

BACKGROUND NOTES FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

About the Theme – The Sacrament of Reconciliation

To help us understand this Sacrament we need to know a little bit about a Sacrament. A sacrament is something that uses signs – usually a combination of words and actions, that have a message for those who are celebrating it; they give them a gift. This gift (which Catholics call grace) is given by Jesus whom they meet in the Sacrament, to strengthen their relationship with him. Through the Sacraments God helps Catholics grow in friendship with him.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is known by various names:

- **The Sacrament of Confession:** This emphasises the confession of sins to a priest.
- **The Sacrament of Forgiveness:** This emphasises the belief that through the priest's prayer of absolution God grants the forgiveness of sin.
- **The Sacrament of Conversion:** This emphasises the call to return to the Father from whom one has strayed through sin.
- **The Sacrament of Reconciliation:** This emphasis that through the Sacrament the penitent is reconciled to God, and to each other.
- **The Sacrament of Penance:** This is the official title given to the sacrament and emphasises the need for the penitent to do penance to repair any damage their sins may have done.

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation the key signs are:

- The **words of absolution** which removes a person's sins.
- The **laying on of hands** which occurs many times during the sacraments to symbolise the giving of strength and power. When the sign is used in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, it reminds us of the times when Jesus laid his hands on the sick and healed them.

Through these signs Jesus heals the person of sin and reunites them with God and God's family – the Church.

This Sacrament was given by Jesus after the resurrection when he said to his apostles 'Whose sins you forgive they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain they are retained'. It was through these words that Jesus gave his Church the power to forgive sin and to reconcile sinners.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation brings those who receive it back to God, who forgives them and absolves them from their sins. During the Sacrament of Reconciliation the Church celebrates the gentle love and mercy of God which is illustrated in parables such as The Lost Sheep and The Prodigal Son. The Sacrament calls people to confess sins, seek forgiveness and be reconciled to God and to one another. It is a celebration because while Catholics are sorry for their sins, they know that, no matter how badly their friendship with God has been damaged, God still loves and heals the sinner.

For Catholics the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a source of joy and comfort. In the Sacrament they experience time and time again the extraordinary love of God.

CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

Catholics prepare for the sacrament by thinking about what to say to the priest. They may pray to the Holy Spirit to give them strength, guidance and courage to make a sincere and honest confession. Then Catholics make an examination of conscience. Your conscience is the sense of right and wrong that is inside you, and helps you to make good choices. During an examination of conscience the penitent (the person receiving the sacrament) thinks about what they have done and the bad choices for which they are sorry. The bad choices which are done on purpose are sins – that is something that spoils or breaks friendship with God and with other people. Sin is anything that breaks God's law of love.

The Sacrament

The priest welcomes the penitent and greets him or her with kindness in the name of Jesus. They make the Sign of the Cross together. The priest invites the penitent to have trust in God. He may say *'May God, who has enlightened every heart, help you to know your sins and trust in his mercy'*.

The priest might then read a short scripture passage which reminds the penitent of the mercy and gentleness of God who loves us and is always ready to forgive us.

The penitent confesses his/her sins – the bad choices they identified during the examination of conscience.

After the confession the priest may give a few words of advice and encouragement and then gives a penance which may be a prayer or a practical act of kindness. This is to give the penitent the opportunity to show the sincerity of their sorrow so that they may, in some small way, repair the damage his/her sins have done.

After a penance is given and accepted, the penitent expresses his/her sorrow. The person prays an act of sorrow, such as:

"O my God, because you are so good, I am very sorry that I have sinned against you and with the help of your grace I will not sin again."

This is one of the most important parts of the Sacrament. If the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to have an effect there must be true sorrow. To be truly sorry involves a determination to avoid repeating the wrong. It is not enough to say sorry – the penitent has to be willing to change and promise to make a new start. This is called **making a firm purpose of amendment**.

