

Reconciliation Orientation Sessions

Parent Orientation Session (Reconciliation)

Overview

This one-and-a-half to two-hour session is for parents whose children will use the *Go Seek Find: Discover God's Treasures* Reconciliation program in a parish setting or who will be preparing their children at home to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Session at a Glance



A. Welcome and Gathering Prayer (5 minutes)

B. Reflecting on Reconciliation (15 minutes)



C. Bible Story (20 minutes)

D. Treasure Hunt (20 minutes)

E. Break (10 minutes)



F. Program Overview (15 minutes)

G. Optional Activity (30 additional minutes)

H. Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Materials and Preparation

Materials Needed

- a Bible, a candle, and other items to create a prayer space
- Go Seek Find* sacrament preparation program kits (treasure kits)
- manila tag with string for each treasure kit, for parents to attach
- copies of the following handouts, one for each family:
 - "Reflection on Children's Moral Development" (Document #: TX005776)
 - "Program Outline: Reconciliation" (Document #: TX005777)
 - "Effective Sacrament Preparation for First Reconciliation" (Document #: TX005778)
 - "Some Dos and Don'ts for Parents: Reconciliation" (Document #: TX005779)
 - "Family Prayer before First Reconciliation" (Document #: TX005780)

- “Nurturing a Child’s Understanding of the Need for Forgiveness and Reconciliation” (Document #: TX005781)
 - “First Reconciliation Meal Prayer” (Document #: TX005782)
 - “Frequently Asked Questions: Reconciliation” (Document #: TX005783)
- manila envelopes, one for each family (for handouts)
 - blank name tags and markers
 - silver dollars (or dollar bills, bingo chips, or tokens, one per family) and tape (A homemade token could be a circle of yellow construction paper with “Jesus” written on it.)
 - refreshments for break time
 - sticky notes and pens (*optional*)
 - sheets of blank paper and pens (*optional*)
 - stationery, envelopes, and pens (*optional*)

Preparation Tasks

- Make arrangements to provide childcare during the session. Include this availability in your invitation or advertising. This will likely enable more parents to attend the meeting.
- Print each handout on different colored paper for easy identification during the session.
- Place a copy of the handouts in a manila envelope for each family, identified by name on the front of the envelope. Arrange these on a table near the entrance, in alphabetical order, to be picked up by the parents as they enter.
- Set up a table with the treasure kits on it.
- Have blank name tags and markers available for parents as they arrive.
- Arrange for help with hospitality. Greeters can help families find envelopes and answer questions.
- Arrange to have a podium and microphone present if needed. Arrange chairs in a large semicircle for the first part of the meeting.
- Bookmark Matthew 13:44–46 in the Bible. Prior to the session, ask a parent volunteer to prepare to read this passage at the closing prayer. On an index card or slip of paper, write, “A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew” and “The Gospel of the Lord,” and place it in the Bible. Suggest that the reader begin the passage with the first phrase and end with the latter one.
- Hide the money or tokens around the room.
- Provide a light snack and beverages for the participants.

Session Steps



A. Welcome and Gathering Prayer (5 minutes)

1. **Welcome** the participants and thank them for coming. Introduce yourself, your pastor, and parish catechist(s) if they are present. Ask the parents to take a minute to introduce themselves to others at their table or sitting nearby.
2. **Invite** the group to recall that they are in the holy presence of God and allow for a few moments of silence.
3. **Lead** or choose another appropriate person to lead the following prayer:
 - Lord Jesus Christ, you have called us to seek and find the treasures of your Kingdom through meeting you in the sacraments. Be with us as we seek to share the treasures of your Kingdom of peace, love, and justice with our children. Thank you for forgiving our failures to live as your brothers and sisters. Help us, through the Holy Spirit, to seek and find the treasure of your presence in all that we think, say, and do. We ask this in your name, Lord Jesus. (All say "Amen.")
4. **Close** with the Sign of the Cross.

