
Diocesan Youth Retreat Team

RECONCILIATION RETREAT FORMAT

November 2018

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Retreat with Children and Parents (Modified Version of Model 3)

Overview

This retreat model is a modified version of Model 3 in the "*Celebrate and Remember: Reconciliation Program Director Manual*", found on pages 124-128. The main focus is on God's forgiveness, so that children and parents can understand God as a loving Father. It involves interactive object lessons and activities, real-life stories of remembrance, and prayer with action. This is intended as a 105-minute retreat, but the time can be adjusted.

Retreat at a Glance

A. Arrival and Gathering	(10 minutes)
B. Welcome and Opening Prayer	(10 minutes)
C. Icebreaker/Game	(15 minutes)
D. Memories of Childhood	(10 minutes)
E. Prodigal Son Story	(15 minutes)
F. Break	(10 minutes)
G. Flash Paper/Sin Demonstration	(5 minutes)
H. Examination of Conscience	(15 minutes)
I. Procession with Good Deeds	(10 minutes)
J. Closing Prayer and Sending Forth	(5 minutes)

Materials and Preparation

Materials Needed

- refreshments for break
- a Bible, a candle, and other items to create a prayer space
- name tags and markers
- Reconciliation Resources Booklet*
- any materials needed for chosen icebreaker/game
- copies of handout, "Memories of Childhood"
- materials for the "Prodigal Son Story"
 - PowerPoint of images, planning pages, projector, screen
- materials for Examination of Conscience
 - copies of "Preparing for Reconciliation"
 - if using skit: props for "Bad Confession, Good Confession" Skit
 - if using video: copy of video, device to play video, projector, screen, sound
- extra materials for "Procession with Good Deeds"
 - strips of paper, pens/pencils/markers, and containers for good deeds
- materials for "Flash Paper Demonstration" or "Sin Demonstration"
 - if using Flash Paper Demonstration: flash paper, lighter, candle
 - If using Sin Demonstration: "God" and "Family of God" signs (optional)
- lyrics to and a recording of the hymn for the Prayer of Saint Francis, and equipment for playing it (unless you will have musicians present)

Preparation Tasks

- At the first meeting, provide each child with a container (envelope, paper bag, jar, etc.) and a copy of the "Good Deeds Examples" on page 1 of the *Reconciliation Resources Booklet*. The children will take the containers home, are welcome to decorate them, and will fill their containers with good deeds they have performed throughout their journey of preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Blank strips are provided where the children can write their own good deeds. When you send invitations or reminders about the retreat, ask the parents to send their children with their containers. Have extra materials on hand at the retreat, in case someone forgets, so that all children can participate in the "Procession with Good Deeds".
- Ask for catechists who will serve as ministers of hospitality to direct the children and parents throughout the retreat.
- In addition to setting up the meeting room, arrange to use the church sanctuary for the second half of the retreat. If the retreat is being held offsite, set up another appropriate space that is conducive to prayer.
- Plan ahead to create a welcoming environment for the children and parents. Have name tags and markers available as they arrive.
- Download images and planning pages for Prodigal Son Story from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/rg-prodigal-son/>
- Prepare equipment if using video for the examination of conscience

Retreat Outline

A. Arrival and Gathering (10 minutes)

1. Have the children and parents make name tags as they arrive.

B. Welcome and Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

1. Welcome the families as they arrive and distribute copies of "Memories of Childhood" on page 5 of the *Reconciliation Resources Booklet* and "Preparing for Reconciliation". Explain that they will be advised when to use these handouts.
2. Introduce the pastor, the deacon, the catechists, and the other adults who may be present.
3. Explain to them that the purpose of the retreat is to allow children and their parents to spend quality time together and for the children to take a little time to think and pray about their First Reconciliation. Remind the families that with the busy pace of life today, it is crucial to take some time to step back and focus on those things that are the center of our lives.
4. If possible, have the pastor or associate pastor lead everyone into prayer.
5. Explain the Respect Rule
 - respect for self, respect for others, respect for the space, respect for God
6. Introduce an attention grabber that will be used during the retreat.

C. Icebreaker/Game (15 minutes)

1. Encourage the families to warm up and mingle with one another by playing an icebreaker or a game. Refer to the "Icebreakers and Games" section, found on pages 2-5 of the *Reconciliation Resources Booklet*.

D. Memories of Childhood (10 minutes)

Have everyone split up into their families and invite the parents to share about a poor choice they made as a young child. Ask the parents to describe how they felt sorry for the harm they may have caused and how a parent, other adult, or someone else who was involved forgave them and made them feel relieved. Parents can refer to the "Memories of Childhood" handout that was provided when they arrived.

