

First Reconciliation Retreat

Note to Retreat Facilitator: Parents are expected to play an active role in this retreat. This retreat is designed to last approximately three hours. A sample schedule is included but can be adapted to fit your own needs.

It is recommended to have some hospitality (water & simple snack) available as participants check in and during any breaks taken during the retreat.

Begin preparing with the team a few months before the retreat date. Make sure adequate time for preparation is given to those giving talks/teachings. Suggested talking points are given, but each speaker will need to develop the specifics of their talk.

Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

Leader: Today we gather as families to prepare for a very special moment in the lives of our children---their First Reconciliation. This sacrament reminds us that God is always waiting for us with open arms. Today is not about being perfect; it is about discovering how deeply we are loved by God and how His mercy helps us begin again.

As we begin, let us quiet our hearts and remember that Jesus is with us.

(Brief period of silence).

Opening Song

Reader 1: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Loving Father, you know each of us by name. You created us in love, and You never stop calling us back to you.

Reader 2: Today we gather as parents and children, ready to learn more about your mercy and the gift of forgiveness.

Reader 3: Open our hearts. Help us to listen carefully, to pray honestly, and to trust that you are always ready to forgive us when we turn to you.

Reader 4: Bless our families. Bless our conversations. Bless this retreat, so that it may prepare us to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with faith, joy, and peace. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Luke 15:11-24 (The Return of the Prodigal Son)

(A parent or child proclaims the Gospel)



Leader: In today's Gospel, the father runs to welcome his son home before the son can even finish saying he is sorry. This is a picture of God's love for us. Sometimes we make poor choices. Sometimes we hurt others. Sometimes we forget to love as Jesus taught us. But God never stops loving us. Every time we celebrate Reconciliation, God welcomes us home with joy. He forgives us, heals our hearts, and helps us begin again. Today, as families, we prepare not only to learn about confession but also to experience God's amazing mercy together.

Reader 5: Let us bring our prayers before our loving Father. Our response is "Lord, hear our prayer."

For the children preparing for their First Reconciliation, that they may know how much Jesus loves them, we pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, hear our Prayer

Reader 6: For parents, that they may be examples of forgiveness, faith, and love within their homes, we pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, hear our Prayer

Reader 7: For our families, that we may learn to forgive one another as God forgives us, we pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, hear our Prayer

Reader 8: For our parish community, that we may always welcome others with kindness and mercy, we pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, hear our Prayer

Reader 9: For all who have wandered away from God, that they may discover his loving embrace, we pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, hear our Prayer

Leader: Parents, please place your hand gently on your child's shoulder.

Heavenly Father, bless these parents, the first teachers of the faith. Give them patience, wisdom, and joyful hearts as they guide their children closer to You.

Bless these children. Help them to know that they are your beloved sons and daughters. May they always trust in your mercy and never be afraid to come to you.



Strengthen every family gathered here, and fill each home with faith, hope, peace, and love. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Welcome (10 minutes)

- The retreat facilitator should take this time to welcome the retreat participants, introduce the team that is helping to lead the retreat, and explain how the retreat will work. If participants will be moving to different spaces, make sure to explain how that movement will be done. Share any other information vital to the day at this time, including that parents will be participating with their child (except for the parent session, if there is one).

Session 1: Jesus Knows and Loves Us (20 minutes)

- The goal of this session is to share how Jesus knows everything about us and chooses to love us unconditionally.
- This session is based on Psalm 139:1-18. The speaker should make themselves familiar with this Scripture and be able to share it in a way that the children will understand.
- Some things that can be shared include:
 - God knows everything about us—the good and the not-so-good.
 - God chooses to love us completely. There is nothing we can do to make God love us less. There is nothing we can do to make God love us more.
 - We do not have to earn God's love—He gives us his love freely.
 - Because of this, we never need to be afraid of Confession. What we share will not surprise God.
 - We should seek Reconciliation because we love God and do not want to be separated from Him and His love.
- After the teaching session, have the parents complete the following activity with their child.
 - Give each family a large sheet of paper. Have the child trace one hand and the parent trace the other.
 - Inside one hand, write:
 - Gifts God gave me
 - Things I'm thankful for
 - Inside the other hand, write:
 - People who help me grow closer to God
 - Ways I can show love
 - Have them write things in each hand that fit those categories

