

INSPIRE!

Touching hearts. Igniting joy.

CREATIVE REFLECTION FOR

ADVENT

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RECLAIM

RECONCILIATION

PAGE 18



God
IS MORE READY
THAN EVER TO
Welcome you
INTO
his arms.

—SAINT JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE

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ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

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CONTRIBUTORS

Steven Ellair, Jill Johnson, Sigrid Lindholm, Laurie Ziliak, Brian Singer-Towns



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from the editor



As fall turns to winter, the seasons of our Church also change. November brings a shift from Ordinary Time to Advent, which begins on Sunday, November 28, this year. Advent provides an opportunity for reflection, repentance, and preparation as we look ahead to the celebration of Christmas.

As we all know, it is easy for Advent to be overshadowed by the cultural realities of Christmas, not only in our ministry but in our own spiritual journeys. This issue of *Inspire* provides material to help teachers, catechists, children, and families slow down and intentionally embrace Advent. You will find creative ideas to help children reflect on the Gospels for each Sunday of Advent as well as activities and coloring pages that allow children to deepen their engagement with the Scriptures of Advent.

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is also prominent in this issue, as it can be a central part of our spiritual Advent preparations. Included are suggestions and activities that empower children to engage and embrace the celebration of the sacrament. Also included are some aspects of preparation for celebrating this sacrament. Recommendations and a handout are also included for engaging families in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

It is our hope that this Advent is a time of spiritual renewal for you and for those with whom you minister. We are grateful for the work you do with children and families and are happy to be able to be part of your journey.

Live Jesus in our hearts . . . forever!

Steven Ellair



Creative Reflection FOR *Advent 2021*

BY BRIAN SINGER-TOWNS

As we enter Advent, we hear the familiar Gospel readings of the Advent season each Sunday. The Advent Gospel passages present faithful followers of Christ and call us to action as we prepare our hearts for the coming of the Messiah. As teachers and catechists, we are called to introduce these Advent Gospel passages to the children with whom we minister. The task, however, is not to simply read the Bible to children but to help them truly encounter the Word of God in meaningful ways. The following material presents some fun, creative adaptations and activities for the Advent 2021 Gospels that can help bring the Word to life.



First Sunday of Advent:

November 28, 2021

Gospel Reading:

Luke 21:25–28, 34–36

Theme: When Jesus Comes

Activity: Spontaneous Drama

This Gospel passage is a dramatic prophecy of the end times. The dramatic images beg to be acted out! As you read this passage to the children, assign the following actions to specific individuals, small groups, or to the entire class.

When you read:

Have them:

“the sun, the moon, and the stars”

make circles with their arms above their bodies

“roar of the sea and the raging tides”

roar and sway back and forth

“faint from fear”

pretend to feel faint with scared faces

“the Son of Man will appear”

look upward and point

“stand up and raise your heads”

stand up straight and look up to the sky

“too much feasting and drinking”

pretend to eat a meal

“catch you like a trap”

pretend to have their foot caught in a trap

“pray that you will have the strength”

fold hands and bow heads in prayer

“stand before the Son of Man”

wave and smile at Jesus

Follow the acting out of the Gospel passage by leading the children in a conversation about what it is like waiting for Christmas to come. Draw comparisons to waiting for Jesus. Be sure the children understand that although the world isn’t yet perfect, Jesus is at work making the world a more loving place through us, his followers. When he comes again at the end of time, it will be amazing and wonderful. Lead the children in a closing prayer that asks for that time to come. (The Lord’s Prayer would also be appropriate.)



Second Sunday of Advent:

December 5, 2021

Gospel Reading: Luke 3:1-6

Theme: Make a Smooth Path for Jesus

Activity: Construction Project

After describing the political leaders in charge during John’s ministry, this Gospel passage focuses on making a smooth path for Jesus to enter our lives. Read the passage and briefly discuss its meaning with the children. Then have them create a group diorama based on verses 4 and 5:

As it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

“Someone is shouting in the desert:

‘Get the road ready for the Lord;

make a straight path for him to travel!

Every valley must be filled up,

every hill and mountain leveled off.

The winding roads must be made straight,

and the rough paths made smooth.”