B. Reflecting on Reconciliation (15 minutes)

1. **Ask** the parents to recall, as best they can, their own preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. If some parents are not Catholic, have them think about what they know about this sacrament.
2. **Invite** the parents to share in the large group some of their thoughts and memories.



C. Bible Story (20 minutes)

1. **Distribute** a treasure kit to each family. Invite the parents to pull out *The Catholic Children's Bible* and to open it to Matthew 13:44–46 (page 1478).
2. **Direct** them to turn the page to the Featured Story "God's Kingdom Is Greater Than Any Treasure," on pages 1480 and 1481. Tell them that the words between the leaves on page 1480 repeat the Scripture verses on page 1478.
3. **Ask** the parents to look at the artwork on the pages, and then invite a parent to read the Featured Story.
4. **Ask** the parents several questions, such as these:
 - Where did the man find the treasure box? (*in a field*)
 - What did he do about the treasure? (*He bought the field so the treasure could be his.*)
 - Where did the man find the pearl? (*From the art, we can guess that the fishermen are selling the pearl. We can surmise that the man holding the pearl bought it from the fishermen.*)

5. **Explain** that *treasure* in this story refers to God's Kingdom, which is greater than any monetary treasure. God's Kingdom is a kingdom of peace, love, justice, and mercy. The treasure of God's Kingdom is important because it brings us life, both now and for all eternity.

Understand It!

Summarize the second paragraph of Understand It! and point out the challenge of spending time and work to grow in our faith. Explain that this program will provide children and their families with a wonderful opportunity to focus on and grow in faith.

Live It!

Ask volunteers how they might fill in the blank in the second line. Encourage them to name treasures that the world might encourage us to seek or that can sometimes distract us from seeking the real treasure of God's Kingdom.

Tell It!

Point out the images in Tell It! and explain that these images recall the Featured Story and will help their children remember the story.

D. Treasure Hunt (20 minutes)

1. **Explain** to the parents that you are going to ask them to have some fun and go on a treasure hunt. Tell them that there are about twenty silver dollars (or substitute tokens) hidden around the room, some taped under chairs or tables and some hidden in view on shelves or on other items. Explain where they should *not* look so as to respect others' belongings and the gathering space. Share the following:
 - When I say, "Get ready, get set, go!" that is your signal to leave your seats and to start looking for the silver dollars (or tokens). You will have about 10 minutes to find one. Once your family has one, go back to your seat.
 - Get ready, get set, go!
2. **Allow** about 10 minutes before ending the game. Briefly discuss the activity by asking the following questions:
 - What makes treasure hunts fun and exciting?
 - How might this activity relate to your child's Reconciliation preparation program, *Go Seek Find: Discover God's Treasures?* (Accept reasonable responses.)
3. **Allow** the parents to keep the money or the tokens they have found.

