

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Outline	Environment	Materials
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Opening Prayer2. Activity Centers<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activity 1: <i>The Story of the Cracked Pot</i>• Activity 2: Meditation and Examination of Conscience• Activity 3: Masks• Activity 4: Visit to the Reconciliation Room3. Peer Group Time4. Closing Prayer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children's Bible• At least 4 group facilitators• An adult and several children to act out the Gospel in the opening prayer• A prayer setting with large, lighted candle, Bible on a stand or table, and a clear bowl filled with water• Tables and chairs for family groups• Chairs set in a circle or circles around the prayer setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nametags (color coded for activity centers)• <i>Songs of Celebration</i> CD• Light refreshments• Lyrics to "Like a Shepherd"*• Additional materials needed are listed within each activity.

Gathering and Opening Prayer (20 minutes)

Welcome the participants and explain the agenda for the gathering. Have facilitators distribute nametags and invite families to enjoy the light refreshments as they find a place to sit in the circle of chairs.

Sing "Coming Back Together," *Songs of Celebration* CD, track 6.

Pause for a moment of silence.

Make the Sign of the Cross

Let us pray. Loving and merciful God, as we gather together this day, we pray for those who are sick, afraid, lost, abandoned, alone, and unhappy. Your love is so wide and deep that there is room enough for every person on this earth. Help us to remember those who most need our love and give us the courage to offer our love to them in your name. Amen.

Proclaim the Gospel according to *Matthew 18:10–14, Parable of the Lost Sheep* from the children's Bible. You may want to have an adult and some children mime the story during the proclamation. If so, you will have to prepare them ahead of time.

Make the following points:

- In this story, we see that Jesus gives full attention to the lost sheep. This means that Jesus will do anything to bring everyone into the loving light of God's family.
- We are to be like Jesus, concerned for ourselves when we wander away from Jesus, and concerned when the bond of love between ourselves and another is broken; that is, when we wander away from each other.
- Jesus desires that we all be one with him and with one another in love.

Sing "Like a Shepherd" by Bob Dufford, SJ.

Invite all to extend a sign of peace to each other.

Activity Centers

Tell the group that the lunch break will occur after the families have visited two centers. The remaining two centers can be visited after lunch.

Direct the participants to note the color code on their nametag and ask them to move to the appropriate center.

* "Like a Shepard," ©1976 Robert J. Dufford, SJ. Published by OCP.

Activity 1: *The Story of the Cracked Pot* (20 minutes)

Materials Needed

- Family Reconciliation Retreat Handout 1
- Pencils and paper

Gather in a classroom, meeting space or a quiet place in the large hall.

Read *The Story of the Cracked Pot*.

Ask: Did you ever think a cracked pot would be a good thing? What was your favorite part of this story? Did you ever feel ashamed, like the pot did, because you made a mistake or did something wrong? How did you feel when the bearer of the pot pointed out the flowers? Whom does the bearer resemble?

Distribute Family Reconciliation Retreat Handout 1, paper and pencils, and instruct family members to write their own family stories of how Jesus can use each of their “cracks” to make something beautiful and new.

Distribute copies of the story for use at home.

Rotation and Break (5 minutes)

Activity 2: Meditation and Examination of Conscience (20 minutes)

Materials Needed

- CD of reflective music

Gather in a chapel or room away from the activities of the other centers. Play reflective music, place pillows on the floor or provide sitting mats, and put a sign on the door that asks visitors to enter quietly.

Explain that this quiet time will be used to make an examination of conscience.

Remind everyone that we make an examination of conscience:

- to discover a pattern to our shortcomings.
- to discover how we have sinned.
- to prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Begin a centering meditation using these or similar words, pausing frequently when appropriate: *Close your eyes and sit in a comfortable position. Think about each breath you take. As you breathe, relax deeper and deeper into a quiet place in your heart. Think about the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and helps you to know God*

and to make good choices. Pray to the Holy Spirit now. Ask him to help you see where you have sinned and where you can do better. (Pause for a few minutes.)

Imagine God pouring love like water all over you. (pause) Feel God loving you even when you failed to love, forgot to be kind, or were naughty. (pause) Now think about how you love God in return. Ask yourself: Do I pray and spend time thinking about God? (pause) Do I treat sacred places and things with respect? (pause) Do I join my community of faith in worship each week? (pause) Do I use God's name with respect not as a curse word? (pause) Am I kind to others? Do I speak kindly about others? (pause) Do I forgive others when they hurt me? (Pause for a few minutes.)

Close the meditation by inviting all to pray the Act of Contrition together.

Lunch (45 minutes)

Activity 3: Masks (20 minutes)

Materials Needed

- Poster paper
- Pencils
- Scissors
- Stapler
- Permanent markers
- Feathers
- Stickers
- Yarn and fabric scraps
- Glitter
- Beads
- Variety of found objects
- Glue
- Elastic
- Family Reconciliation Retreat Handout 2

Ask the participants to think about how they think others see them. Have them share one by one in family groups, but tell them no one can comment on what is said until the next step.

Invite family members to tell how they look at the others, and what they see inside themselves or others that others may not see.

Invite the families to discuss the many faces they wear, at home, at school, and at play.

Distribute Family Reconciliation Retreat Handout 2 and read the directions aloud.

Ask parents to help children make a mask expressing their inside and outside faces.

Encourage families to take time to discuss the two representations on the masks and what they mean to the children.