Session 2: Scripture Experience (20 minutes)

- The goal of this session is to learn about the characteristics of God through Scripture.
- Choose one of the following Gospel stories:



- The Parable of the Prodigal Son
- The Lost Sheep
- Jesus and Zacchaeus
- Instead of simply reading, assign family members roles to act out the story.
- Engage in a dramatic reading of the story as the family members act out the story.
- After the enactment, have students and their parent discuss the following questions:
 - What surprised you about the story?
 - How do you think the different characters felt?
 - When have you needed forgiveness?
 - When have you extended forgiveness to another family member?
 - What do you think the story tells us about God?

Session 3: Family Examination of Conscience (20 minutes)

- The goal of this session is to share the importance of an examination of conscience as part of making a good confession.
- Instead of handing out a list immediately, use a guided conversation. Allow time with each prompt for students and parents to very briefly complete the prompt. Read one prompt at a time. (These are suggestions and we encourage you to add more of your own.)
 - I show love when....
 - I forget to love when...
 - I listen to my parents by....
 - I listen to my children by...
 - I can be kinder to my brothers and sisters by....
 - I treat other people fairly and with kindness by...

Session 4: Practice Reconciliation (For Children)

- The goal of this session is to help make the children comfortable with the confessional and to practice what it will look like when they make their first confession.
- Some of the things that can be shared include:
 - Take the children on a “tour” of the confessional. Let them take turns sitting in the priest’s chair, kneeling behind the screen, etc. Explain how others will know that somebody is in the confessional
 - Teach them the five steps to confession
 - Examine your conscience
 - Be sorry
 - Plan to do better
 - Confess your sins
 - Do penance
 - Discuss the do’s and don’ts of going to confession
 - Have adults role play what it will look like when they go to confession



- Answer any questions the students may have about what it will be like to go to confession for the first time.

Session 4: Parent Session (For Parents)

- The goal of this session is to share with parents the expectations and role of the parents in their child making the first confession.
- Some of the things that can be shared include:
 - Share important information the parents need about their children making their first confession, but do not dedicate the whole session to this.
 - Remind the parents that at the child's baptism, they agreed to undertake the responsibility for raising their children in the faith.
 - Children often learn more by the examples they are shown. Because of that, parents should be an example in faith to their children and frequent the Sacrament of Confession themselves.
 - If there is something holding the parents back from going to confession themselves, encourage them to set up a meeting with the priest to work on that issue, whatever it may be.
 - Consider watching (or showing) the video "Lump" from the Nooma series (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IBPXuxpheE>)
 - If you watch it, retell the story shared and then invite the parents to discuss in small groups how they can be an example of God's forgiveness.
 - If you show the video to the parents, invite them after the video to share their takeaways and how they can be an example of God's forgiveness.

Wrap-Up (5 minutes)

- Before closing in prayer and dismissing the participants, take a moment to thank them for their presence. Thank all of those who helped to plan and facilitate this retreat. Share any information that the parents and/or students may need to know before their departure. Then close in prayer.

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Reader 1: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
Holy and loving Father, you have given us new life in Jesus, your Son. Send the Holy Spirit to help us live as signs of your love for everyone to see.

Reader 2: Lord, we ask for your blessing. May God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit help us to live as Jesus taught.

Reader 3: May God fill our hearts with kindness to forgive others as he forgives us.

Reader 4: May God bless us, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.



First Reconciliation Retreat Sample Schedule

8:30am—Check-in and hospitality

9:00am—Welcome and Opening Prayer

9:15am—Session 1

9:35am—Transition

9:45am—Session 2

10:05am—Transition & Break

10:25am—Session 3

10:45am—Transition

10:55am—Session 4**

11:45am—Transition

11:50am—Wrap up and Closing Prayer

12:00pm--Dismissal

*For the first three sessions, you can either have the group split into thirds and the parents and children move from station to station. Or, if the group is small enough, you can have them all stay in the same room and the entire group do each session together.

** The length of the fourth session will depend on the size of your group. The bigger the group, the longer it will take for all the children to tour the confessional.