Use whatever construction materials you have on hand—construction paper, glue, tape, scissors, crayons—to create a river valley surrounded by trees and hills. Then for your prayer, give each child a gray or brown “paving stone” that you have prepared in advance. After they write their name on their stone, have them add it to the diorama creating a (somewhat) straight path through the valley. As they add their stone, invite them to pray, “I am preparing the way of the Lord.” The rest of the group could echo each individual child, saying, “(Name) is preparing the way of the Lord.”

**Third Sunday of Advent:**

December 12, 2021

Gospel Reading: Luke 3:10-18**Theme:** Giving to Others**Activity:** Artistic Prayer

In this Gospel, John the Baptist tells the people what they can do to prepare their hearts for the coming of Jesus. His suggestions are works of charity and justice, making sure that other people have what they need. Help the children meditate on what this might mean in their lives. After reading the Gospel passage, engage the children in some creative brainstorming on how they can be of service to their family and friends or to people in need. Then have them draw pictures of themselves performing these acts of service. The pictures can be shared with the rest of the class and even displayed inside or outside of the classroom.

As you prepare to lead prayer, remind the children of the acts of service they brainstormed and drew. Have the children prepare their hearts for Jesus' arrival by inviting them to pray for the people served by these acts. Facilitate prayer in which each child holds up their drawing and says, "I pray for _____ . Help me to serve them." All can respond, "Lord, hear our prayer." The children can pray for people by name (first name only) or offer general prayers ("I pray for those without a home.").

This Sunday's Gospel is the account of Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth, which Catholics call the Visitation. It is a beautiful story, but we just hear the bare bones version. However, the people of God have a history of meditating on biblical stories by filling in the details using our imagination (a process Jewish people call *midrash*). Lead the children in an imaginative meditation.

**Fourth Sunday of Advent:**

December 19, 2021

Gospel Reading: Luke 1:39-45**Theme:** Mary Is Our Mother**Activity:** Storybook Imagining

First, ask the children to speculate about what Mary might have been feeling, or other details not included in the story. Then introduce an illustrated children's storybook on Mary. You may already have such a book in the school or parish library; if not, here are some recommended titles:

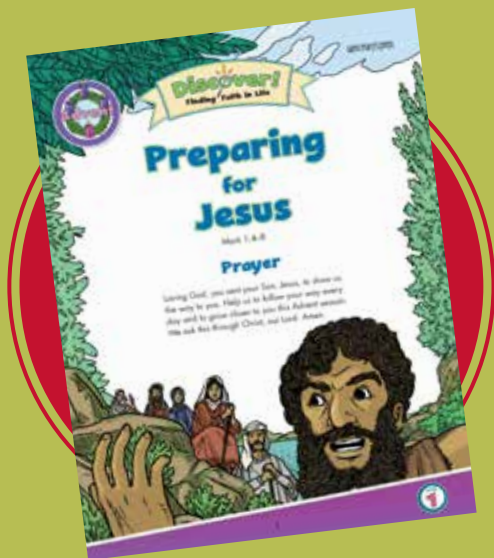
- *Mary, the Mother of Jesus*, by Tomie de Paola (Ignatius Press, 2020)
- *The Life of Mary for Children*, by Karen Cavanaugh (Regina Press, 2000)
- *All about Mary Mother of Jesus* (Baby Professor, 2017)

Gather the children around to read the children's book to them. You can read the whole book or just the section on the Visitation. Pause to show the children the pictures and to elicit comments and observations about details that help them better understand Mary's experience. When you are finished, lead the children in praying the Hail Mary.

By leading children through creative reflection on the Advent Gospel readings, you will help them truly prepare their hearts for Christmas and encounter the Word in a way that changes hearts and touches lives.

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SOMETHING FUN FOR YOU!



The activity on the following page is taken from the Advent chapter of the Grade 1 Activity Booklet for the *Discover! Finding Faith in Life* program.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT
DISCOVER! AND ITS COMPONENTS:

