



Renewed

Your Journey to First Reconciliation

FAMILY FAITH FORMATION

Parish Session Guide



ASCENSION

West Chester, Pennsylvania

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This *Renewed Family Faith Formation* Parish Session Guide is intended for use with the second edition of the *Renewed: Your Journey to First Reconciliation* Student Workbook and Leader's Guide.

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Ascension

PO Box 1990

West Chester, PA 19380

1-800-376-0520

ascensionpress.com



**Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful
and kindle in them the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.
And you shall renew the face of the earth.
O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit
did instruct the hearts of the faithful,
grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise
and ever enjoy his consolations.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

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Letter to Directors

Welcome to Ascension's catechetical manual for directors and catechists of *Renewed Family Faith Formation*. Thank you for accepting this vital leadership role in *Renewed: Your Journey to First Reconciliation*. Your parish selected this guide to help you prepare parents to teach their children about our Faith using the *Renewed* program at home. Your invaluable commitment to monthly sessions for four months will help you steer the parents-as-catechists on the right path. By supporting these moms and dads and their children during this project, you are strengthening the domestic Church as you nurture the Catholic Faith of entire families. Indeed, it is a holy mission.

As you may know, a parish catechist will be needed to facilitate the children's sessions that take place during your session with their parents. Well ahead of the sessions themselves, we encourage you and the catechist to become fully familiar with the material you will be conveying by reviewing the content in this manual—including the videos—and having supplies on hand.

Each family's journey is unique. Some parents will embrace their own role with confidence, while others may be nervous about teaching their children and need extra encouragement and support. You will direct both types of parents—and everyone in between. Remind parents that they have already been their child's first catechist before their child began faith formation, so their ability to pass on the Faith will flow naturally.

The *Renewed* program is flexible. Do families need extra time or different approaches to master a concept? No problem. Adapt and accommodate as you ensure that the parents understand the essential teachings. Your versatility, experience, and insight will help them find the balance that fits their needs.

If you feel apprehensive about this responsibility, that's natural. These feelings show that you understand the profound importance of this ministry. Relax! You have everything you need: an open heart, a love for God, a joyful witness to his endless mercy and grace, and a program designed for you, the parents, and their children.

As you unfold *Renewed*, you will witness priceless moments of family faith formation as parents and children grow in their understanding of God's love and mercy. You are fostering spiritual memories that will last a lifetime, and for that, we are deeply grateful.

As you journey on with your families, we are praying for all of you!

In Christ,

Your Friends at Ascension

Renewed Family Faith Formation **Program Overview**

Renewed: Your Journey to First Reconciliation, second edition, is a twelve-lesson sacramental preparation program for elementary school children. It prepares children to encounter God’s mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation by setting the sacrament in the context of salvation history—God’s love for us and his desire for us to know him and love him in return.

This new program, *Renewed Family Faith Formation*, supplements the original *Renewed* program by giving parents the tools to teach *Renewed* at home. Following the *Renewed* Student Workbook, Second Edition, and videos, the parents will use the *Renewed Family Faith Formation At-Home Lesson Guide* to effectively deliver our Faith’s teachings to their children. The At-Home Lesson Guide walks the parents through the lessons and tells them what to say and do every step of the way.

Directors will use this Parish Session manual with the *Renewed* Leader’s Guide to present the at-home program to parents. Catechists will also use this manual to lead the children’s sessions, where they will introduce concepts and vocabulary to the children using, in addition, the *Renewed* Student Workbook and Leader’s Guide.

Monthly sessions over a four-month period for parents and children are outlined here. To keep material fresh, director and catechist sessions should ideally occur just before parents begin teaching that month’s at-home lessons.

As a director, you will help parents fully understand the Sacrament of Reconciliation, explore their own faith, and gain confidence in accompanying their children on this journey. You will assist them with the activities and help them address any challenging questions. You will help parents embrace their role as primary educators of the Faith, providing them with the support, resources, and other components they need to succeed in this sacred mission.

Importantly, your leadership work extends beyond teaching Reconciliation. The program aims to stimulate encounters between the children and God. Thus, you’ll guide parents in fostering meaningful moments. *Renewed: Your Journey to First Reconciliation* invites children to meet Jesus Christ in his Word and in the sacrament—ultimately leading to a conversion of heart. Your guidance will help the parents guide their children to respond in faith to the voice of God who “first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

The ultimate goal? Forming children into young disciples.

Let’s get ready!

Components of the Program

Director and Catechist Resources and Supplies

- *Renewed Family Faith Formation* Parish Session Guide
- *Renewed: Your Journey to First Reconciliation* Leader's Guide, Second Edition, with online leader access
- Paper, pens, pencils, and markers or crayons
- Laptop and monitor to display online videos

Children's Material

- *Renewed: Your Journey to First Reconciliation* Student Workbook, Second Edition, with online course access

Parents' Material

- *Renewed Family Faith Formation* At-Home Lesson Guide

Additional Resources

The *Renewed* program provides additional resources to support your role as a director, such as prayer cards and *Renewed by Jesus: My Guide to Reconciliation*, a keepsake book that children can use in preparation for their first Reconciliation. The program also offers online support for parents through the *Renewed* Online Parent Certification on Thinkific, which you can refer to as you guide them through their teaching journey.

About the Parish Session Guide

The parish sessions are once-a-month meetings for all the participants in the family faith formation program. One session, led by the director, is for the parents; the other, which is held at the same time, is led by a catechist for the children.

The *Renewed Family Faith Formation* Parish Session Guide is the manual for you and a catechist to use in your preparatory sessions with the parents and children. This manual supplements the program's Leader's Guide, which has the necessary information to run the program in a classroom. You will refer to the Leader's Guide for lesson-specific content. This manual provides the additional structure and resources needed to run the same program with the parents as primary catechists of their children, and it leads you through the sessions.

The director and parents' sessions—including text, videos, and discussions—will help you instill confidence in the parent-teachers. The catechist and children's sessions will give boys and girls the vocabulary and experiences with the content that will help them learn catechetical lessons with Mom or Dad.

The sessions you lead using this manual will help relieve the parents' teaching anxiety and show the children that the lessons are straightforward and even fun. The goal is to help all participants know that they are more than up to the task. *Renewed Family Faith Formation* will be a successful adventure for you, the parents, and their children.

Suggested Session Calendar

Ideally, these preparatory sessions for the parents and their children will occur early in each month so parents can teach the units' lessons during the rest of the month. It is important that everyone stays on schedule.

September

Unit 1: Who Created the Universe?

Unit 2: How Did God Show His Love to His People After the Fall?

October

Unit 3: Who Is Jesus?

Unit 4: Why Did Jesus Give Us the Sacraments?

November

Unit 5: Why Did Jesus Give Us the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

December

Unit 6: How Do We Live Out the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

First Reconciliation Retreat

This should take place shortly after the parents and children finish Unit 6 and before they start Unit 1 of *Received: Your Journey to First Communion*. If your parish is continuing to follow the Ascension family faith formation programs, you may consider scheduling the First Reconciliation Retreat in December or early January.