The priest then administers the Sacrament of Reconciliation. To do this he either places his hands on the penitent's head or extends his right hand over the penitent's head. The priest then prays the prayer of absolution which is the blessing that removes the person's sins. The priest makes a Sign of the Cross over the penitent as he recites the final words of the Prayer of Absolution, "And I absolve you from all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." It is enough for the children to know that the sign of the cross reminds us how Jesus loved us so much he died for us. It reminds us of God's love and forgiveness.

The penitent replies "Amen" to this prayer. The Sacrament ends with a very short prayer of thanks and dismissal which reminds the penitent of the great joy and comfort the Sacrament brings.

Overview

Key Vocabulary	<u>YEAR 3</u> Choices
Reconciliation Confession conscience sorrow penance sin choice consequences repentance penitent absolution grace	<p data-bbox="903 405 1169 439" style="text-align: center;">RECONCILIATION</p> <p data-bbox="592 461 1430 633">When making a choice, it is important to examine your conscience in order to make a good choice and minimise bad effects for ourselves and others. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a celebration of God’s love and mercy; it is about the forgiveness of sin and being reconciled with God and one another.</p> <p data-bbox="592 656 1018 685">Children will know and understand:</p> <ul data-bbox="592 707 1198 790" style="list-style-type: none">• Choices have consequences• The importance of conscience in making choices <p data-bbox="592 813 1150 842">See Background Notes for Parents and Carers</p> <p data-bbox="592 864 1437 1037">Week 1: Talk about how choices we make have consequences. Tell the story of ‘Choices’ and ask the key questions. Ask children to record on the grid some choices they have made; what the choice was; was it a good or a wrong choice; what were the consequences for you or other people?</p> <p data-bbox="592 1059 1430 1299">Week 2: Read the story of the Two Sons, ask the key questions and discuss their choices. Talk about what a conscience is and how it helps us make good choices. Every day, usually before going to sleep, many Christians ‘examine their life’ (‘conscience’). Ask children to make a prayer card (using the two prayers below) that they could use each evening to help them examine their conscience and say sorry for the bad choices.</p> <p data-bbox="592 1321 1430 1426">Week 3: Read the story of the Prodigal son and look at the painting by Rembrandt of <i>The Return of the Prodigal Son</i>. Discuss how God is like the father in the story, full of mercy and compassion.</p> <p data-bbox="592 1449 1437 1583">Introduce the Sacrament of Reconciliation, sometimes called <i>Confession</i> or <i>Penance</i>. Read the extract from Church’s Story, outlining what happens in the Sacrament. Ask children to put the different stages in order.</p> <p data-bbox="592 1606 1437 1778">Week 4: Look at the key vocabulary for this topic and use it to remember all we have learnt about choices, the consequences of good and bad choices, what an examination of conscience is and what happens in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Celebrate with a simple Act of Worship.</p>

Year 3

Year 3 children are introduced to the concept of sin and the importance of saying sorry and forgiveness. They are taught about and learn how to make an examination of conscience, say a simple prayer of sorrow, and are introduced to what happens during the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Week 1: Talk about how the choices that we make have consequences. Tell the story of 'Choices' (see below) and ask the key questions. *Record on the grid some choices you have made. Say what the choice was. Was it a good choice or wrong choice. What were the consequences for you or other people?*

Week 2: Tell the story of the Two Sons (see below), ask the key questions and discuss their choices. Talk about what a conscience is and how it helps us make good choices. You might know the song "*Pinocchio and Jiminy Cricket – Always Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide*". Many Christians pray every day for the help they need to make good choices. Every day, usually before going to sleep, many Christians 'examine their life' ('conscience'). This means that they think about what has happened during the day and how they have tried to be the kind of person that God who loves them, wants them to be. They think about what they have done during the day – the good choices they have made for which they say thank you, and the bad choices for which they are sorry. The wrong choices which are done on purpose are sins – that is something that spoils or breaks friendship with God and with other people. Sin is anything that breaks God's law of love. It is always something that has been done on purpose, not accidentally, or it is something we should do and purposely do not do it. *Make a prayer card (using the two prayers below) that you could use each evening to help you examine your conscience and say sorry for the bad choices.*

Week 3: God is always loving and forgiving and here is a story that Jesus told that shows this. Read the story of the Prodigal son (see below). Find a picture of the Prodigal Son on Google e.g. Rembrandt's *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (see below). Talk about what is happening in the picture and what the characters might be thinking. God is full of mercy and compassion. God always loves you but does not like sin.