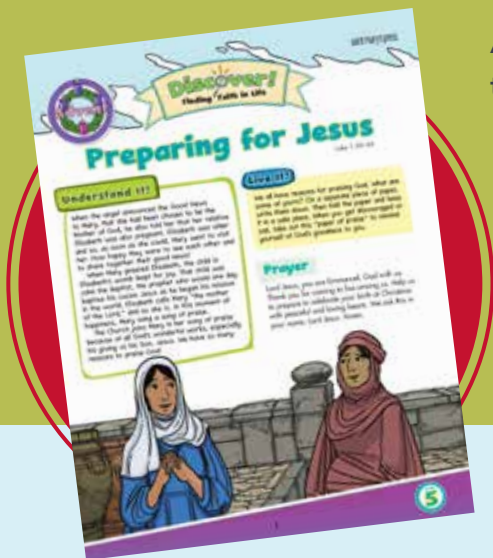
ARE YOU AT A PARISH?
SMP.ORG/DISCOVERPARISH

ARE YOU AT A SCHOOL?
SMP.ORG/DISCOVERSCHOOL

PRINT COPIES OF THE ACTIVITY ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE

SOMETHING FUN FOR YOU!

The activity on the following page is taken from the Advent chapter of the Grade 5 Activity Booklet for the *Discover! Finding Faith in Life* program.



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ARE YOU AT A PARISH?
SMP.ORG/DISCOVERPARISH

ARE YOU AT A SCHOOL?
SMP.ORG/DISCOVERSCHOOL

Word Find Answers can be found on page 32.

PRINT COPIES OF THE ACTIVITY ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE

Find the names below in this word find. Words may be found running horizontally, vertically, or diagonally.

Mary

Elizabeth

Zechariah

Abraham

Jesus

John

Gabriel

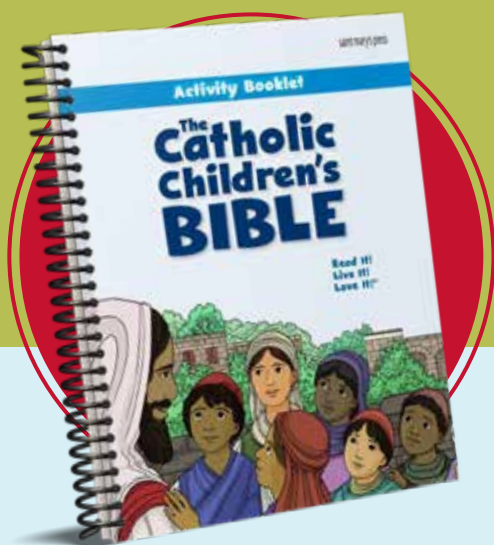
D	C	L	J	B	Y	Z	A	D	F
E	H	V	O	D	M	H	K	L	E
M	S	B	H	O	U	A	E	C	L
A	A	F	N	C	T	I	R	V	I
H	C	N	H	B	R	R	A	Y	Z
A	S	C	G	B	S	A	G	U	A
R	U	K	A	H	P	H	Y	I	B
B	S	G	L	J	Q	C	F	V	E
A	E	Y	Z	P	Q	E	R	G	T
G	J	A	N	E	D	Z	B	W	H

My  praises
the Lord;
my soul is glad
because of
God my Savior.



Luke 1:46

SOMETHING FUN FOR YOU!



The activity on the following page is taken from
The Catholic Children's Bible Activity Booklet.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CATHOLIC CHILDREN'S
BIBLE AND ITS COMPONENTS:

visit smp.org/ccb

Crossword Answers: Across: 1. king, 4. Joseph, 5. servant,
7. angel, 9. mother, 10. Yes **Down:** 2. Gabriel, 3. troubled,
6. Nazareth, 8. Jesus

Seek and Find Answers: the angel and Mary

PRINT COPIES OF THE ACTIVITY ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE

Message Received

Read Luke 1:26–38 and use the words in the box to help you complete the crossword puzzle.

angel	Gabriel	Nazareth	Joseph
troubled	Jesus	king	servant
Yes	mother		

Across

1. God will make his Son a _____.
4. Mary was promised in marriage to _____.
5. Mary said she was the Lord's _____.
7. God sent a(n) _____ with a message for Mary.
9. Mary was chosen to be the _____ of God's Son.
10. Mary trusted in God and said, "_____."

Down

2. The messenger's name was _____.
3. Mary was _____ by the message.
6. God's messenger went to the town of _____.
8. Mary was to name God's Son _____.



Seek and Find: Look at pages 1574 and 1575 of *The Catholic Children's Bible*. What two figures do you see through the windows of the stone house at the bottom of the story page?