Parish Session Format

Director and Parents' Session (1 hour and 15 minutes)

Gathering and Welcome (7 minutes)

- Volunteers welcome the participants to the meeting.
- Parents sign in and sit at a table.
- Opening prayer is provided (or you may use prayers of your own).

Part 1—Preparation for Catechesis (13 minutes)

- Discussion with parents and director, including review of the previous units during sessions 2, 3, and 4.
- For large groups, consider dividing into smaller discussion groups or tables.
- Assign a small group leader to each table. (This can be done prior to the session.)

Part 2—Overview of Units, Videos, and Discussion (40 minutes)

- Introduce lesson objectives.
- Present supporting videos and explain key concepts.
- Guide discussion to deepen understanding.
- Wrap up discussion: Address questions, clarify key concepts, direct, and encourage.

Part 3—Closing: Parents and Children Together (15 minutes)

- Children rejoin parents after their session with a catechist.
- Families sit together and share what they have learned.
- The director guides the discussion using the conversation prompts in this manual.
- Closing prayer is provided (or you may use or add prayers of your own).

Catechist and Children’s Session (1 hour and 15 minutes)

Gathering and Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

- Children meet with the catechist.
- They begin with focused prayer time and say the Our Father.
- These few minutes set the tone for the session.

Independent Activities (15 minutes)

- The activities settle the children and introduce themes and vocabulary that they will explore more fully with their parents at home.
- Children work alone, with a partner, or with the catechist and assistants.

Interactive Activities (40 minutes)

- One or two activities selected from those detailed in this manual, as time allows
- Guided, hands-on activities with the catechist and assistants, if available
- Group participation opportunities
- Reinforcement of lesson concepts

Closing: Parents and Children Together (15 minutes)

- Children join the Director and Parents’ Session for closing activities and prayer.

Advance Preparation

May, June, July

Use your parish bulletin, email blasts, and any other forms of communication that your parish uses to invite parents of eligible children to take part in and register for *Renewed Family Faith Formation*. Briefly describe the program, who to contact for information, and how to register.

August

This is a busy month for you!

- Invite your priest to open the first parish session in September.
- Recruit volunteer small group leaders. Suggestions:
 - » Use your parish email and bulletin to send an announcement to parishioners who either already help with faith formation or who have helped in the past, asking for volunteer catechists for the monthly family faith formation parish sessions.
 - » Explain to the volunteers that their role only requires a bit of positive commitment and a willingness to lead small groups.
 - » If recruitment does not yield small group leaders, groups can decide among themselves during the sessions who will take on this role.
- Recruit a volunteer parishioner or two to welcome participants each month, as described in this manual.
- Depending on the number of children, you may consider recruiting some volunteer assistant catechists to help with the Catechist and Children's Sessions.
- Print out the list of "Gathering and Welcome" instructions and the monthly prompts for "Part 1—Preparation for Catechesis," included in each session, so you can hand them to the small group leaders at the sessions.
- Make sure the meeting rooms have enough tables and chairs, including extra chairs in the parents' room for the children when they join at the end of each session. This is also a good time to plan for refreshments and supplies (see page 7). Feel free to decorate your rooms to create a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere. The catechist should also make sure that the children's meeting room, the church, and locations to be used for activities are accessible to all the children.

SEPTEMBER PARISH SESSION

The Director and Parents' Session takes place at the same time as the Catechist and Children's Session. These sessions cover the following lessons:

Unit 1: Who Created the Universe?

Lesson 1.1: God's Plan for Creation

Lesson 1.2: What Happened to God's Plan

Unit 2: How Did God Show His Love to His People After the Fall?

Lesson 2.1: From Adam and Eve to the Exodus

Lesson 2.2: From the Ten Commandments to the Promised Savior, Jesus Christ

September Director and Parents' Session

Gathering and Welcome (7 minutes)

Volunteers greet and welcome participants, provide direction, and facilitate an inviting check-in process. If your situation allows, provide a check-in sheet, name tags, coffee, and snacks at the sign-in table.

Each table should have a small group leader and, at most, eight parents. If you were unable to assign leaders, let the groups decide among themselves who will lead. Then, hand each small group leader this list of instructions:

- Get to know everyone at the table.
- Facilitate discussion.
- Gather and distribute any required materials.
- Serve as a point person for answering questions.

After everyone is checked in and settled, you and, hopefully, your priest may welcome parents to this first session. Tell them about breaks, refreshments, and restroom locations. This will orient the parents and help them feel welcome. Explain that the September session will begin with a large group discussion. This will help the participants get to know one another.

Begin this session—and the other three sessions—with a prayer:

God our Father,

Your love is the source of family life, and every family is called to reflect your glory. We come before you today and seek to grow in faith, hope, and love as families in our parish. Give us wisdom and joy as we grow in our Faith and hand on the story of your love to our children. Bless our conversation today, and remain with us when we go home. Help us to take what we have learned and discussed and use it to bring our families closer to you. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part 1—Preparation for Catechesis (13 minutes, large group)

For this initial session, complete Part 1 as a large group. To gauge parents' expectations, please ask everyone these questions:

- Tell the rest of your group a bit about your family.
- What are you most looking forward to during family faith formation this year?
- What do you anticipate will be your biggest challenge in family faith formation this year?

Part 2—Units 1 and 2 Overview, Videos, and Discussion (40 minutes, small groups)

Units 1 and 2 introduce the story of salvation. This grand story stretches from Creation to the coming of Jesus Christ. While much of the *Renewed* content will be familiar to parents, some of the stories may be new, so this is a rich opportunity to excite their hearts and minds.

Explain to the parents that they will watch videos and discuss them with the other parents at their table. (These parents will be their small group throughout the program.)

Video 1



Watch *The Bible in 10 Minutes* (10 minutes)

<https://ascensionpress.com/blogs/videos/the-bible-in-10-minutes-feat-fr-mike-schmitz>

This video features creative animation and Fr. Mike Schmitz's engaging narration. It invites parents to dive a bit deeper into the story of salvation. Some parents might have seen this video on YouTube or have gone through *Bible in a Year*[®]. If so, don't worry; no one will mind seeing the video again.

Dim or turn off the lights and ask the parents to cast aside distractions and tune into *The Bible in 10 Minutes*.

Discussion Questions (10 minutes)

- How was the story of salvation instilled in you when you were growing up? What stuck? What do you wish was more deeply presented, explained, or instilled in you? How can you bring more of that to your family today?

The goal is to get parents talking about their foundational experiences. Widely different experiences are good for discussion! Encourage honesty, and support the parents as they share.

- Are there any specific stories or images from Scripture that you carried from childhood to today? Are they positive or negative?

Many people report that certain images from picture Bibles, films, videos, or other sources have stayed with them into adult life.

- What thoughts, feelings, and questions did the summary of Scripture in this video bring up for you? How do you feel called to more deeply engage with Scripture in your daily life? How can you bring this deeper reality into the flow of family life?

Don't feel pressured to answer questions that come up. For the sake of this discussion, simply encourage the group to dive deeper and seek answers. The Ascension app is a great resource for this!