E. Prodigal Son Story (15 minutes)

1. Read Luke 15:11-32 and show the accompanying images. Images and a story planner can be downloaded at <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/rg-prodigal-son/> (Click icon to download your chosen format. The Story Planner has the text to read for each image, as well as a section for you to add your own notes).
2. When you have finished, ask for volunteers to help recount the events of the story.
3. Then engage the children and parents in dialogue, using these or similar questions and observations:
 - Do you think the two sons were rich or poor?
They were rich because their father gave them everything they needed.
 - Why do you think the younger son left home?
He didn't appreciate his father's generosity. He wanted to be on his own. He didn't like being the younger brother.
 - Did the father stop loving the son who went away? How do you know?
No. He looked for him every day. When the son came home, his father forgave him.
 - Why did the son return home?
He felt guilty and ashamed because he wasted his father's gifts. He was sorry for what he did.
 - Did the older son understand why his brother was forgiven?
No. He was envious because he had not been given a party. He too did not appreciate his father's generosity.
 - When Jesus told the story, whom do you think he was talking about?
He was talking about God and us. The father is God, and the sons are us.
 - How was the father in the story like God? How were the sons like us?
God always forgives and waits for us to feel sorry for our sins and return to his love. But we do not always appreciate God's love for us.

F. Break (10 minutes)

1. Invite the parents and children to relocate to the room where you have the refreshments set up. If the parish is not providing refreshments, send a reminder ahead of time to parents and children to bring their own snacks if they wish.
2. When everyone is gathered, direct the participants to the restrooms and the refreshments (if they are provided).
3. If you wish, you may lead the group into a fun grace. Refer to the "Fun Graces" section on pages 6-7 of the *Reconciliation Resources Booklet*.

G. Flash Paper/Sin Demonstration (5 minutes)

1. Ask the children to bring their container of good deeds with them. They will be used for an activity later on.
2. Lead everyone into the sanctuary or another appropriate space that is conducive to prayer.
3. Choose one of the following demonstrations to show to the children:

➤ Flash Paper Demonstration

Objective: To demonstrate how you cannot carry Christ's light to the world if your life is full of sin. This is why we need to confess our sins so that we can be a light to the world.

Materials:

- flash paper (can be purchased at magic shops)
- a candle
- a lighter

Instructions:

1. Ask for one volunteer. Give them a candle and say "When you were born and you were baptized, you received the light of Christ. The fire represents that light – that Christ is present in you." Light the candle.
2. Light-heartedly say, "Now you've got the light of Christ. Are you happy?" (*They should respond yes.*)
3. Next say, "Now you haven't been as good as you could be. You've committed some sins". Get the audience to name a few sins – for each sin, crumple up a piece of flash paper and give it to the volunteer to hold. Once their hands are full of sin and they can't hold the candle anymore, take the candle away.
4. Ask the volunteer if they miss their light. (*They'll say yes*). Ask them if they want their candle back (*again, yes*).
5. Say, "You want the candle but you can't hold it with all the garbage. So what do you have to do?" (*go to Reconciliation*)
6. Explain to the children that God will take each sin and *burn the flash paper* then it's gone! There's nothing left! He forgives you COMPLETELY from your sins. In fact, He doesn't even keep a record of them.
7. Once all the flash paper is burned up, ask "Now can you hold the candle?" (*Yes*) "Do you want the candle back?" (*Yes*)
8. Before giving the candle back, talk about penance. Penance is a prayer or good action to show that we are sorry for our sins and that we want to be the Light of Christ to the world again. Ask everyone to help pray a "Hail Mary", then give the candle back to the volunteer.
9. Also discuss how we try not to sin anymore so that we can keep our light.

➤ Sin Demonstration

Objective: To understand sin and penance

Materials (optional):

- 'God' Sign
- 'Family of God' Sign

Discussion Questions

- What is sin?
 - *Sin is something we say, do, or think that does not follow God's will.*
 - *When we sin we offend God and hurt our relationship with him.*
 - *Sin separates us from God (important!).*
- How do you know when you've sinned?
 - *Your conscience is a gift from God that helps you to know when you've sinned.*
 - *Adults such as parents, teachers, and priests also help us to recognize when we have sinned or done a bad thing.*
 - *The Bible teaches us about what is sinful and what is good.*
- How does sin hurt us?
 - *Sin hurts us because it makes us feel alone and as if God is far from us.*
 - *Sometimes we think that 'little' sins are minor and don't really count, but they do.*

Demonstration

1. Ask for two volunteers. Choose one to represent 'God'. Tell him/her that he/she must stand in one place and not move from his/her spot. The other volunteer will represent each of us, the 'Family of God'. Optional: Have volunteers hold up signs that say 'God' and 'Family of God'.
2. Say, "Look how God and His family are close to each other. They can talk, shake hands and high five" (*Instruct the volunteers to do these actions as you mention them*).
3. Ask, "What happens when we sin?" Then ask the audience for some minor sins (*Responses may vary. Guide the children in naming sins that they may commit such as lying, fighting, etc.*). As audience members give examples, have them come and stand between God and His family. Make sure it is God's family that moves (NOT God) to make way for the sins!
4. Ask, "Can name of person representing the Family of God still talk to God? (*yes*) Are they as close as they used to be? (*no*).
5. Ask the audience for another couple of sins and have them come up.
6. Say, "When we sin, we choose to move away from God. The more we sin, the more we move away from Him. God never moves away from us."