E. Break (10 minutes)

✕ Find

F. Program Overview (15 minutes)

1. **Explain** to the parents that they just learned about the meaning of the word *treasure* in the Gospels, and that Jesus used this word to refer to the Kingdom of God. Tell them that *treasure* is also how the Church describes the sacraments and is the focus of this sacrament preparation program. Share the following points:
 - The title of our sacraments program, *Go Seek Find*, is a reference to Jesus' words—to seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all things will be given to us (see Matthew 6:33).
 - Jesus assures us that if we seek this Kingdom of love and peace, justice and mercy, we will find it. If we knock, the doors will be opened (see Matthew 7:7–8).
 - The doors to the treasure of the sacraments—in particular, the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist—are open to us. With the help of this program, we will open the doors of these treasured sacraments to our children.
2. **Explain** to the parents that they have just been led through the first part of a typical lesson, with the focus on a Bible story and core learning activity. After learning about a Bible story that is related to the sacrament, the children will then learn about the Sacrament of Reconciliation in more detail.
3. **Direct** the parents to the treasure kit, and have them find the activity booklets for Reconciliation. Explain that there are eight activity booklets for Reconciliation and ten for Eucharist.
4. **Ask** the parents to open the Reconciliation activity booklet for chapter 1. Point out the prayer, the Bible story activity, the sacrament activity, and the Family Page. Explain that the Family Page directly links the theme of the lesson to activities the family can do at home. (If you prefer to keep the treasure kits intact, demonstrate the activity booklet using a sample or by showing the pages in a PowerPoint presentation.)
5. **Point out** that the prayers used in the lessons can be found in the back of *The Catholic Children's Bible*. All of these prayers, and more, can also be found in *The Catholic Children's Prayer Book*, which can be purchased separately.
6. **Tell** the parents that the activities in these booklets are meant to support the learning that is taking place in the preparation session. Sometimes the activities will be completed in the session, and sometimes they might be left to complete at home. The activities are not meant to test knowledge but to reinforce the topic being discussed in the classroom.
7. **Direct** the parents to “The Rite of Reconciliation and Key Words” booklet (the last booklet in the set). Explain that this booklet contains all of the key words that will be focused on throughout preparation for Reconciliation, as well as a description of the Rite of Reconciliation (both individual and communal), and a process for an examination of conscience.
8. **Point out** some of the other components in the treasure kit, such as the treasure map and the stickers, and briefly highlight the purpose of each.

9. **Ask** the parents to reassemble the kits. Distribute a manila tag with strings to each family, asking them to write their own child's name on it and tie it to the treasure kit. Invite the parents to return the kits to a designated table so that they can be distributed to the children at the first session. If time allows, you may also distribute sticky notes and pens and encourage the parents to write a note to their child, sticking it to *The Catholic Children's Bible* in the kit. Their child will then find the note when they open their treasure kit in the first session.
10. **Encourage** the parents to keep the treasure kits a surprise so that their child will experience the joy of discovering the kit at the first session.
11. **Refer** the parents to their envelope of handouts and briefly review what they can find there. Answer any remaining questions the parents may have about the program.

G. Optional Activity (30 additional minutes)

Option 1: Group Reflection on Children's Moral Development (30 minutes)

1. **Ask** the parents to form groups of three or four.
2. **Invite** the groups to take a minute or two to think quietly about what they believe is the greatest challenge in raising their children to lead a Christian life. Have them write about this challenge on a sheet of blank paper. Allow about 5 minutes for writing.
3. **Ask** the parents to take 5 minutes to share what they have written with their groups. Then call for a volunteer from each group to report on their discussion. Write ideas on the board.
4. **Invite** comments about ways to meet the challenges the parents have identified.
5. **Explain** that understanding several aspects of moral development can help parents better prepare their children for the Christian life and for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.
6. **Ask** the parents to pull from their manila envelopes the handout "Reflection on Children's Moral Development" (Document #: TX005776). Direct their attention to the bullet points on ethics, morals, virtue, and moral laws. Briefly summarize each paragraph.
7. **Direct** attention to the paragraph beginning, "Growth in moral understanding . . ." Ask for comments on each bullet point, or direct the groups to discuss them for a few moments.
8. **Conclude** by asking the parents to review at home the handout "Nurturing a Child's Understanding of the Need for Forgiveness and Reconciliation" (Document #: TX005781).

Option 2: Letter-Writing Activity (30 minutes)

1. **Distribute** sheets of stationery, envelopes, and pens.
2. **Ask** the parents to write a letter that will be given to their child on First Reconciliation day. After composing the letter, the parents will put their child's full name on the envelope and seal it.
3. **Offer** the following topical suggestions to get the parents started:
 - How I feel about your First Reconciliation
 - What I remember about my First Reconciliation
 - How Reconciliation will help you to grow closer to Jesus
 - Prayers, affirmations of support, and love
4. **Collect** the sealed envelopes, and tell the parents that you will keep the letters until the day of First Reconciliation. If any parents are unable to complete the letters at this meeting, encourage them to finish their letters at home and return them to you as soon as possible.

H. Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

1. **Ask** the parents to take a few moments to quiet themselves and to recall that they are in the holy presence of God.
2. **Begin** by offering the following prayer:
 - God, our Father, you sent your greatest treasure, your Son, to show us how to live and to save us from our sins. Help us to seek Jesus always, in the midst of the fields of our lives, and to find him in the sacraments that he gave us. As we help prepare our children for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, may we guide them to find the pearl of great price, your grace and loving mercy. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Lord. Amen.
3. **Invite** a reader to proclaim Matthew 13:44–46.
4. **Lead** this litany by asking the parents to respond, “Lord, your treasure lives within us.”
 - Be with us, Lord, as we help our children prepare to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Help them to grow in their understanding of your mercy.
 - Be with us, Lord, as we admit our failings to one another. Help us to make up for them and be better followers of you in the future.
 - Be with us, Lord, as we share forgiveness of one another in family life.
 - Thank you, Lord, for the treasure of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. May we and our children participate in it fully and come to know its power of forgiveness and peace.
5. **Lead** the participants in praying the Lord’s Prayer:
 - Let us now pray together in the words Jesus taught us: Our Father . . .
6. **Close** with the Sign of the Cross.

Parent-Child Orientation Session: Reconciliation

Overview

This two-hour session is for both parents and children who will use the *Go Seek Find: Discover God's Treasures* Reconciliation program in a parish or home setting.

Session at a Glance



- A. Combined Welcome and Gathering Prayer (10 minutes)
- B. Combined Engage Activity (20 minutes)

Parents



- C1. Bible Story (20 minutes)
- D1. Bingo Game (20 minutes)
- E1. Break (10 minutes)



- F1. Program Overview (15 minutes)
- G1. Letter-Writing Activity (15 minutes)

Children



- C2. Bible Story (20 minutes)
- D2. "Come to Jesus" Game (20 minutes)
- E2. Break (10 minutes)



- F2. Craft Activity (20 minutes)
- G2. Cleanup (10 minutes)

Parents and Children Together

- H. Combined Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

Materials and Preparation

Materials Needed

General

- a Bible, a candle, and other items to create a prayer space
- silver dollars (or dollar bills, bingo chips, or tokens, one per family) and tape (A homemade token could be a circle of yellow construction paper with "Jesus" written on it.)
- refreshments for break time
- sign-up sheet for volunteer opportunities

Parent Session

- blank name tags and markers
- Go Seek Find* sacrament preparation program kits (treasure kits) and a large cloth
- copies of the following handouts, one for each family:
 - “Treasures of Our Faith Bingo Card” (Document #: TX005784)
 - “Program Outline: Reconciliation” (Document #: TX005777)
 - “Effective Sacrament Preparation for First Reconciliation” (Document #: TX005778)
 - “Some Dos and Don’ts for Parents: Reconciliation” (Document #: TX005779)
 - “Family Prayer before First Reconciliation” (Document #: TX005780)
 - “First Reconciliation Meal Prayer” (Document #: TX005782)
 - “Reflection on Children’s Moral Development” (Document #: TX005776)
 - “Nurturing a Child’s Understanding of the Need for Forgiveness and Reconciliation” (Document #: TX005781)
 - “Frequently Asked Questions: Reconciliation” (Document #: TX005783)
- manila envelopes, one for each family (for handouts)
- manila tag with string for each treasure kit, for parents to attach
- sticky notes for parent notes to children (*optional*)
- stationery, envelopes, and pens (*optional*)

Child Session

- a Bible (do not distribute the treasure kits to the children at this time, but save them for the first session)
- a sign with “Jesus” written on it, with string for wearing around the neck (for the activity leader)
- craft supplies based on craft choices (see step F2)
- a plastic bag for each child, to carry home finished and unfinished crafts