THE MESSAGE OF

John the Baptist

MATERIALS NEEDED

- a computer with internet access
- a computer projector
- precut paper hearts, one for each child
- red crayons, one for each child
- a board or poster to write on

Activity

- Show the video "Tell Me the Story: John the Baptist" (www.youtube.com/watch?v=_OO84K9RuF0, 2:23).
- Ask the following questions to check for comprehension:
 - What was John's Good News? (*That Jesus was God's Son who was coming to save the world.*)
 - Who came to John? (*People who were sorry for their sins.*)
 - How did John help people prepare for Jesus? (*He baptized them.*)
 - What did John say that he was doing? (*Baptizing with water.*)
 - How would Jesus baptize? (*Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit.*)
 - How does the Holy Spirit help us? (*The Holy Spirit helps us to share God's love.*)
- Remind the children that we learn about John the Baptist in Advent because John the Baptist reminds us to prepare our hearts for Jesus to come to us at Christmas.

1. Distribute a precut paper heart and a red crayon to each child.
2. Write on the board, "Come, Lord Jesus!" Instruct the children to copy the prayer onto their paper hearts in big letters.
3. Direct the children to take their hearts home and to display them there. The hearts will remind them and their families to prepare for the coming of Jesus into their hearts at Christmas.



HEART TEMPLATE CAN
BE FOUND ON PAGE 32.

This activity is taken from the Advent chapter of the Grade 1 Teacher Guide for the *Discover! Finding Faith in Life* program.

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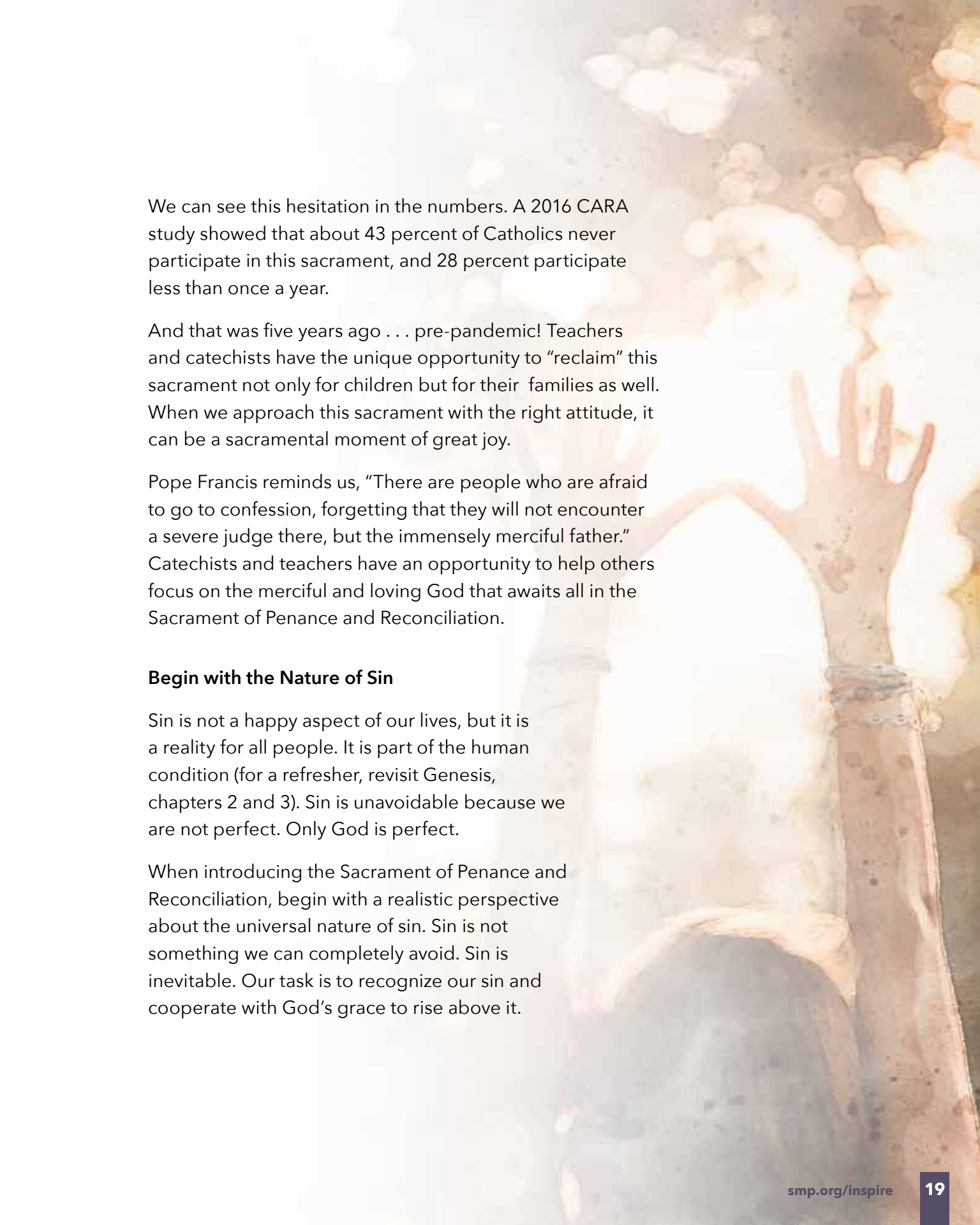