- How would you sum up the story of salvation in a few sentences that can be repeated and handed on in your family?

Let the group sum it up in their own way. During sharing, some might feel their answer has been stated. They may say their answer anyway. The idea is for the group to walk away with a memorable vision of the “big picture” of salvation history.

Video 2



Watch *Chosen 3.2* (6 minutes)

<https://youtu.be/Vt5c041JDuw>

Jesus is the center of this video. Take the same approach that you did in the first video and invite parents to enter into a focused reflection on who Jesus is and what he came to do.

Discussion Questions (10 minutes)

- Who is Jesus in the story of salvation? How did you understand that as you were growing up? How does that affect you now?

Encourage parents to think back to the first video as well as the second one as they answer this question.

- What thoughts, feelings, and questions come up for you when you think about Jesus, the “big picture” story of salvation, and your own life?

This is a more personal question. It might help to pause so parents can think a bit before sharing.

Wrap-up (4 minutes, return to large group)

Invite everyone back to one large group. Draw out questions about the day's content, answer them, and summarize key points. This is also a perfect time to congratulate parents on their commitment and provide encouragement as they begin teaching *Renewed* at home.

Part 3—Closing: Parents and Children Together (15 minutes)

As the children return from their session with the catechist, ask parents and children to sit together and then have the following discussion:

- What did you talk about and do in your session? What was your favorite part? What is your favorite Bible story and why?
- Family “Pictionary”: Parents and children draw their favorite Bible story. Then, parents and children discuss each other’s drawings.

End the session with a closing prayer:

Heavenly Father,

We give you thanks for the time we just shared and for the things we have learned. We ask that your Holy Spirit continue guiding us during this month so the seed of the Gospel that has been planted in us may bear good fruit, as Jesus taught us. Amen.

Close with one Hail Mary and one Glory Be. Invite the parents and children to pray with you. These prayers can be found on page 218 of the Student Workbook.

September Catechist and Children’s Session

Gathering and Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Welcome the children as they come in. Quiet the group before the prayer. Explain that by being quiet and still, we can focus on being in God’s presence. Consider setting up a prayer table or sacred space to draw the children into the spirit of prayer. If there is a crucifix in the room, ask the children to face it for the opening prayer.

Ask the children if they have any intentions they would like to pray for. Consider giving them some examples of who or what to pray for. (*My grandma is sick, my mom, my friend, for beautiful weather, etc.*)

Children this age may sometimes tell the entire story of why they are praying for someone. If they are offering intentions aloud, invite them to say just the name of the person they want to pray for.

Pray the Our Father together. Invite the children to turn to page 5 of their Student Workbook and pray along with you. Begin and end with the Sign of the Cross.

Independent Activities (15 minutes)

If any children come into the room after the prayer, welcome them. Ask them to take a seat and get settled.

While you take attendance, invite the children to open their workbooks and begin the “Work It Out!” activities for Units 1 and 2. You can choose one or two activities for the whole group to do, or encourage the children to work through them in order:

1.1 “Creation” Crossword, page 191

1.2 “The Fall” Word Match, page 193

2.1 “Noah’s Ark” Word Jumble, page 195

2.2 “Commandments” Word Search, page 197

These are activities that children can do on their own as everyone gets settled, but feel free to invite them to work with a friend or as a group. If they seem confused by an activity, consider beginning it with the whole class to provide a helpful example. Let the children know that they may ask you questions at any time.

Some activities introduce vocabulary words. Be prepared to explain the meaning of these words and talk about their importance. The glossary begins on page 309 of the Leader’s Guide, and the answers to the activities for Units 1 and 2 appear on pages 259, 261, 263, and 265, respectively.

Interactive Activities: Units 1 and 2 (40 minutes)

Choose one or both activities, as time allows.

1.2 Act It Out!

In this activity, choose scenarios from the list below. Start with one or two—you can do more if you have time. The children will act out two different responses to each scenario. The first response will be what God would want them to do; the second response will be what he would not want them to do.

Prepare: Read through the scenarios and choose the ones you will use.

- What could you do when a parent tells you screen time is over?
- What could you do when your brother, sister, or friend wants to borrow a toy?
- What could you do when a classmate you don’t know well has no one to sit with at lunch?
- What could you do when it’s time to send birthday invitations and you have one classmate you don’t want to include? (Be mindful of children who may have experienced being the classmate who wasn’t included.)
- What could you do when you see your friends making fun of someone?
- What could you do when Mom asks you to clean your room?
- What could you do when Dad tells you that you need to wear clothes you don’t like to a family party?

Direct: Invite the children to consider the first scenario. Give one child an opportunity to act out what God would want. Ask the next child to act out what God would not want.

Some children will benefit from working with a partner or assistant catechist to brainstorm ideas and practice the scenario together before presenting it to the whole group. Also, consider allowing the boys and girls to draw a scenario or say their ideas instead of acting them out.

Help the children understand why God wants us to act in certain ways. Help them discover how listening to him brings peace while disobeying him brings discord and anxiety.

Consider: The children may struggle to come up with a way to approach each scenario. Be ready to guide them and help them brainstorm.

2.2 Commandments Command Center

Play this “Step forward! Step back!” game with the children to help them learn how the Ten Commandments lead us to Jesus.

Prepare: Put a picture of heaven, Jesus, or a crucifix on the far side of the room.

Direct: Ask the children to line up facing the picture or crucifix. Explain to them what it represents. Choose one person to be the leader who will give commands.

Explain: The leader gives a command. The others take a step forward if they think the command will bring them closer to God or a step backward if they think it will lead them away from God.

Here are some sample commands:

- Go to Mass.
- Skip Mass to hang out with your friends.
- Listen to Mom when she asks you to clean your room.
- Say no when Dad tells you to eat dinner.
- Swear on the playground.
- Use kind words even when you’re mad.
- Hurt someone’s feelings by saying unkind things.
- Take a twenty-dollar bill you find on the playground to the lost and found.
- Keep the \$5 you saw someone drop on the playground.
- Be mean to your friend because he or she has the toy you want.
- Be kind to your friend when he or she wins at a board game.

Consider: If time allows, give others a chance to be the leader. Invite them to come up with their own commands. Consider having some children work with a partner: One person can come up with ideas and the partner can speak them. Also, consider modifying the activity if the children will benefit. For example, a child can move markers forward and backward along a piece of paper or give instructions to a partner to step forward or backward.

Closing: Parents and Children Together (see Part 3, page 14)

OCTOBER PARISH SESSION

The Director and Parents' Session takes place at the same time as the Catechist and Children's Session. These sessions cover the following lessons:

Unit 3: Who Is Jesus?

Lesson 3.1: Jesus Heals Us, Teaches Us, and Saves Us

Lesson 3.2: Jesus Gives Us the Church to Continue His Work

Unit 4: Why Did Jesus Give Us the Sacraments?