Preparation Tasks

- Make arrangements to provide childcare during the session. Include this availability in your invitation or advertising.
- Print each handout on different colored paper for easy identification during the session.
- Place a copy of the handouts in a manila envelope for each family, identified by name on the front of the envelope. Arrange these on a table near the entrance, in alphabetical order, to be picked up by the parents as they enter.
- Set up a table with the treasure kits on it. Cover the kits with the large cloth.
- Have blank name tags and markers available for both parents and children as they arrive.
- Arrange for help with hospitality. Greeters can help families find envelopes and answer questions.
- Arrange to have a podium and microphone present if needed. Arrange chairs in a large semicircle for the first part of the meeting.
- Bookmark Matthew 13:44–46 in the Bible. Prior to the session, ask a parent volunteer to prepare to read this passage at the closing prayer. On an index card or slip of paper, write, “A reading

from the holy Gospel according to Matthew” and “The Gospel of the Lord,” and place it in the Bible. Suggest that the reader begin the passage with the first phrase and end with the latter one.

- Hide the money or tokens around the room.
- Provide a light snack and beverages for the participants. Consider having some healthy options available.

Session Steps



A. Combined Welcome and Gathering Prayer (10 minutes)

1. **Welcome** the participants and thank them for coming. Introduce yourself, your pastor, and parish catechist(s) if they are present. Ask the parents and children to take a minute to introduce themselves to others at their table or sitting nearby.
2. **Invite** the group to recall that they are in the holy presence of God, then allow for a few moments of silence.
3. **Lead** or choose another appropriate person to lead the following prayer:
 - Lord Jesus Christ, you have called us to seek and find the treasures of your Kingdom through meeting you in the sacraments. Be with us as we seek the treasures of your Kingdom of peace, love, and justice as we prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Thank you for forgiving our failures to live as your brothers and sisters. Help us, through the Holy Spirit, to seek and find the treasure of your presence in all that we think, say, and do. We ask this in your name, Lord Jesus. (All say “Amen.”)
4. **Close** with the Sign of the Cross.

B. Combined Engage Activity (20 minutes)

1. **Explain** to the parents and children that you are going to ask them to have some fun and go on a treasure hunt. Tell them that there are about twenty silver dollars (or substitute tokens) hidden around the room, some taped under chairs or tables and some hidden in view on shelves or on other items. Explain where they should *not* look so as to respect others’ belongings and the gathering space. Share the following:
 - When I say, “Get ready, get set, go!” that is your signal to leave your seats and to start looking for the silver dollars (or tokens). You will have about 10 minutes to find one. Once someone from your family finds one, all members of that family should go back to their seats.
 - Get ready, get set, go!
2. **Allow** about 10 minutes before ending the game. Briefly discuss the activity by asking the following questions:
 - What makes treasure hunts fun and exciting?
 - How might this activity relate to a sacrament preparation program called *Go Seek Find: Discover God’s Treasures?* (Accept reasonable responses.)
3. **Allow** the families to keep the money or tokens they have found.

4. **Direct** the children to follow their catechist or volunteer(s) to their own space to continue their part of this session.

Parent Session

Seek

C1. Bible Story (20 minutes)

1. **Distribute** a treasure kit to each family. Invite the parents to pull out *The Catholic Children's Bible* and to open it to Matthew 13:44–46 (page 1478).
2. **Direct** them to turn the page to the Featured Story “God’s Kingdom Is Greater Than Any Treasure,” on pages 1480 and 1481. Tell them that the words between the leaves on page 1480 repeat the Scripture verses on page 1478.
3. **Ask** the parents to look at the artwork on the pages, and then invite a parent to read the Featured Story.
4. **Ask** the parents several questions, such as these:
 - Where did the man find the treasure box? (*in a field*)
 - What did he do about the treasure? (*He bought the field so the treasure could be his.*)
 - Where did the man find the pearl? (*From the art, we can guess that the fishermen are selling the pearl. We can surmise that the man holding the pearl bought it from the fishermen.*)
5. **Explain** that *treasure* in this story refers to God’s Kingdom, which is greater than any monetary treasure. God’s Kingdom is a kingdom of peace, love, justice, and mercy. The treasure of God’s Kingdom brings us life, both now and for all eternity.

Understand It!