RECLAIM Reconciliation

BY LAURIE ZILIAK

During the season of Advent, the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation often becomes a sacrament of focus in faith communities. Children celebrate First Reconciliation during Advent, and parishes often offer communal reconciliation services for all. The connection is obvious—Advent is a time to prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ. What better preparation than to receive this beautiful sacrament?

And yet, many are hesitant to celebrate this sacrament for various reasons. Some feel shame and are hesitant to articulate their failings aloud. Others wonder what they have done that is so wrong that it requires an intentional moment of confession. Still others recognize the value of celebrating the sacrament but are afraid they will “mess up” the logistics.



We can see this hesitation in the numbers. A 2016 CARA study showed that about 43 percent of Catholics never participate in this sacrament, and 28 percent participate less than once a year.

And that was five years ago . . . pre-pandemic! Teachers and catechists have the unique opportunity to “reclaim” this sacrament not only for children but for their families as well. When we approach this sacrament with the right attitude, it can be a sacramental moment of great joy.

Pope Francis reminds us, “There are people who are afraid to go to confession, forgetting that they will not encounter a severe judge there, but the immensely merciful father.” Catechists and teachers have an opportunity to help others focus on the merciful and loving God that awaits all in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

Begin with the Nature of Sin

Sin is not a happy aspect of our lives, but it is a reality for all people. It is part of the human condition (for a refresher, revisit Genesis, chapters 2 and 3). Sin is unavoidable because we are not perfect. Only God is perfect.

When introducing the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, begin with a realistic perspective about the universal nature of sin. Sin is not something we can completely avoid. Sin is inevitable. Our task is to recognize our sin and cooperate with God’s grace to rise above it.

Presenting the idea of sin as just a list of bad things people do that can and must be avoided is not helpful. It simply sets any child (and adult) up for failure. In addition, any list of sinful actions cannot be comprehensive in addressing every reality, every culture, or every life experience. Having children consider a list of sins limits their deeper and more important reflection on the ways sin is evident in their lives. Instead, begin with the reality of human nature—we are all sinners. All of our relationships with God, ourselves, and others will be impacted by sin at some point. Facilitate a conversation about this reality, and help the children learn to recognize it in their lives.

Emphasize Love and Mercy

The Gospels make it clear that Jesus loved sinners. He ate with sinners (see Matthew 9:1-17), spent time with sinners (see Luke 15:2), told stories about sinners (see Luke 18:10-14), was friends with sinners (see Luke 7:34), and even stepped in when a sinner was about to be stoned for her sin (see John 8:1-11).

After recognizing the realities of sin and human nature, explore with the children the depth and breadth of God's love as presented in the Gospels. The Gospels are clear—God loves all people, regardless of the ways we have failed. While there are many possibilities, some helpful Gospel passages include:

- **Luke 7:36-50:** Jesus forgives a woman's sins as she anoints his feet.
- **Luke 15:11-32:** A loving father welcomes home his wayward son.
- **Luke 19:1-10:** Jesus visits the home of Zacchaeus, a despised tax collector.
- **Mark 2:13-17:** Jesus calls Levi (and all sinners) to discipleship.

Present the Positives


Children are often presented with a list of dos and don'ts regarding sin, or a lengthy examination of conscience when preparing for Reconciliation. They are given a negative list of ways they may have failed or a series of specific questions that cannot possibly address every aspect of their existence. While lists are often focused on the Ten Commandments, they often focus on specific, negative actions, without addressing the larger context (or allowing for individual reflection).