Lesson 4.1: The Sacraments Bring Us God's Love

Lesson 4.2: The Sacraments Throughout Our Lives

October Director and Parents' Session

Gathering and Welcome (7 minutes)

Volunteers greet and welcome participants, provide direction, and facilitate an inviting check-in process. If your situation allows, provide a check-in sheet, name tags, coffee, and snacks at the sign-in table.

We recommend keeping the small groups the same throughout the program, to develop trust and a sense of community among participants. To facilitate this, ask group leaders and parents to sit at the same table as in September. As before, each group should have, at most, eight parents. Hand each small group leader this list of instructions:

- Catch up with the other participants.
- Facilitate discussion.
- Gather and distribute any required materials.
- Serve as a point person for answering questions.

Once everyone is checked in and settled, welcome participants back for the second session. Remind them about breaks, refreshments, and restroom locations.

Begin the session with a prayer:

God our Father,

Your love is the source of family life, and every family is called to reflect your glory. We come before you today and seek to grow in faith, hope, and love as families in our parish. Give us wisdom and joy as we grow in our Faith and hand on the story of your love to our children. Bless our conversation today, and remain with us when we go home. Help us to take what we have learned and discussed and use it to bring our families closer to you. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part 1—Preparation for Catechesis (13 minutes, small groups)

We begin by reflecting on the home experience of family faith formation that took place between sessions. It is important in this process for parents to share highlights, successes, and challenges and ask questions. Give group leaders these three prompts, which will remain the same for the remaining sessions and can help you establish a rhythm and pattern of sharing from month to month:

- Ask each parent to share one faith highlight or success from the past month. It might relate to last month's lessons, or it could pertain to prayer, experiences at Mass, or perhaps discussions about the Catholic Faith.
- Next, ask each parent to share what aspect of family faith formation he or she is finding the most difficult. Praying together? Going to Mass? Ask them to name something about living out the Faith that's hard for their family.
- Finally, ask parents to state a goal or goals they want to achieve this month to improve their family's faith life.

Part 2—Units 3 and 4 Overview, Videos, and Discussion (40 minutes, small groups)

Unit 3 focuses on the person of Jesus—diving into who he is, what he came to do, and how his work continues in the Church. The first video poses the question, “Who is Jesus?” It draws heavily from an ancient argument brought into modern times by C. S. Lewis. Encourage parents to tune out everything else and watch with undivided attention.

Video 1



Watch *This One Thing Makes Christianity Different from Every Other Religion* (13 minutes)

<https://media.ascensionpress.com/video/this-one-thing-makes-christianity-different-from-every-other-religion/>

Discussion Questions (7 minutes)

- Ask each parent at the table to reply to the question, “Who is Jesus?”
If necessary, remind the parents that Jesus is more than a moral teacher or a prophet. Of course, he was both. He communicated the Father's message. All true, all very important. However, what is most important is that Jesus is fully man and fully God. True God. True man.
- Talk through the trilemma “Lord, liar, lunatic.” How would you explain this to someone?
Help your group review, understand, and talk through the true claims of Jesus. Jesus said things that, if they weren't true, would mean he was crazy or lying. Jesus once told his followers, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). That is a pretty bold statement, but it is true!

Video 2



Watch *I Go to Mass, but It Feels Like Nothing Changes* (9 minutes)

<https://media.ascensionpress.com/video/i-go-to-mass-but-it-feels-like-nothing-changes/>

Unit 4 centers on the sacraments as they communicate God's love throughout our lives. Sometimes, we see the sacraments as cultural rites of passage or symbolic rituals. In truth, the sacraments are effective, real, and powerful signs. They give us grace. That doesn't mean we always feel that power or grace. This video will help parents understand and live their sacramental life as they form their children and prepare them for Confession and, later, first Communion.

Discussion Questions (7 minutes)

Before the discussion, help parents understand that God pours out grace in the sacraments but that they are not magic that is forced upon us like spells. God offers us grace, but we must be open to it and move in it. This video can help parents move beyond the idea of sacraments as rites of passage or simply ceremonies. Encourage them to talk about their own experience and pose their own questions.

- In the video, Fr. Mike Schmitz makes the analogy of getting in the shower with a raincoat or an umbrella. What is he getting at? Do you relate to this?

Wrap-up (4 minutes, return to large group)

Invite everyone back to one large group. Draw out and answer questions about the day's content, summarize key points, and give parents directions and encouragement to support them through the month ahead.

Part 3—Closing: Parents and Children Together (15 minutes)

As the children return from their session with the catechist, ask parents and children to sit together and have the following discussion:

- Parents and children check in and share about the activities they did and what they learned and discussed.
- Parents and children share who Jesus is and why a relationship with him is so central.
- Parents and children each come up with as many words as they can think of to describe Jesus.

End the session with a closing prayer:

Heavenly Father,

We give you thanks for the time we just shared and for the things we have learned. We ask that your Holy Spirit continue guiding us during this month so the seed of the Gospel that has been planted in us may bear good fruit, as Jesus taught us. Amen.

Close with one Hail Mary and one Glory Be. (Invite the parents and children to pray with you. These prayers can be found on page 218 of the Student Workbook.)

October Catechist and Children's Session

Gathering and Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Welcome the children as they come in. Quiet the group before the prayer. Explain that quietness and stillness help people focus on being in God's presence. Consider setting up a prayer table or sacred space to draw the children into the spirit of prayer. If there is a crucifix in the room, ask the children to face it for the opening prayer.

Ask the children if they have any intentions they would like to pray for. If they are offering intentions aloud, invite them to say just the name of the person they want to pray for.

Pray the Our Father together. Invite the children to turn to page 5 of their Student Workbook and pray along with you. Begin and end with the Sign of the Cross.

Independent Activities (15 minutes)

If any children come into the room after the prayer, welcome them. Ask them to take a seat and get settled.

While you take attendance, invite the children to open their workbooks and begin the "Work It Out!" activities for Units 3 and 4. You can choose one or two activities for the whole group to do, or encourage the children to work through them in order:

- 3.1 "Jesus" Crossword, page 199
- 3.2 "Church Window" Coloring, page 201
- 4.1 "The Seven Sacraments" Crossword Puzzle, page 203
- 4.2 "Sacraments" Word Jumble, page 205

These are activities that children can do on their own as everyone gets settled, but feel free to invite them to work with a friend or as a group. If they seem confused by an activity, consider beginning it with the whole class to provide a helpful example. Let the children know that they may ask you questions at any time.

Some activities introduce vocabulary words. Be prepared to explain the meaning of these words and talk about their importance. The glossary begins on page 309 of the Leader's Guide, and the answers to the activities for Units 3 and 4 appear on pages 267, 269, 271, and 274, respectively.

Interactive Activities: Units 3 and 4 (40 minutes)

Choose one or two activities, as time allows.

3.1 What Is Jesus Doing?

Play this interactive game to help the children understand some of the extraordinary things Jesus did when he was on earth.

Prepare: Read the Scripture passages below before the session to make sure you're familiar with them.

Direct: Explain that there are three things Jesus could be doing in each passage you will read. When the children know what Jesus is doing, they should give their answer as a gesture:

Teaching: Thumbs up

Healing: Two hands in the air

Saving: Prayer hands

Act out the three gestures for the children, and give them a chance to try them out.