Summarize the second paragraph of Understand It! and point out the challenge of spending time and work to grow in our faith. Explain that this program will provide children and their families with a wonderful opportunity to focus on and grow in faith.

Live It!

Ask volunteers how they might fill in the blank in the second line. Encourage them to name treasures that the world might encourage us to seek or that can sometimes distract us from seeking the real treasure of God’s Kingdom.

Tell It!

Point out the images in Tell It! and explain that these images recall the Featured Story and will help their children remember the story.

D1. Bingo Game (20 minutes)

1. **Explain** that you will be taking the next few minutes to review some facts about our Catholic faith and about the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
2. **Ask** the parents to pull from their manila envelope the handout “Treasures of Our Faith Bingo Card” (Document #: TX005784). Each square includes a question to be answered. The parents may *not* fill in their own sheets. They must go around the room, introduce themselves to another person, and direct the question to that person. Then they may write the answer and that person’s name on the bingo card.
3. **Explain** that the goal is to fill in the entire sheet, with answers and names, before “time” is called, in about 10 minutes. Tell them that they need to go to a new person for each answer.
4. **Start** the game by saying, “Ready, set, begin!”
5. **Gather** the group and review the questions and answers. The answers can be found on the handout “Treasures of Our Faith Bingo Card Answers” (Document #: TX005785).

E1. Break (10 minutes)

✕ Find

F1. Program Overview (15 minutes)

1. **Explain** to the parents that they just learned about the meaning of the word *treasure* in the Gospels, and that Jesus used this word to refer to the Kingdom of God. Tell them that *treasure* is also how the Church describes the sacraments and is the focus of this sacraments preparation program. Share the following points:
 - The title of our sacraments program, *Go Seek Find*, is a reference to Jesus’ words—to seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all things will be given to us (see Matthew 6:33).
 - Jesus assures us that if we seek this Kingdom of love and peace, justice and mercy, we will find it. If we knock, the doors will be opened (see Matthew 7:7–8).
 - The doors to the treasure of the sacraments—in particular, the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist—are open to us. With the help of this program, we will open the doors of these treasured sacraments to our children.
2. **Explain** to the parents that they have just been led through the first part of a typical lesson, with the focus on a Bible story and core learning activity. After learning about a Bible story that is related to the sacrament, the children will then learn about the Sacrament of Reconciliation in more detail.
3. **Direct** the parents to the treasure kit, and have them find the activity booklets for Reconciliation. Explain that there are eight activity booklets for Reconciliation and ten for Eucharist.

4. **Ask** the parents to open the Reconciliation activity booklet for chapter 1. Point out the prayer, the Bible story activity, the sacrament activity, and the Family Page. Explain that the Family Page directly links the theme of the lesson to activities the family can do at home. (If you prefer to keep the kits intact, demonstrate the activity booklet using a sample or by showing the pages in a PowerPoint presentation.)
5. **Point out** that the prayers used in the lessons can be found in the back of *The Catholic Children's Bible*. All of these prayers, and more, can also be found in *The Catholic Children's Prayer Book*, which can be purchased separately from Saint Mary's Press.
6. **Tell** the parents that the activities in these booklets are meant to support the learning that is taking place in the preparation session. Sometimes the activities will be completed in the session, and sometimes they might be left to complete at home. The activities are not meant to test knowledge but to reinforce the topic being discussed in the classroom.
7. **Direct** the parents to the "The Rite of Reconciliation and Key Words" booklet (the last booklet in the set). Explain that this booklet contains all of the key words that will be focused on throughout preparation for Reconciliation, as well as a description of the Rite of Reconciliation (both individual and communal), and a process for an examination of conscience.
8. **Point out** some of the other components in the treasure kit, such as the treasure map and the stickers, and briefly highlight the purpose of each.
9. **Ask** the parents to reassemble the kits. Distribute a manila tag with strings to each family, asking them to write their child's name on it and tie it to the treasure kit. Invite the parents to return the kits to a designated table so that they can be distributed to the children at the first session. Recover the kits with the cloth. If time allows, you may also distribute sticky notes and pens and encourage the parents to write a note to their child to find when they open their treasure kit in the first session. Instruct them to stick the note to *The Catholic Children's Bible* in the kit.
10. **Encourage** the parents to keep the treasure kits a surprise so that their child will experience the joy of discovering the kit at the first session.
11. **Refer** the parents to their envelope of handouts and briefly review what they can find there. Answer any remaining questions the parents may have about the program.