Rotation and Break (5 minutes)

Activity 4: Visit to the Reconciliation Room

(20 minutes)

Take the group to the Reconciliation Room. It is ideal if one of the parish priests or confessors takes a role in this visit to the Reconciliation Room. This will offer a chance for children to become acquainted with the minister of the sacrament.

Point out the various items in the room: a table with a cross and Bible, two chairs, and also the traditional screen or grill if this option is available.

Walk the families through the six steps of individual celebration:

- 1 The priest greets the penitent and makes the Sign of the Cross.
- 2 A passage from the Scriptures is read (this can be chosen by the priest or the penitent).
- 3 The penitent confesses his or her sins and accepts a penance from the priest.
- 4 A prayer of sorrow, usually the Act of Contrition, is prayed.
- 5 The priest offers absolution.
- 6 A thanksgiving to God for the forgiveness of sin is expressed and the penitent is dismissed.

Respond to any questions that arise in the group.

Rotation and Break (5 minutes)

Peer Group Time (20 minutes)

Adult Session:

Materials Needed

- Bibles (1 for each group)
or copies of Scripture passages listed within text below

Gather the parents into several small groups and give each group one of the passages listed below for reflection. These passages can be printed out or Bibles can be distributed among the groups.

Invite the groups to discuss the following questions:

- What does this passage tell you about Jesus' capacity for forgiveness?
- What application can you make for your own life?

Scripture Passages:

Matthew 8:5–13 “The Centurion’s Servant”

Mark 9:31–37 “The Deaf-mute”

Luke 5:17–26 “The Paralyzed Man”

Matthew 12:9–15 “A Man with a Shriveled Hand”

Mark 5:1–20 “Expulsion of the Devils in Gerasa”

Luke 8:43–48 “Woman with the Hemorrhage”

John 5:1–15 “Cure at the Pool of Bethesda”

Mark 10:46–52 “The Blind Bartimaeus”

Luke 7:36–50 “The Penitent Woman”

John 8:1–11 “The Adulteress”

John 21:15–19 “Peter’s Declaration”

Gather the small groups together and ask volunteers to share their insights or comments.

Make the following points in explaining the concepts of forgiveness, contrition, and reconciliation:

- The Scriptures advocate a large-hearted attitude of forgiveness and tolerance of others’ mistakes. We are challenged to forgive seventy times seven. In biblical math, this is a limitless number.
- Forgiveness is the ability to let go of the hurt, and until we can do so, we remain a slave of the hurt—always brooding over our loss and the injustice done to us.
- Forgiveness is not forgetting or denying we have been hurt, nor is it condoning or excusing what has been done to us. It is a conscious choice to turn to the good in the face of wrongdoing.
- Bringing ourselves to contrition is a process guided by God’s grace. It takes time and openness to be led through this process. This process includes a sense of remorse, taking responsibility for one’s hurtful actions, making restitution, and finally repentance, that is, a turning away from past actions and focusing on a new direction.
- Forgiveness does not automatically achieve reconciliation between ourselves and those who have hurt us. Forgiveness is one person’s response in the face of injustice or hatred. Reconciliation occurs when two persons can come together in mutual respect.
- When reconciliation occurs, it is always a sign of God’s presence and activity.

Children’s Session:

Materials Needed

- The story of Joseph and his brothers from *Genesis* (video, storybook, or interpretive play or mime)

Tell, read, or have the story of Joseph acted out (*Genesis 50:15–21*).

Discuss:

- How did Joseph and his brothers feel when they met each other after so many years.
- How was Joseph able to forgive them?
- Did the brothers need to forgive Joseph?

Explain that it takes both parties to reconcile. God helps us forgive and reconcile.

Closing Prayer (20 minutes)

Gather the participants in a circle.

Ask the families to share what they most enjoyed about the day.

Tell the following parable:

A man was exploring caves by the seashore. In one of the caves, he found a canvas bag holding a bunch of hardened clay balls. It was as if someone had rolled clay balls and left them out in the sun to bake. They didn't look like much, but they intrigued the man, so he took the bag out of the cave with him. As he strolled along the beach, he would throw the clay balls one at a time out into the ocean as far as he could. He thought little about it until he dropped one of the balls and it cracked open on a rock. Inside was a beautiful, precious stone.

Excited, the man started breaking open the remaining clay balls. Each contained a similar treasure. He found thousands of dollars' worth of jewels in the 20 or so clay balls he had left. Then it struck him. He had been on the beach a long time. He had thrown maybe 50 or 60 of the clay balls with their hidden treasure into the ocean waves. Instead of thousands of dollars in treasure, he could have taken home tens of thousands, but he just threw it away.

Conduct the following reflection in these or similar words:

It's like that with people. We look at someone, maybe even ourselves, and we see the external clay vessel. It doesn't look like much from the outside. It isn't always beautiful or sparkling, so we discount it. We see that person as less important than someone more beautiful or stylish or well-known or wealthy. But we have not taken the time to find the treasure hidden inside that person by God.

There is a treasure in each and every one of us. If we take the time to get to know another person, and if we ask God to show us that person the way he sees them, then the clay begins to peel away and the brilliant gem begins to shine forth.

Proclaim Matthew 18:21–35.

Reflect with the families:

- There is no time when we can refuse to forgive another because each person holds a treasure within.
- God always shows mercy and forgives us no matter what we have done.
- We are to forgive and show mercy just as God forgives us.

Sing "Coming Back Together," *Songs of Celebration* CD, track 6.

Thank the families for participating in the retreat.