Read each of the following passages aloud. Ask the children to use the movements (no words!) to show what they think Jesus is doing in the passage:

Jesus cleanses a leper: Matthew 8:1–4 (answer: healing)

Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law: Matthew 8:14–15 (answer: healing)

The Beatitudes: Matthew 5:1–12 (answer: teaching)

Jesus is the Bread of Life: John 6:35 (answer: saving)

Jesus is crucified: Mark 15:25–27 (answer: saving)

Consider: Take the activity a step further by asking the children to explain why they think Jesus did these things. Do any of these Scripture stories remind you of the sacraments? If so, which sacraments?

3.2 Tour-the-Church Scavenger Hunt

This activity helps children identify and understand the purpose of objects in the sanctuary of the church.

Prepare: Have pencils and paper available. Before you head over, make sure nothing is happening in the church sanctuary.

Direct: Review the items below with the children before going into the sanctuary. Instruct them to be very respectful, remembering to bless themselves and genuflect as they enter.

Stand at the back of the sanctuary with the children, or go into a pew together and sit. Ask them to point out the things below. You may walk around as a group to take a closer look, or you may consider splitting the children up into smaller groups led by assistant catechists.

- Who can point out the baptismal font?
- Who can point out the sanctuary?
- Who can point out the tabernacle?
- Who can point out the light by the tabernacle?
- Who can point out the confessional?
- Who can point out the crucifix?
- Who can point out the altar?
- Who can point out the organ or piano?

- Who can point out a statue of the Blessed Mother?
- Who can point out the priest's chair (the presider's chair)?

Consider: This would be a great activity to involve your pastor in. Perhaps he can give the children a tour before they start the scavenger hunt. Make a list of these things on paper so they can check them off. Add things to the list that might be unique to your parish, like a statue or image of your parish's patron saint.

4.1 Efficacious Signs Exercise

In this interactive game, the children will follow signs to direct their movement. This will help them conceptualize what an "efficacious sign" is!

Prepare: Before the session, make simple directional signs—an arrow pointing left, an arrow pointing right, and a stop sign. Make sure you have enough space in your classroom to do this activity.

Direct: Invite the children to stand up and show the signs.

- Say, "When I hold up a sign, do exactly what it says. Go two steps in whatever direction it tells you to go."
- Hold up the left arrow, right arrow, right arrow, left arrow, stop sign, right arrow, stop sign, and so on.
- Ask the children to sit. Ask, "How do the signs work? What do they tell you to do?"

The boys and girls will likely respond with, "They told me to move left or right, or they told me to stop."

Explain, "This is how the sacraments work. They are signs, but they have an effect on us. They make us move, not left or right, but closer to Jesus and closer to God's love."

Consider: Also explain that an efficacious sign creates a change in our hearts that we cannot see with our eyes. This is the action of grace.

4.2 Strainers and Sins

Complete this interactive activity to show how Reconciliation heals us.

Prepare: Have clear plastic cups, water, a mesh strainer, and large and small stones.

Direct:

- Hold up two separate cups filled with water. Explain that the first cup represents God, and the second cup represents us. Because we're made in the image of God, the cups look the same.
- But then we start to sin. As we add sins in our life—in small ways (drop small stones into the "us" cup) and big ways (drop in large stones)—we start to look less like God.
- Look at what happens when we receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. (Pour the water from the "us" cup through a strainer and into another cup. Look at the stones in the strainer and then throw them away.)
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation catches the sin, makes us look at how we hurt God, others, and ourselves, and then gets rid of it, leaving us purified.

Consider: To help the boys and girls fully grasp the message, suggest they perform the activity with their own cups.

Closing: Parents and Children Together (see Part 3, page 19)

NOVEMBER PARISH SESSION

The Director and Parents' Session takes place at the same time as the Catechist and Children's Session. These sessions cover the following lessons:

Unit 5: Why Did Jesus Give Us the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

Lesson 5.1: Our Need for Forgiveness

Lesson 5.2: Our Friendship with God

November Director and Parents' Session

Gathering and Welcome (7 minutes)

Volunteers greet and welcome participants, provide direction, and facilitate an inviting check-in process. If your situation allows, provide a check-in sheet, name tags, coffee, and snacks at the sign-in table.

Parents should sit at the table with their usual small group. Please hand each small group leader this list of instructions:

- Catch up with the other participants.
- Facilitate discussion.
- Gather and distribute any required materials.
- Serve as a point person for answering questions.

Once everyone is checked in and settled, welcome parents back for the third session. Remind them about breaks, refreshments, and restroom locations.

Begin the session with a prayer:

God our Father,

Your love is the source of family life, and every family is called to reflect your glory. We come before you today and seek to grow in faith, hope, and love as families in our parish. Give us wisdom and joy as we grow in our Faith and hand on the story of your love to our children. Bless our conversation today, and remain with us when we go home. Help us to take what we have learned and discussed and use it to bring our families closer to you. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part 1—Preparation for Catechesis (13 minutes, small groups)

We begin by reflecting on the home experiences of family faith formation that took place in between sessions. It is important in this process for parents to share highlights, successes, and challenges and ask questions. Have the participants break out into their respective small groups, where they will remain through Part 1 and Part 2 of the session. Give group leaders these three prompts:

- Ask each parent to share one faith highlight or success from the past month. It might relate to last month's lessons, or it could pertain to prayer, experiences at Mass, or perhaps discussions about the Catholic Faith.

- Next, ask each parent to share what aspect of family faith formation he or she is finding the most difficult. Praying together? Going to Mass? Ask them to name something about living out the Faith that's hard for their family.
- Finally, ask parents to state a goal or goals they want to achieve this month to improve their family's faith life.

Part 2—Unit 5 Overview, Videos, and Discussion (40 minutes, small groups)

Unit 5 is about our need for the Sacrament of Reconciliation because of sin. The two videos will help parents think about the nature of sin, and why it is important to say we are sorry. This lesson will also help prepare the parent-teachers for Unit 6, which focuses specifically on the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Video 1



Watch *What Is Sin* (6 minutes)

<https://media.ascensionpress.com/video/what-is-sin/>

This video provides a helpful discussion on the nature of sin. It will help parents understand sin for themselves and better communicate with their children about what it is, how to avoid it, and how to repent.

Discussion Questions (12 minutes)

- Ask everyone, “In your own words, what is a sin?”
Help the groups develop and discuss an understanding of sin versus mistake. Draw on points from the video to help them understand central points like revelation, evil as a lack, and sin as breaking a relationship versus breaking a rule. Encourage all participants to explore their own insights and experiences, too.
- Ask everyone, “How do you see yourself better explaining this idea to your children? What do you think are misconceptions or unhelpful ideas about sin?”
Obviously, answers will vary. It is good for parents to explore how they think this teaching would best be communicated to their children.