G1. Letter-Writing Activity (15 minutes)

1. **Distribute** sheets of stationery, envelopes, and pens.
2. **Ask** the parents to write a letter that will be given to their child on First Reconciliation day. After composing the letter, the parents will put their child's full name on the envelope and seal it.
3. **Offer** the following topical suggestions to get the parents started:
 - How I feel about your First Reconciliation
 - What I remember about my First Reconciliation
 - How Reconciliation will help you to grow closer to Jesus
 - Prayers, affirmations of support, and love
4. **Collect** the sealed envelopes, and tell the parents that you will keep the letters until the day of First Reconciliation. If any parents are unable to complete the letters at this meeting, encourage them to finish their letters at home and return them to you as soon as possible.

Children's Session

Seek

C2. Bible Story (20 minutes)

Note: The reading below, with the commentaries titled Understand It! and Live It!, are based on the Featured Story “Jesus Welcomes Children!,” on pages 1496–1497 in *The Catholic Children's Bible*. This Bible is not being used in this session, so that finding it in the kit at the first preparation session will be a surprise for the children. However, you may want to look at this Featured Story before presenting this session.

1. **Gather** the children in a separate space and ask them to sit down. Explain that we will listen to God's Word from the Bible. We will talk about it a little bit, and then we will play a game that will remind us of this Gospel.
2. **Open** a Bible to Matthew 19:13–15. Begin the reading, “A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.” Then read the passage. At the end, say, “The Word of the Lord.” Lead the children in the response, “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.”
3. **Ask** the children several questions to check comprehension. Responses may vary based on the wording of the translation you read.
 - Why were people bringing children to Jesus? (*so he could place his hands on them and bless them*)
 - Did the disciples of Jesus think this was a good idea? (*No, they scolded the people.*)
 - What did Jesus say? (*“Let them come and do not stop them. The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these.”*)
 - What did Jesus do? (*He placed his hands on them and went away.*)

Understand It!

Explain that Jesus loves children. He wants children to come to him so he can bless them. Jesus wants you to come to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Jesus is welcoming you today to this sacrament of forgiveness. Jesus made little children an example for everyone else to follow, because he said that people who are like children will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. To Jesus, every person is important, even the youngest.

Live It!

Ask the children to close their eyes. Then continue, using these images:

- Imagine that Jesus is sitting before you. He lifts you up, sets you on his lap, and folds his arms around you. You can feel his heart beating.
- Now tell Jesus whatever you'd like to tell him. He loves to hear you talk to him, and he listens to everything you tell him. Feel his arms around you, and listen to what he says to you in your heart.

D2. “Come to Jesus” Game (20 minutes)

1. **Explain** that you will be playing a game based on this Gospel passage. The game is called “Come to Jesus.” Put a sign around your neck with the name of Jesus on it.
2. **Explain** that you will be playing Jesus. Sit or stand at one end of the room with your arms out in welcome. Have the children line up in a single row at the other end of the room.
3. **Call** the children up to you in steps by calling out personal characteristics, such as physical features, clothing colors, individual preferences, and so on. Any child who matches the characteristic you have named should take one step forward. For example:
 - All those with blue eyes, take one step forward.
 - If you’re wearing the color green, take one step forward.
 - If you like puppies, take one step forward.
 - If your name begins with a *J*, take one step forward.
4. **Continue** to create different categories that will call various groups of children forward. Try to make sure no child falls more than three steps behind the others. Continue to call characteristics until all of the children have reached you. You might also wish to add a special category, such as, “All those who love Jesus, take two steps forward!”
5. **Gather** the children around you and ask a volunteer to take a photo of the group at the end of the game. You might arrange to send the photo to the parents via e-mail.