Spend time exploring the intent of the Ten Commandments (living in community, honoring others, being a person of integrity, and so forth) and asking the children how those aspects can be found in their lives. Explore the Ten Commandments as lifelong goals to pursue, and discuss ways we all can do better at pursuing them right now. Conclude any consideration of the Ten Commandments with a reflection on the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:35-40), which calls all to love God, self, and neighbor.

Expel Fear

Naming fear is an important step when exploring the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, especially with children. Many children (and adults) experience fear around this sacrament, ranging from fear of revealing the worst about themselves to fear of getting the logistics of the sacrament wrong. Address these fears directly.

- **Provide a fear factor box:** Invite the children to write anonymous notes naming their fears about the sacrament (both for those preparing for their First Reconciliation and for those who have received the sacrament previously). Set aside intentional time to address each named fear.
- **Meet the confessors:** Bring in those who will be serving as confessors during the year so the children can develop a comfort level with them. Invite each confessor to speak about their own experience of Reconciliation.
- **Prepare for the rite:** Invite the children to prepare a “cheat sheet” or index card for themselves as they prepare to celebrate the sacrament.
- **Include families:** Oftentimes, adults experience the same fears as children regarding the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Include families in your fear-busting activities, and send home the “Dos and Don’ts for Parents: Reconciliation” handout (found on pages 24–25 of this issue), which offers some broader advice for families of children preparing to receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.



The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation can be a beautiful moment of grace and joy, love, and mercy if we are able to overcome the many negative fears and misperceptions often associated with it. Help the children and their families reclaim the beauty of this sacrament and celebrate it joyfully.

The statistics quoted in this article are from “Religion and Public Life,” Pew Research Center, September 2, 2015. www.pewforum.org/2015/09/02/chapter-2-participation-in-catholic-rites-and-observances.

The quotation by Pope Francis in this article is from *Angelus* (Saint Peter’s Square, August 2, 2015), at www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2015/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20150802.html. Copyright © LEV.

Some **Dos** and **Don'ts** for Parents: Reconciliation

Do be aware that you teach more by who you are and what you do than by what you say. Basic attitudes of faith and love will grow in your child gradually if they witness you trying to live a life of faith. Be aware of how your actions support what you want to teach your child about faith.

Do pray together as a family each day. Choose the most appropriate time according to your family circumstances. Allow each member of the family to mention something happy that has happened that day or share a particular challenge they are dealing with. Everything can be brought to God in prayer.

Do worship together as a family every Sunday. Attend Sunday Mass together and sit up front where your child can see what is happening. Family attendance at Mass will help your child understand the faith tradition that inspires the Catholic Church community.

Do take every opportunity to be forgiving about your child's poor choices. Be sure to encourage your child to be forgiving toward others as well, and to seek ways to improve relationships within the family and among friends.

Do talk with your child about your own experience of First Reconciliation.

Tell your son or daughter about your own First Reconciliation, and ask any older children in the family to do the same.



Do ask your child to share their hopes and fears about First Reconciliation. Keep an open line of communication about your child's experiences as they continue the sacrament preparation process. Encourage your child to share excitement as well as any areas of concern or fear. This will be important as you journey with your child through the preparation process.

Do reflect on how your family might live as an active part of the parish community. Try introducing some simple commitments to the Church community, such as offering an elderly person a ride to Mass on a regular basis or providing a meal to a family in crisis.

Do take time to relax and enjoy each other as a family. Setting a regular time works best. Try to make at least one family meal a week a special event. This provides an opportunity to talk, share what's happening in your lives, and reinforce your commitment to one another as a family.

Don't feel that your child has to receive First Reconciliation just because they are a certain age or in a certain grade. If you have concerns about your child's readiness, your pastor or DRE can help you assess whether or not your child is ready to begin preparation for First Reconciliation.

Don't Don't forget to remind your child often that God loves them. Recalling this love can help their desire to become their best selves.

This handout is adapted from the Reconciliation Online Resources in the *Go Seek Find: Discover God's Treasures* program.



