

RECONCILIATION AT ST. FRANCIS XAVIER PARISH

Each year, the parish community of St. Francis Xavier invites children to prepare to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Reconciliation is one of the sacraments of healing offered to baptized Catholics and offers us a regular opportunity to restore our souls to a grace-filled state. Asking for and receiving forgiveness is something that we experience and accept through absolution.

Preparation for Reconciliation began for children when they first began to have disagreements with playmates or family members. Parents/grandparents/family members became the reconciler and teacher with words such as "Say you are sorry." The foundation on which future Christian formation would take place happened when children began to understand that some of their actions were unacceptable/wrong and parents/grandparents/family members responded with love and forgiveness.

Here at St. Francis Xavier Parish, we continue this journey with our children at a developmental level thru age appropriate catechesis. Our goal is to have each child come to understand and experience the richness of the sacrament.

In its celebration of the sacrament of Penance, the Church acknowledges we are a sinful people, but shows God's mercy and grace working in our everyday lives. The process of examination of conscience, repentance, and forgiveness brings us closer to Christ as well as those in our lives. It's a sacrament built on relationships – the necessary healing process that needs to take place when we have wronged those around us as well as sinned against the very God we love. Reconciliation allows us to mend those relationships with the help of God's grace.

Preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a three-phase process adapted to accommodate the age appropriate stages in the life of the child. The first stage occurs prior to First Eucharist (usually in second grade). Children reflect on God's mercy and are introduced to an examination of conscience. Children participate in a communal Reconciliation service and receive individual laying on of hands and absolution.

The second stage of preparation occurs following First Eucharist (normally in third grade). With the guidance of parents and teachers/catechist, students continue their reflection on God's mercy and forgiveness in an effort to gain greater appreciation of God's great love for them. It is at the age of about eight or nine years old that most children are capable of grasping the difference between mistakes and sins as well as understanding that sin involves knowing that something is wrong and choosing to do it anyway. Again, students participate in communal Reconciliation and receive individual laying on of hands and absolution.

The final stage of preparation occurs at about the age of ten (typically in fourth grade). During this stage, children prepare to receive Reconciliation in the form of one-on-one confession with a priest. The ten-year old's growing sense of justice and fair play provides the basis for the exploration of Christian morality as a way of life. Emphasis is on our covenant relationship with God and responsibility to the community. Preparation sessions are held. One is held for parents and focuses on our current adult understanding of

Reconciliation. The children's preparation is supported and expanded with materials sent home to the parents and with topics covered in religion classes geared to the age group. A Reconciliation Service is celebrated during the month of March during which children make an individual confession to a priest and receive the sacraments. Parents are encouraged to receive the sacrament with their children.

Each year the child's understanding of the sacrament deepens as they are exposed to more information and opportunity for reflection. Each year their celebration and appreciation of the sacrament broadens as they have an opportunity to participate in Reconciliation services during the Lenten season.

Each time we gather to ask forgiveness of God and of one another it is a time of hope for our entire community. The Sacrament of Reconciliation brings all of us closer to God.

Sacrament of Reconciliation (Program Outline)

Grade 2

Children learn about the BIG 4: sins against God, others, ourselves, creation

They learn to say "I'm sorry"

They come to understand . . . God loves us no matter what!

Catechesis is provided by a priest or teacher/catechist

Celebration:

Children gather for a Reconciliation Service.

They hear and talk about Scripture (Story of Zaccheaus).

They participate in calling out things for which they, as community or as individuals, are sorry (i.e., for times when we let someone else take the blame for what we did).

They come forward and ask forgiveness by saying "I'm sorry"

They receive the laying on of hands and the prayer of absolution.

They extend and receive the Sign of Christ's Peace to one another.

Resource: FINDING GOD, published by Loyola Press

Grade 3

Children review their understanding of the BIG 4.

Catechesis is given by priest or teacher/catechist.

Children write a private letter to God to ask forgiveness.

Celebration:

Children gather for a Reconciliation Service.

They hear and talk about Scripture (Story of the Prodigal Son).

They participate in calling out things for which they, as community or as individuals, are sorry (i.e., for times when we let someone take the blame for what we did)

They come forward with personal letter to God and ask forgiveness by saying "I'm sorry" and place their letters in a basket.
They receive the laying on of hands and the prayer of absolution.
They extend and receive the Sign of Christ's Peace to one another.
The priest burns children's personal letters to God.

The ritual of burning of letters is used to demonstrate what fire does to the letters, as a chemical change, is similar to what absolution does for each of us in the form of a spiritual change. We are no longer the same persons who let someone else take the blame for something we did, for example. The ritual encourages children to try again to make positive changes in behavior, with the understanding that God loves them "no matter what!"

Resource: FINDING GOD, published by Loyola Press

Grade 4

Parents meet, and they are invited to have a one-on-one discussion with their child about the sacrament and how the child has come to understand what the ritual of the sacrament means through the second and third grade experience.

Children review their understanding of the BIG 4 .

There is more intense and formal catechesis around the sacrament for the children by a teacher/catechist or priest.

Children and parents are invited to celebrate the sacrament together.

Children have the opportunity to speak with a priest about how they would like to change a behavior that has changed their relationship with God, others, creation, themselves (BIG 4).

Children receive absolution and a candle that remains lighted in church to remind them that they have agreed to spend some time trying to change a behavior that does not contribute positively to their relationships.

Parents are invited to model the behavior of celebrating the sacrament by also spending some time with a confessor.

Resources: We Celebrate Reconciliation: The Lord Forgives, published By Silver Burdett & Ginn and God's Gift of Reconciliation TOGETHER (Home Preparation for Reconciliation), published by Loyola Press

Grades 5, 6, 7

Children celebrate the sacrament with their classes during the school year.

Grade 8

Students are reminded of the importance of the sacrament and encouraged to celebrate the sacrament at a parish celebration or at a scheduled parish time reserved for the sacrament.

Eighth graders are encouraged to go independently to develop the habit or practice of celebrating the richness of the sacrament when they have the need, especially during the Lenten season.