One of the more formal ways of saying sorry to God is through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is sometimes called *Confession* or *Penance*. It is in this Sacrament that Christians celebrate God's love and mercy. It helps them to think about their lives and how they are following Jesus and it gives them the opportunity to make a new start. Read the extract from Church's Story (see below) outlining what happens in the Sacrament. *Can you put the different stages of the celebration of the Sacrament in order?*

Week 4: Look at the key vocabulary for this topic and use it to remember all we have learnt about choices, the consequences of good and bad choices, what an examination of conscience is and what happens in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Celebrate with a simple Act of Worship (see below).

Week 1 Choices

It was holiday time, and lots of children were playing in the park. Tom and Andrew had met some of their friends and were looking forward to a good game of football. Just then, along came Paul. "Just look," said Tom, "he's got his sister with him!" And there she was. Jane was dressed in her shorts and was wearing new trainers. "What have you brought her for?" asked Andrew. "I had to choose," said Paul. "Mum said I could come if I brought Jane, but if not, I would have to play with her at home."

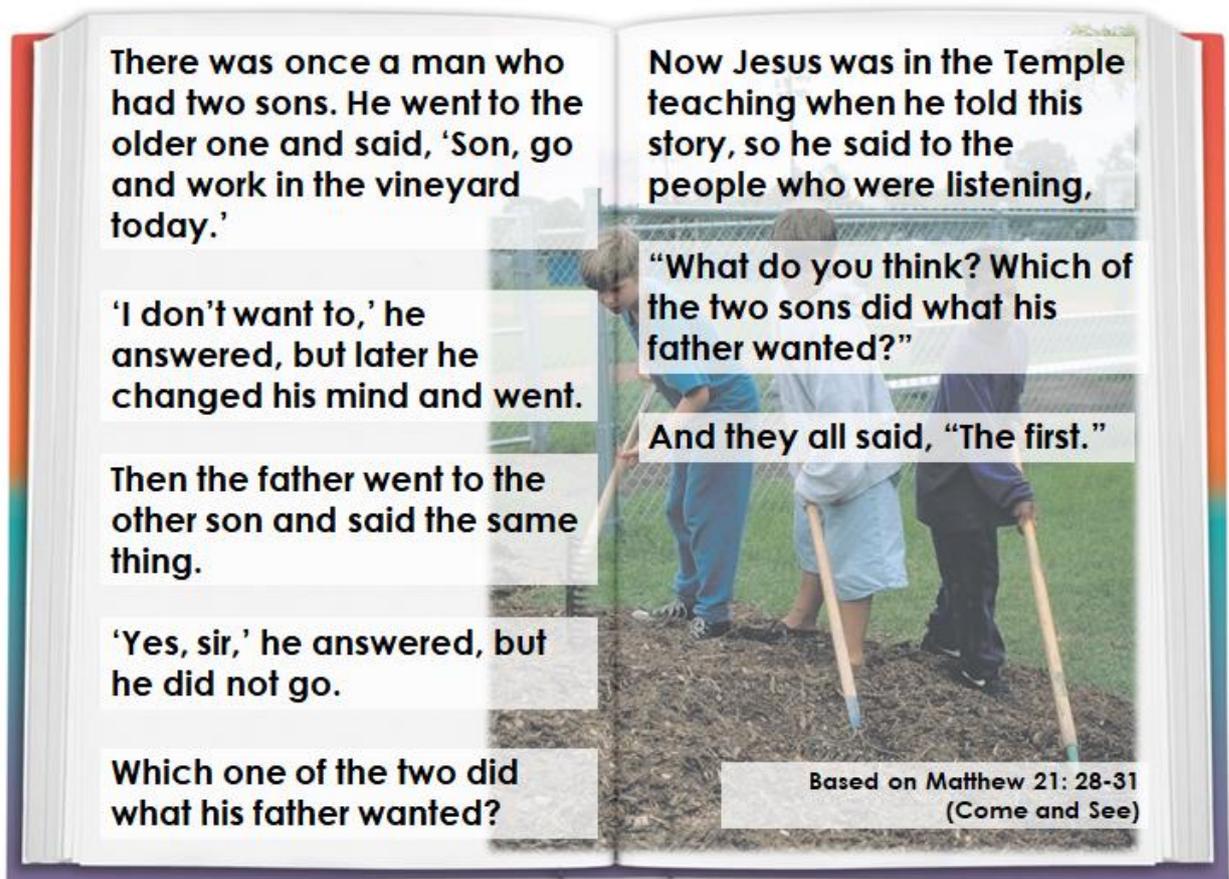
"It's all right," said Jane, "I can play football. I've been practising at home, and I've got my new trainers." Tom liked Jane. He'd seen her kicking a football in the school playground and knew she wouldn't spoil the game, but he felt a bit afraid of saying so. He thought Andrew wouldn't be friends with him if he did.