A Ten Commandments Relay

MATERIALS NEEDED

- ten scrolls (rolled-up construction paper, but not tied)
- a prize, such as a holy card or a prayer card, for each child

Activity

Introduce the following activity to help children learn the Ten Commandments:

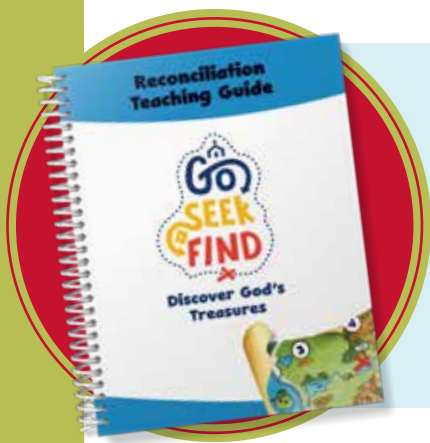
- Prepare by writing one of the Ten Commandments, found on page 1988 in *The Catholic Children's Bible*, on each of the ten scrolls.
- Arrange the children into ten teams with the same number of children on each team, if possible. Line the teams up next to each other. Establish a starting line in front of each team and a finish line across the room.
- Give one scroll to the first team member in each line. If some teams are larger, give commandments with fewer words to those teams.
- Explain that the object of the race is not to finish first, but to learn the commandment by heart. When the leader says, "Ready, set, GO!" the first member of each team will run to the finish line, open the scroll, read aloud the commandment, roll up the scroll, turn around, and run back to give the scroll to the next team member. That team member will do the same thing. When all team members have returned to their line, they are to raise their hands in the air and keep them up to show that they have completed the relay. The last person to return to the line will hold up the scroll.

- Ask each team—in commandment order—to share their commandment by reciting it from memory.
- Have a prize ready for each child—perhaps a child-friendly holy card or prayer card—because everyone who learned a commandment is a winner.

Teacher Note: If there are too few children to make ten teams, you can divide the group into five teams, distribute the first five commandments on scrolls, hear the recitations at the end, and then run the race again with the next five commandments. If time permits, you can scramble the teams and run more races, thus allowing the children to run with and learn a different commandment.

Process the Activity

- Discuss the significance of the Ten Commandments by asking the children to share why God gave them to us. (*Responses might include: out of love; because God wants us to be safe and happy.*)
- Conclude by reminding the children that if we want to follow Jesus, we will love God, ourselves, and others as he taught us. The Ten Commandments were not just for Moses and God’s people long ago. They are still God’s rules today. They are the best way for us to love God, ourselves, and others.

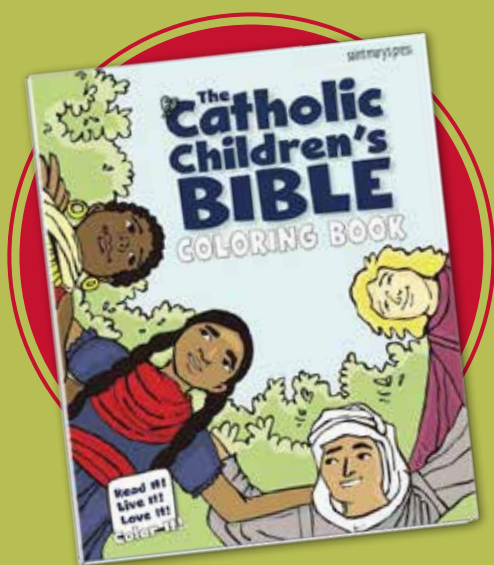


This activity is adapted from chapter 4 of the *Reconciliation Teaching Guide* in the *Go Seek Find: Discover God’s Treasures* program.

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SOMETHING FUN FOR YOU!



The activity on the following page is taken from *The Catholic Children's Bible Coloring Book*.

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AND ITS COMPONENTS:

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PRINT COPIES OF THE ACTIVITY ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE

The Ten Commandments



Exodus 20

See more on page 132 in *The Catholic Children's Bible*.

SOMETHING FUN FOR YOU!



The activity on the following page is taken from the chapter 4 Activity Booklet in the *Go Seek Find: Discover God's Treasures Reconciliation* program.