7. Say, "We have a special gift from God that allows us to get close to him again. It's called Reconciliation. When we receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we ask God to forgive us for our sins."
8. Tell the Family of God to ask God for forgiveness. For each sin, ask the Family of God to say, "God, please forgive me for name of sin." Then, tell God to say, "I forgive you" and have the volunteer who named that sin go back to his/her seat.
9. Continue Step # 8 with all the sins standing in between God and His family. If time is limited or there are a lot of sins, tell the Family of God to say, "God, I'm sorry for all my sins." God will say, "I forgive you." As the sins sit back down, make sure that the Family of God stays in his/her place and does not close the gap.
10. When all of the volunteers who gave examples of sins are sitting back down, say "Even though the sins are gone, God and His family still aren't as close as they used to be."
11. Then ask, "Does anyone know what we can do to bring them closer again?" (*Penance*)
12. Say, "Penance is a prayer or good action to show that we will do better. When a priest gives us our penance, it helps us to take the steps to reconnect with God."
13. Ask, "Can anyone give me an example of penance?" (*Responses will vary.*)
14. Ask the audience to help the Family of God say a "Hail Mary" all together for penance. As everyone is praying, have the Family of God walk back towards God.
15. Once the Family of God and God are standing side by side again, say, "After we do our penance and really make an effort to change our lives, we are closer to God again. See how God and His family can talk, shake hands and high five again without all the sins in the way?" (*Again, instruct the volunteers to do these actions.*)

H. Examination of Conscience (15 minutes)

1. If the pastor or deacon is present, invite him to conduct this examination of conscience. Provide each child with a copy of the "Preparing for Reconciliation" card.
2. Tell the children that you are going to lead them in an examination of conscience to help them remember things that they have done that may have been harmful to others or against God's will. Tell them that this examination of conscience also appears on page 84 of the children's book, and suggest that they read this over a few more times after the retreat to help them prepare for their First Reconciliation.
3. Slowly and reverently read the following, using these or similar words. Pause briefly between sentences.
 - Think about the words of Jesus: "As I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (John 13:34).
 - Think about the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule.

- Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind what you have done, or what you have not done, to follow God's rules. You may want to pray one of the following prayers:

- **Invocation to the Holy Spirit**

Come, Holy Spirit

Come, Holy Spirit

Come, Holy Spirit

- **A Prayer to Jesus**

by Saint Richard of Chichester

O most merciful Redeemer, Friend, and Brother,

May I know you more clearly,

Love you more dearly,

And follow you more nearly,

For ever and ever.

Amen.

- Ask yourself:

- Have I used God's name and the name of Jesus with respect?
- Have I honored God by saying my prayers?
- Have I done my best to pay attention at Mass and to pray and sing with my parish?
- Have I shown love to my parents and others who care for me by listening to them and always doing as they ask?
- Have I lied to my parents or my teachers?
- Have I been helpful to my brothers and sisters? Have I been mean to them?
- Have I treated others in a kind and friendly way? Have I been mean to others?
- Have I played fairly?
- Did I call names or tell lies about someone?
- Did I share my things with others?
- Have I treated the belongings of others carefully? Have I taken what does not belong to me?

4. After a pause, lead the children in the Act of Contrition that they have been asked to memorize. A copy can be found on page 92 of the children's book.

5. At this point, you can show the children where confessionals or stations for their First Reconciliation will be and how they will be set up.

- If time permits, have some volunteer catechists act out the "Bad Confession, Good, Confession Skit" below. If a pastor is available, have him play the role of the priest.

- As an alternative, you can show a video on "How do I go to Confession?" by OBD Films.

Link to video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lb8pzvnnL20>

Bad Confession, Good Confession Skit

Objective: To illustrate both improper and proper approaches to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Cast:

- a priest
- 4 people to play the following roles: the blamer, the unrepentant, the uncaring, the good one (if required, one person can play all 4 roles)
- a commentator (if required, the Priest can carry out the Commentator's role to stop the skit when called for and explain what happened)

Materials:

- Two chairs facing each other, as in "face to face" Reconciliation
- Props to dress the priest (i.e. a stole or something that can represent a stole, like a scarf, and a cross)

Skit:

This skit can be carried out in a series of four examples of Confession; three are "bad" examples, the last one is a "good" example. After each example, the commentator (or priest) can stop the skit, ask the kids what happened, then explain why it is a proper or improper example. As an option, the commentator can instruct the kids to make a buzzer sound any time he/she stops the skit using a phrase like "Hold it right there!" or "Wait a minute!" Not necessary, but an idea to keep the kids involved/engaged.