"Hurry up," shouted the rest of the gang. "Aren't you going to play today?" It was now or never. "Come on Jane," said Tom, "we'd better put our football boots on and show them." Then he turned to Andrew, "Give her a chance," he said. The game started before Andrew had a chance to answer. And they all enjoyed it - Tom, Paul and Andrew, and of course, Jane. None of them regretted that Paul had brought his sister with him.

- Q What do the words *choice* and *consequence* mean?
- Q What choices can you find in the story?
- Q What two choices did Mum give Paul?
- Q What do you think Paul said to his Mum?
- Q How do you think Jane felt when she heard what Tom said, and what Andrew said?
- Q How do you think Paul felt?
- Q What were the consequences of Paul's choice?

What choices have you had to make recently? Did you make the right choice? How did you choose and what were the consequences?

Choice	Good or Wrong	Consequence



The first son

- Q What was his first choice?
- Q Why do you think he chose as he did?
- Q How do you think he felt?
- Q Can you think of some of the consequences of his choice?
- Q Can you think of reasons why he changed his mind? How did he feel?
- Q Do you think that was easy? Give reasons.
- Q Have you ever done something like this? When? Why?

The second son

- Q What did the second son choose?
- Q Why do you think he changed his mind?
- Q How do you think he felt?
- Q Have you ever done something like this? When? Why?

The father

- Q How do you think the father felt about his two sons?
- Q Why did the father react like this?

Week 2: Make a Prayer card using these two prayers

Holy Spirit, you are with us when we choose.

For our good choices and the joy of making them, we thank you.

For the joy they bring us and others, we thank you.

For our wrong choices, we are sorry.

For the hurt we have done to others, we are sorry.

Help us to take time to think.

We ask you to help and guide us, Amen

O my God because you are so good,

I am very sorry that I have sinned against you

and with the help of your grace I will not sin again. Amen

THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON (based on Luke 15:11-32)

A man had two sons. The younger became impatient of living at home on the farm. He wanted to set out into the wide world and seek his fortune. He said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the money from the farm that would come to me when you die."

His father was very sad to hear this, but he loved his son, so he sold off half the farm and gave him the money.

The older brother was furious, but the younger son was delighted. He had never had so much money in his life! At once he set off for a far country where nobody would know him and his riches would impress everyone. And they were impressed! He soon found friends to help him to spend his money. He really enjoyed himself. He did anything he wanted. There would be plenty of time later to get a job, and come home to his family a very wealthy man.

But a famine spread quickly over the country. Crops failed and there was very little work of any sort to be had. His new friends could not even be bothered to offer him a meal. The only job he could find was working on the farm of a Gentile – feeding pigs! He was so hungry that he would have been glad to eat the pigs' food himself. At last he came to his senses.