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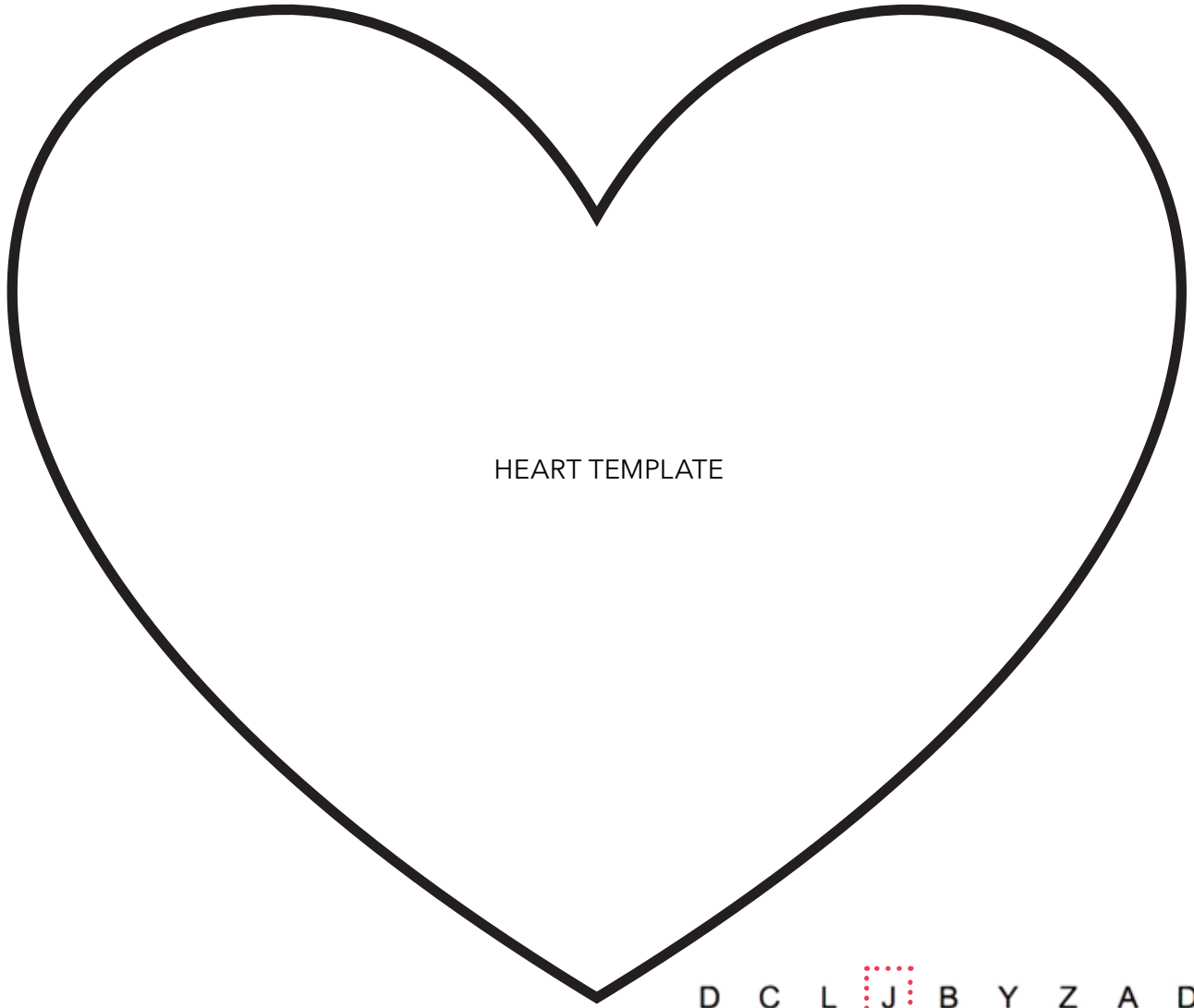
Answers: 1. Worship, 2. generations, 3. evil, 4. Sabbath/holy, 5. Respect, 6. steal, 7. accuse, 8. house/donkeys

PRINT COPIES OF THE ACTIVITY ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE

Read Exodus 19:16-20:17 (found on page 132 in *The Catholic Children's Bible*), and fill in the blanks with a word from the following list:

evil	Sabbath	worship	donkeys
generations	respect	steal	holy
accuse	house		

1. _____ no god but me.
2. I show my love to thousands of _____.
3. Do not use my name for _____ purposes.
4. Observe the _____ and keep it
_____.
5. _____ your father and your mother.
6. Do not _____.
7. Do not _____ anyone falsely.
8. Do not desire another man's _____; . . . his
wife, his slaves, his cattle, his _____, or
anything else that he owns.



HEART TEMPLATE



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