are always loved by God and that God always forgives us.

In **first class** children are helped to understand that sometimes they lose their way, they don't show love and that when they do this it has an impact on themselves and on others. They learn the importance of saying sorry and begin to become aware of the steps involved in the process of reconciliation. They memorise and pray **The Act of Sorrow**. They listen to the story of Shauna, a little girl who made a bad choice when she lied to her mother, her teacher and her friends in school and how she came to say sorry. The word '**sin**' is introduced to the children to describe doing something that we know is wrong. The experience of losing their way, of being lost is linked with the scripture story of the Lost Sheep. The parable of the Lost Sheep gives us the wonderful image of Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, who goes looking for the lost sheep. The children are helped to see God as the one who will always look for us, will always be waiting for us and will always want us to come back. Finally, in first class the children begin to explore the Sacrament of Reconciliation as the time when they say sorry to God and are forgiven.

In **second class** the children continue to deepen their understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Together with the Act of Sorrow they learn to pray the Confiteor. They consider what happens when we behave in ways that are not loving towards others and towards God. They continue to explore what 'sin' is and come to realise that even when we sin God still loves us. God will always forgive us and we should forgive others when they say sorry to us. They hear the story of Zacchaeus which helps them to see how we are always loved and forgiven by God. The children are taught that there are five steps in celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

When celebrating the sacrament for the first time the children follow these steps. The form of Reconciliation celebrated with the children is known as the **Second Form of the Rite**, officially entitled: **Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution**. There is a Liturgy Preparation Planning Sheet for the Celebration for Reconciliation for the First time that can be downloaded from www.kandle.ie

NOTE: The parents, siblings and other adults present at this celebration might be encouraged to also come forward and celebrate the sacrament. This is done as a visible sign to the children that we are all in the need of God's love and forgiveness. It might be useful to have some of the very popular

Diocesan Pocket Guide to Confession available for people to use. *These are available from FDS should you need extra supplies.*

Based on the five steps that the children have learned in school it is suggested that the Celebration of First Reconciliation takes the following format:

1: I REALISE I HAVE DONE WRONG AND FEEL SORRY.

I prepare to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

This first step of the Reconciliation Celebration will include praying the Confiteor, listening to a scripture reading, singing a psalm and listening to a Gospel story, usually the story of Zacchaeus. This will be followed by a short Examination of Conscience when the children and adults present reflect on areas of their lives where they need forgiveness and want to say sorry to God. There is a sample Examination of Conscience on the Liturgy Preparation Planning Sheet.

2: I SAY SORRY TO GOD

Parents are then invited to present their child to the priest and then step back to allow their child to celebrate the sacrament

The child begins by making the Sign of the Cross

They tell the priest why they are there by saying '*Bless me Father, for I have sinned.....*

They tell the priest what they are sorry for. This is what we call '*confession.*' This is not a list of 'sins' but an opportunity to acknowledge one or two times when the child has not shown love or not lived as Jesus would like them to

3: I ACCEPT MY PENANCE AND PRAY THE ACT OF SORROW

The priest gives the child something to do show that they are sorry, '*penance,*' and asks them to say the **Act of Sorrow.**

4: I AM FORGIVEN

The priest says the prayer of **Absolution.** In this prayer the child is assured of God's love and forgiveness. The priest may say some words of encouragement and support to the child and they then return to their parent/s.

5: I TRY AGAIN

The child, having celebrated God's love and forgiveness, knows that they must now try to make better choices.