Example 1: The Blamer

In this example, the Main Character attempts Confession, but then proceeds to only talk about the other person involved.

Priest: *Begin with sign of the cross:* In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...

Main Character: "Bless me Father for I have sinned, this is my First Confession. I got in a fight with my brother...but you know what? *He* started it! I *told* him it was *my* turn to use the iPad and he just kept using it! So you know what? Maybe *he* should be here instead of me!"

Commentator (or Priest): What happened? What did he/she do wrong? Should you talk about the actions of others in Confession?

Reconciliation is about *us* taking responsibility for our own actions and asking God for forgiveness for *our* sins, not someone else's. *We* never have to provide a reason for *why* something happened, just tell the priest *what* happened and how often it happened. The priest is there just to forgive us of our sins in Jesus' name; no explanation of the circumstances is required.

Example 2: The Unrepentant

In this example, the Main Character attempts Confession, but then expresses that he/she is not really sorry for it.

Priest: *Begin with sign of the cross:* In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...

Main Character: “Bless me Father for I have sinned, this is my First Confession. I stole twenty dollars from my mom...but you know what? She doesn't really need it. In fact, she probably doesn't even know that it's gone. And I really needed the money. I have been wanting this toy for a long time, but I never had enough money. No big deal, right? I know, as a Catholic, I should go to Confession, so let's get on with the absolution already, okay?”

Commentator (or Priest): What happened? What did he/she do wrong? Was it right or wrong that he/she took the money as they explained?

One of the most important things in Reconciliation is that we must be *sorry* for our sins. Reconciliation gives us an opportunity to always change our life and refocus our sight on God. How can God forgive us for something if we are not sorry? Having an attitude of wanting to change, and making a resolution to try to avoid sin from then on is important to our confession.

Example 3: The Uncaring

In this example, the Main Character doesn't really attempt Confession.

Main Character: *Sitting with arms crossed, maybe chewing gum, staring at the priest.*

Priest: *Begin with sign of the cross:* In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...

Main Character: *A long, awkward silence follows. Perhaps the only thing heard is the person's chewing of gum.*

Priest: *Show confusion or discomfort for comedic effect. Ideally, the kids will find it funny until finally the commentator (or priest) interrupts the silence.*

Commentator (or Priest): What happened? What did he/she do wrong? Why didn't he/she say anything?

We have to prepare for First Reconciliation. We have to use different tools, like an Examination of Conscience, to think about our life and the things that we should confess. We have to be ready for the sacrament and willing to let God work through the celebration of the sacrament in order to remain close to Him and change our life.

Example 4: The Good One!

In this example, the Main Character properly displays a “good” Confession.

Priest: *Begin with sign of the cross:* In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...

Main Character: “Bless me Father, for I have sinned. This is my First Confession. I got into two fights with my brother, I stole twenty dollars from my mom’s purse once, and I came to church but I really didn’t feel like being there and didn’t want to pray.”

Commentator (or Priest): What happened? What did he/she do *right*?

Reconciliation is a dialogue between us and Jesus, whose representative is the priest. We have to be sorry for our sins, ready to confess them, and make a resolution to avoid sin from then on. We will more than likely sin and go to confession again, but it is important that we tell God that we will always do our best.

I. Procession with Good Deeds (10 minutes)

1. Invite the children to come forward prayerfully, thanking God for the good things they have been given, and to place their good deeds containers in front of the sanctuary or worship area. Distribute handouts with the lyrics to the Prayer of Saint Francis (alternatively, you can project the lyrics on a screen). Have the musician lead the song as the children process, or play the recording if no musician is present.
2. Provide extra containers and paper for those that may have forgotten their good deeds at home, so that all children can participate. Simply have them write "for all my good deeds" on a piece of paper and then put it into the container instead of trying to recall all the good deeds they have performed.
3. Explain that when we go to confession, the sins we have committed are forgotten, just like in the Flash Paper or Sin Demonstration. However, the good deeds we perform are things that we want to remember and bring forward as an offering to God.

J. Closing Prayer and Sending Forth (5 minutes)

1. Distribute any announcements or reminders for the parents and children to bring home.
2. Ask all to stand. If the pastor or deacon is present, invite him to bless the children. Or, in the absence of a priest or deacon, you may ask God's blessing. The following blessing may be used:

Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God.
Loving God, our source of life,
you know our weaknesses.
May we reach out with joy to grasp your hand
and walk more readily in your ways.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
All: Amen

All make the Sign of the Cross as the leader concludes:
May God, who frees us from sin,
bless us and keep us always in peace.
All: Amen
(*Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*, pp. 317-318)