E2. Break (10 minutes)



F2. Craft Activity (20 minutes)

Prepare one of the following crafts: (1) Reconciliation Family Meal Prayer, (2) T-shirt Art, or (3) Banners for Reserved Seating at the Reconciliation Liturgy. See the directions that follow for each craft.

Option 1: Reconciliation Family Meal Prayer

1. **Explain** to the children that in the days before they receive their First Reconciliation, they are asked to pray a special prayer to help them get ready. They can say this prayer with their families at mealtime.
2. **Distribute** the cards made from the handout “First Reconciliation Meal Prayer” (Document #: TX005782) as well as pencils, crayons, or markers.
3. **Invite** the children to think about God’s wonderful gifts, especially our families and the food we have to eat.
4. **Ask** the children to fold the prayer cards in half, making a “tent” that has the prayer printed on one side. Then ask them to decorate the white space of the prayer cards with images they think their family members will enjoy. They will present these prayer cards to their parents at the final break before the closing prayer.

Option 2: T-Shirt Art

1. **Provide** each child with a T-shirt in his or her size or a bit larger. Tell the children that they will be making T-shirts to wear during their retreat later in the program. They can also wear the shirts during their preparation sessions with their catechist, if appropriate.
2. **Tell** them they have a choice of the following sayings to put on their shirts:
 - I am a child of God.
 - God forgives me.
 - I am a peacemaker.
 - Friend of Jesus
 - God loves me
 - Forgiveness rocks!
3. **Distribute** fabric paint in several colors. Have the children use the paint to write their chosen phrase on the T-shirt and decorate it with various symbols and colors.

Option 3: Banners for Reserved Seating at the Liturgy

1. **Tell** the children that they will be making banners with their names on them. The banners will be placed at the end of the rows in church where they and their families will sit during the First Reconciliation liturgy.
2. **Distribute** 8½-x-11-inch sheets of construction paper, as well as markers, crayons, and other art materials.
3. **Help** the children to position their paper vertically. Then invite them to decorate their paper banners by writing their names and including artwork or symbols of forgiveness and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
4. **Ask** the children to take their decorated banners home, along with instructions for their parents to tape a long pencil across the top of the banner and to tie a piece of yarn to both ends of the pencil, so that the banner can be hung from the end of a pew or the side of a row of chairs.
5. **Direct** the children to bring their completed banners back to the rehearsal for the First Reconciliation liturgy.

G2. Cleanup (10 minutes)

1. **Give** the children some warning when the time for the craft is nearly ended. Help them collect their things in a plastic bag so that they might finish at home.
2. **Encourage** the children to help clean up the space. Then lead them back to the room with the parents for the closing prayer.

Parents and Children Together

H. Combined Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

1. **Ask** the participants to take a few moments to quiet themselves and to recall that they are in the holy presence of God.
2. **Begin** by offering the following prayer, or ask your pastor, if present, to offer this prayer or another suitable prayer:
 - God, our Father, you gave us your greatest treasure, your Son, to show us how to live and to save us from our sins. Help us to go, seek, and find him always in the very midst of our lives. Help us to prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, so that we may know your peace and forgiveness, your love and mercy. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Lord. Amen.
3. **Invite** the previously designated reader to proclaim Matthew 13:44–46.
4. **Lead** this litany by asking the parents and children to respond, “Jesus, be with us.”
 - Be with us, Lord, as we prepare to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Help us to grow in understanding of your mercy.
 - Be with us, Lord, as we admit our failings. Help us to make up for them and be better followers of you in the future.
 - Be with us, Lord, as we share forgiveness of one another in family life.
 - Thank you, Lord, for the treasure of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. May we come to know its power of forgiveness and peace.
5. **Lead** the participants in praying the Lord’s Prayer:
 - Let us now pray together in the words Jesus taught us: Our Father . . .
6. **Close** with the Sign of the Cross.