Video 2



Watch *The Benefits of Saying “I’m Sorry”* (6 minutes)

<https://ascensionpress.com/blogs/videos/the-benefits-of-saying-im-sorry>

This video is about the importance of apologizing. Repentance is key to our relationship with God and others. Being able to acknowledge that we have something to be sorry for is important.

Discussion Questions (12 minutes)

- Fr. Mark-Mary Ames talks about people in his life who modeled humility and gratitude. Who in your life is good at owning up to and saying “sorry” when they need to?

This is a subjective question. Allow parents time to think, and perhaps offer your own example to get the ball rolling.

- How is saying you are sorry a part of your family life? How can each family grow a culture of forgiveness?

Allow a moment for parents to think and some time for sharing between spouses if both parents are present. Point out—gently—that apologizing can strengthen relationships. It can move a family toward a culture of mercy. Support any ideas that are brought up, and suggest that, at a particular meal each week, members of their family could take turns reflecting on the past week, asking for forgiveness, and offering it to one another. This weekly tradition can help convey the beauty and importance of regularly going to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Wrap-up (4 minutes, return to large group)

Invite everyone back to one large group. Draw out and answer questions about the day's content, summarize key points, and give parents directions and encouragement to support them through the month ahead.

Part 3—Closing: Parents and Children Together (15 minutes)

As children return, parents and children should sit together and have the following discussion:

- Parents and children check in and share about the activities they did and what they learned and discussed.
- Parents explain sin.
 - » A sin is something you freely choose to do.
 - » A sin is something that you know you shouldn't do.
 - » Sin hurts our relationship with God, others, and ourselves.
- Parents and children share mercy with each other. Tell them that each may share
 - » Something that they are grateful for
 - » Something that they are sorry for
 - » A goal for loving God and others better

End the session with a closing prayer:

Heavenly Father,

We give you thanks for the time we just shared and for the things we have learned. We ask that your Holy Spirit continue guiding us during this month so the seed of the Gospel that has been planted in us may bear good fruit, as Jesus taught us. Amen.

Close with one Hail Mary and one Glory Be. (Invite the parents and children to pray with you. These prayers can be found on page 218 of the Student Workbook.)

November Catechist and Children's Session

Gathering and Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Welcome the children as they come in. Quiet the group before the prayer. Explain that quietness and stillness help people focus on being in God's presence. Consider setting up a prayer table or sacred space to draw the children into the spirit of prayer. If there is a crucifix in the room, ask the children to face it for the opening prayer.

Ask the children if they have any intentions they would like to pray for. If they are offering intentions aloud, invite them to say just the name of the person they want to pray for.

Pray the Our Father together. Invite the children to turn to page 5 of their Student Workbook and pray along with you. Begin and end with the Sign of the Cross.

Independent Activities (15 minutes)

If any children come into the room after the prayer, welcome them. Ask them to take a seat and get settled.

While you take attendance, invite the children to open their workbooks and begin the "Work It Out!" activities for Unit 5. You can choose one or two activities for the whole group to do, or encourage the children to work through them in order:

5.1 "Commandments" Fill-in-the-Blank, page 207

5.2 "Prepare Your Room" Activity, page 209

These are activities that children can do on their own as everyone gets settled, but feel free to invite them to work with a friend or as a group. If they seem confused by an activity, consider beginning it with the whole class to provide a helpful example. Let the children know that they may ask you questions at any time.

Some activities introduce vocabulary words. Be prepared to explain the meaning of these words and talk about their importance. The glossary begins on page 309 of the Leader's Guide, and the answers to the activities for Unit 5 appear on pages 275 and 277, respectively.

Interactive Activities: Unit 5 (40 minutes)

Be sure to do Activity 5.1 to help children memorize their Act of Contrition, and do 5.2 if time allows.

5.1 My Act of Contrition

Prepare: Have pencils and paper available.

Direct: Help the children memorize the traditional or modern Act of Contrition, found on page 224 and on the back cover of the Student Workbook. Read the prayer line by line and ask the children to repeat the words after you.

Explain the three concepts in the prayer. In the first part, we express our sorrow by saying “I’m sorry.” In the second part, we show that we understand that we have separated ourselves from God because of our sins. In the third part, we resolve to change, to amend our lives—that is, we promise to try not to sin again.

Consider: You can also help the children memorize the prayer by repeating it line by line as before, but this time, ask them to write each line after you say it. The children can also work with peers or assistant catechists, one reading each line aloud and the other repeating or writing it. Consider assigning the memorization as homework. At your next meeting, ask the children to recite it.

5.2 Build a Ready Home for Jesus

In this activity, the children use wooden blocks with different qualities written on them (both good and bad) to build a house for Jesus. The point is for them to choose only good qualities to build their house. These are the kinds of qualities we want to have when we welcome Jesus into our hearts.

Prepare: For this activity, you will need wooden tower blocks (like Jenga blocks) or something similar with a good or bad quality written on each. Twenty-seven blocks (half a typical game) will give you a set containing the qualities listed below.

Write a quality on each block. Here are some suggested qualities:

HONESTY	GRATEFULNESS	FORGIVENESS
ENVY	ENTHUSIASM	STRENGTH
HUMILITY	DISRESPECT	WEAKNESS
PRIDE	FAIRNESS	GENTLENESS
GRACE	FEAR	BOREDOM
BRAVERY	HOPE	ANGER
LAZINESS	HELPFULNESS	IMPATIENCE
FAITHFULNESS	LOVE	PATIENCE
IGNORANCE	RESENTMENT	KINDNESS

Direct: Place children in two or more groups (depending on how many blocks are available), and give each group a set of blocks, making sure they get a mix of good and bad qualities in their blocks—and enough good qualities to build a small house! Instruct the children to build a house for Jesus using only the qualities they think he would want to see in their lives.

When everyone has finished, ask someone in each group to tell the others about the blocks they chose. Then, make the connection for them that when we go to Confession, we strengthen our good qualities and root out the bad ones so that our hearts may be a more fitting home for Jesus in the Eucharist.

Consider: Ask families to donate old and incomplete sets of wooden tower blocks for this activity. You might also find inexpensive sets at a thrift shop or dollar store.

Closing: Parents and Children Together (see Part 3, page 26)

DECEMBER PARISH SESSION

The Director and Parents' Session takes place at the same time as the Catechist and Children's Session. These sessions cover the following lessons:

Unit 6: How Do We Live Out the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

Lesson 6.1: Our First Reconciliation

Lesson 6.2: Living the Life God Wants for Us

December Director and Parents' Session

Gathering and Welcome (7 minutes)

Volunteers greet and welcome participants, provide direction, and facilitate an inviting check-in process. If your situation allows, remember to provide a sign-in sheet, name tags, coffee, and snacks at the sign-in table.

Parents should sit at the table with their usual small group. Please hand each small group leader this list of instructions:

- Catch up with the other participants.
- Facilitate discussion.
- Gather and distribute any required materials.
- Serve as a point person for answering questions.

Once everyone is checked in and settled, welcome parents back for this fourth and final session. Quickly remind them about breaks, refreshments, and restroom locations.

Begin the session with a prayer:

God our Father,

Your love is the source of family life, and every family is called to reflect your glory. We come before you today and seek to grow in faith, hope, and love as families in our parish. Give us wisdom and joy as we grow in our Faith and hand on the story of your love to our children. Bless our conversation today, and remain with us when we go home. Help us to take what we have learned and discussed and use it to bring our families closer to you. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Part 1—Preparation for Catechesis (13 minutes, small groups)

We begin by reflecting on the home experiences of family faith formation that took place in between sessions. As before, parents may share highlights, successes, and challenges and ask questions. Have the participants break out into their respective small groups, where they will remain through Part 1 and Part 2 of the session. Give group leaders these three prompts:

- Ask each parent to share one faith highlight or success from the past month. It might relate to last month's lessons, or it could pertain to prayer, experiences at Mass, or perhaps discussions about the Catholic Faith.

- Next, ask each parent to share what aspect of family faith formation he or she is finding the most difficult. Praying together? Going to Mass? Ask them to name something about living out the Faith that's hard for their family.
- Finally, ask parents to state a goal or goals they want to achieve this month to improve their family's faith life.

Part 2—Unit 6 Overview, Videos, and Discussion (40 minutes, small groups)

Unit 6 focuses on the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The videos will help parents gain a deeper understanding of the sacrament, and, more importantly, they will invite them to renew their own relationship with God through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Prompts for discussion are provided below, but this session would also be a great time to offer Reconciliation to parents. There are examinations of conscience for mothers and fathers included in the appendix of this guide (see pages 35–37). Even if Confession is not offered during the session, we recommend printing out the examinations of conscience and for parents for later discussion and use.

Video 1



Watch *Confession Is a Place of Victory* (8 minutes)

<https://media.ascensionpress.com/video/confession-is-a-place-of-victory/>

Discussion Questions (10 minutes)

- What stood out to you in this video? What ideas, images, and stories do you want to remember and share with others? How did this lesson square with your understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

There are many rich images, stories, and ideas here. Help your group focus on the gift of the sacrament, the role of the priest, and God's mercy. Encourage parents to be moved by this and experience it directly by going to Reconciliation either during this session (if offered) or later this week.

- What does this video make you want to share with your children?

There are many things in the video that can be helpful for parents and children alike. The animated analogy with garbage from the video is a good example. Help parents think about the best way to communicate and reinforce to their children the beauty of God's mercy in the sacrament.

Special Reading (8 minutes)

There is no second video for this session. Instead, please hand out the examinations of conscience and ask parents to read them.

A long time might have passed from the last time parents did a thorough examination of conscience. For that reason, you are encouraged to use these guides since they are tailored to fathers and mothers, but you can use other ones if you wish.

Discussion Questions (10 minutes)

- How have you examined your conscience in the past? What challenges, thoughts, and questions do you have?

Help parents share their thoughts and experiences, but ask them not to share information about their sins.

If Reconciliation is available, and even if it isn't, encourage some quiet time for examination.

Wrap-up (4 minutes, return to large group)

Invite everyone back to one large group. Draw out and answer questions about the day's content, summarize key points, and give parents directions and encouragement to support them through the month. Be sure to tell them about the First Reconciliation Retreat (see page 34).

Part 3—Closing: Parents and Children Together (15 minutes)

As the children return from their session with a catechist, ask parents and children to sit together, and then have the following discussion.

- Parents and children check in and share about the activities they did and what they learned and discussed.

End the session with a closing prayer:

Heavenly Father,

We give you thanks for the time we just shared and for the things we have learned. We ask that your Holy Spirit continue guiding us during this month so the seed of the Gospel that has been planted in us may bear good fruit, as Jesus taught us. Amen.

Close with one Hail Mary and one Glory Be. (Invite the parents and children to pray with you. These prayers can be found on page 218 of the Student Workbook.)

December Catechist and Children's Session

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Welcome the children as they come in. Quiet the group before the prayer. Explain that quietness and stillness help people focus on being in God's presence. Consider setting up a prayer table or sacred space to draw the children into the spirit of prayer. If there is a crucifix in the room, ask the children to face it for

the opening prayer.

Ask the boys and girls if they have any intentions they would like to pray for. If they offer intentions aloud, invite them to say just the name of the person they want to pray for.

Pray the Our Father together. Invite the children to turn to page 5 of their Student Workbook and pray along with you. Begin and end with the Sign of the Cross.

Independent Activities (15 minutes)

If any children come into the room after the prayer, welcome them. Ask them to take a seat and get settled.

While you take attendance, invite the children to open their workbooks and begin the “Work It Out!” activities for Unit 6. You can choose one or two activities for the whole group to do, or encourage the children to work through them in order:

6.1 “Reconciliation” Fill-in-the-Blank, page 211

6.2 “Cardinal Virtues” Word Match, page 213

These are activities that children can do on their own as everyone gets settled, but feel free to invite them to work with a friend or as a group. If they seem confused by an activity, consider beginning it with the whole class to provide a helpful example. Let the children know that they may ask you questions at any time.

Some activities introduce vocabulary words. Be prepared to explain the meaning of these words and talk about their importance. The glossary begins on page 309 of the Leader’s Guide, and the answers to the activities for Unit 6 appear on pages 279 and 281, respectively.

Interactive Activities: Unit 6 (40 minutes)

Be sure to do activity 6.1 to help children continue to learn their Act of Contrition, and do 6.2 if time allows.

6.1 Act of Contrition Round-Up

In this interactive game, the children will continue learning an Act of Contrition by arranging the lines in the proper order.

Prepare: Type out the traditional or modern Act of Contrition in very large letters, leaving space between sentences. (Use the version your group began to memorize in activity 5.1 in November.) Cut out the different sentences.

Direct: Mix up the sentences and distribute them to the children. Give each child one sentence from the Act of Contrition. Ask the children to read their part aloud for the group and then line it up in the correct order for the prayer.

Consider: Some children will have memorized the prayer by now, while others may still be working on it. Consider repeating this exercise until every child knows it by heart.

6.2 Portrait of a Young Saint

Prepare: Have paper, pencils, crayons, and markers available for the children to use.

Direct: Give each child a blank piece of paper. Then, remind them that they are called to sainthood by saying, “The saints are people just like us who did their best to live a holy life. They practiced virtue, received the sacraments often, and used their gifts to make the world a better place. Consider the things you have learned about yourself so far this year. What gifts do you have? What virtues? Where do you struggle? Using the space below, draw a portrait of yourself as a saint. How would you be remembered? What or who would you be the patron saint of?”

If time permits, ask the children if they wish to share their portraits with the others.

Consider: Encourage the children to choose noble and good things to be the patron saints of. They might say they are not worthy to be a saint or they don’t want to become a saint. One way to respond to those concerns is by acknowledging that all people in heaven are saints. We might not want to be a famous saint, and that is OK, but once in heaven, we will all try to help people make it there. Ask them how they would like to help people get to heaven.

Closing: Parents and Children Together (see Part 3, page 31)

First Reconciliation Retreat

Congratulations!

You, a catechist, and your classes of parents and children have successfully prepared for each of the *Renewed: Family Faith Formation* catechetical lessons, and we hope the parents and children have completed the *Renewed* program at home!

The children are almost ready for their first Confession. Almost.

But first, one final get-together with all of you in attendance is important. It's called the First Reconciliation Retreat. This retreat reviews the high points of what the children—and parents—learned over these memorable months, consolidates the concepts, and gives the children confidence before their first Reconciliation. You will celebrate, too.

This retreat needs to occur shortly after parents have finished teaching Unit 6, ideally in December or January. Ascension has a free First Reconciliation Retreat outline to help you prepare for this group event (see below for the link).

It is a good idea to give your priest a readout of the program and discuss the retreat with him. Be sure to invite him to the retreat, so he can welcome everyone, congratulate them, participate in activities, and say a few words to the children about their first Confession.

We thank you for your dedication to the people of your parish! Please click on the link to download Ascension's retreat content, and have a wonderful time at this special event.

In Christ,

Your Friends at Ascension



[Renewed First Reconciliation retreat resource](#)

Appendix: Examinations of Conscience

Introduction to an Examination of Conscience

An examination of conscience is an invitation to the Holy Spirit to convict us of our sins (see John 16:8). If that sounds dangerous, keep reading.

All of us have sinned and fallen short (see Romans 3:23). At some level, we all know it, and we aren't overly eager to face that reality. There is something inside us that wants to run and hide from the gaze of God the Father. It's been like this from the very beginning, all the way back to the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 3).

Our tendency to avoid the gaze of God the Father ties back to the original temptation and to the original lie that is at the root of human sinfulness. It is the lie that God is a controlling tyrant rather than a loving Father. Adam believed that lie, and he hid. Then, he made excuses and blamed everyone but himself.

The Devil thrives on this lie because he is the Great Accuser. He tempts, exploits, and solicits us to excuse, blame, deny, and hide. Then, he condemns us. He seeks to cut us off from the Father's love by instilling a false sense of God's identity and our identity.

It is important for us to remember our constant battle with the Devil, but more importantly, we need to remember that the Holy Spirit *convicts*. This is very different from being condemned. When we open our hearts in an examination of conscience, the Holy Spirit shines a light on our hearts and into our memories so that we can see our sins and be separated from them "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12).

Making a good examination of conscience is a chance to open ourselves to God's mercy, receive healing, and prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is important to take time to focus and be brave in the face of what we have done and what we have failed to do. Below are two specific examinations. One is for fathers, and the other is for mothers. These are NOT the only acceptable versions of an examination of conscience, but they were designed specifically for mothers and fathers whose children are preparing to receive God's mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. What a great time for parents to bravely search their own hearts and be renewed by the merciful love of God!

Examination of Conscience for Parents

This examination will focus on who you are as a father or mother. It is NOT designed to belittle or discourage you. It is designed to open a path in your heart for the Holy Spirit to convict, heal, and empower you to be more authentically who you were made to be. St. John Paul II reminds us, "We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures; we are the sum of the Father's love for us."¹ You have a heavenly Father who sees, knows, and loves you. He is pleased to invite you into the ultimate heart of your vocation as a father or mother, and repentance is a part of receiving that love. Here are some questions to ask as you seek forgiveness and strive to grow in your identity and mission.

1. John Paul II, World Youth Day homily, Toronto, Canada (July 28, 2002), 5, vatican.va.

Examination of Conscience for Fathers

First Commandment

- Have I made idols in my life?
- Have I put work, sports, leisure, myself, or anything else above God?
- What example have I set for my children in honoring God above all things?

Second Commandment

- Have I disrespected God through my language, whether in cursing his name or in using profanity?
- Have I set a bad example in my family through my use of words?
- How have I set a standard for God's name to be honored and sacred in our family?

Third Commandment

- Have I led my family into a proper worship of God on Sundays and Holy Days?
- Have I ensured that Mass is a priority above other activities?
- How have I invited my family into Sabbath observance?

Fourth Commandment

- How have I honored my own parents, even now, as an adult?
- How do I treat my spouse to set a standard for her to be honored by our children?
- How have I respected legitimate authority and set an example for our children?

Fifth Commandment

- Are there ways that I have harmed others or disrespected the dignity of others in my thoughts, words, or actions?
- How have I honored the dignity of each member of my family?
- Have I exercised discipline lovingly in my relationship with my child(ren)?

Sixth Commandment

- Have I been a faithful husband in my thoughts, words, and actions?
- Have I neglected my vows to love and honor my wife freely, totally, and faithfully?
- How have I been an image of Christ's love to her?
- How have I set an example of faithful love for my children?

Seventh Commandment

- Have I taken, grabbed, or grasped things that are not mine, whether property, ideas, or credit?
- How have I taught my children about respect for the property of others?
- Has ingratitude infected my attitude toward life?

Eighth Commandment

- Have I been honest in my speech and actions, or has lying crept into my habits?
- Are there particular lies that come to mind and for which I am in need of repentance?

Ninth and Tenth Commandments

- Have I looked lustfully at women or lusted after the lives, blessings, and situations of other families?

The Call of Fatherhood

- Have I taken seriously the call to spiritual leadership and accountability in my family?
- How have I reflected the image of God's fatherhood?

Examination of Conscience for Mothers

First Commandment

- Have I made idols in my life?
- Have I put work, sports, leisure, myself, or anything else above God?
- What example have I set for my children in honoring God above all things?

Second Commandment

- Have I disrespected God through my language, whether in cursing his name or in using profanity?
- Have I set a bad example in my family through my use of words?
- How have I set a standard for God's name to be honored and sacred in our family?

Third Commandment

- Have I led my family into a proper worship of God on Sundays and Holy Days?
- Have I ensured that Mass is a priority above other activities?
- How have I invited my family into Sabbath observance?

Fourth Commandment

- How have I honored my own parents, even now, as an adult?
- How do I treat my spouse to set a standard for him to be honored by our children?
- How have I respected legitimate authority and set an example for our children?

Fifth Commandment

- Are there ways that I have harmed others or disrespected the dignity of others in my thoughts, words, or actions?
- How have I honored the dignity of each member of my family?
- Have I exercised discipline lovingly in my relationship with my child(ren)?

Sixth Commandment

- Have I been a faithful wife in my thoughts, words, and actions?
- Have I neglected my vows to love and honor my husband freely, totally, and faithfully?
- How have I been an image of love to him?
- How have I set an example of faithful love for my children?

Seventh Commandment

- Have I taken, grabbed, or grasped things that are not mine, whether property, ideas, or credit?
- How have I taught my children about respect for the property of others?
- Has ingratitude infected my attitude toward life?

Eighth Commandment

- Have I been honest in my speech and actions, or has lying crept into my habits?
- Are there particular lies that come to mind and for which I am in need of repentance?

Ninth and Tenth Commandments

- Have I looked lustfully at men or lusted after the lives, blessings, and situations of other families?

The Call of Motherhood

- Have I taken seriously the call to spiritual leadership and nurturing in my family?
- How have I reflected the image of the Church as a mother?