"Even my father's servants have more food than they want, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I don't deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants." So he left the place and went back to his father.

His father had been watching out, hoping his son would come home. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him, barefoot, ragged and dirty and so very pale and thin. He ran to the boy and hugged and kissed him.

The son began his speech, but his father interrupted him, calling to the servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening and prepare a feast. I want to celebrate, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found."

Week 3 The Return of the Prodigal Son by Rembrandt



Week 3 The Sacrament of Reconciliation (Church's Story 3)

RECONCILIATION



In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we celebrate God's love and mercy. We learn about the joys and challenges of living as a follower of Jesus in love and peace.

During Reconciliation, the Church celebrates the love and mercy of God and calls people to confess sins, seek forgiveness and be reconciled to God and to one another.

Reconciliation is known by various names: Penance, Confession, Sacrament of Forgiveness

It is another sacrament we can celebrate often. It helps us to live as followers of Jesus.

Sometimes the parish family comes together to celebrate a Service of Reconciliation. During this time individuals may make their confession to a priest. At other times the priest and one member of the parish family celebrate the sacrament.



Before confessing their sins, people will have spent some time thinking about ways in which they have not lived as Jesus did. This is called an examination of conscience.

CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT

At the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the priest welcomes the person in the name of Jesus. They make the Sign of the Cross together. Sometimes they listen to a passage from the Bible.

The person confesses his or her sins to the priest.

The priest asks them to say or do something to make up for their sins and as a sign that they will try to do better in the future. This is called a penance.

The person prays an act of sorrow, such as:

"O my God, because you are so good, I am very sorry that I have sinned against you and with the help of your grace I will not sin again."

The promise to make a new start is called a firm purpose of amendment.

The priest then raises his hand over the person and says the words of forgiveness and absolution.

"I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Together they say a prayer for God's forgiveness and love.



Week 3 What happens at the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

Put these in the correct order.

The priest says the words of forgiveness and absolution.

The priest talks kindly to them and encourages them to do or say something to make up for what they have done wrong. This is called a penance.

The priest welcomes the penitent, and they both make the Sign of the Cross.

The person leaves the priest and prays and thanks God for forgiving them and completes the penance the priest has asked them to do.

The penitent confesses (tells the priest his/her sins).

The person then prays an act of sorrow, which includes the promise to try not to do the same again.

The penitent (person confessing his/her sins), takes time to examine their conscience (life). This means to think about the times they have not followed Jesus' way of love and kindness.



Act of Worship
Year 3
CHOICES



“The importance of conscience in making choices”

**Gathering
Together**

You may like to set up a focal table:
Table with candle and purple cloth
Picture of the Prodigal Son
Bible if possible
Any work done on the topic

We begin our liturgy on ‘Choices’ by lighting our candle and remembering that God is present in our gathering as we say **In the name of the Father...**

We have been reflecting on how all choices have consequences – some good and some bad!

**The Word
of God**

When he was teaching the people and trying to help them, Jesus told this story about two sons who made choices. Choices always have consequences. Let’s sing ‘Alleluia’ to greet the Gospel and then listen to the story:

A reading from the Holy Gospel According to Matthew
Glory to You, O Lord

(We make the sign of the cross on our forehead, lips and heart, in preparation to hear the Good News of the Gospel. We make the sign of the cross on our foreheads to show we believe in God’s Word, on our lips to show we try to speak God’s Word to others, and on our hearts to show we love God’s Word and will try to live a good life).

There was once a man who had two sons. He went to the older one and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’
‘I don’t want to,’ he answered,
but later he changed his mind and went.
Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing.
‘Yes, sir,’ he answered,
but he did not go.
Which one of the two did what his father wanted?
Now Jesus was in the Temple teaching when he told this story,
so he said to the people who were listening,
“What do you think? Which of the two sons did what his father wanted?”
And they all said,
“The first.”

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to You Lord Jesus Christ

**Response to
the Word**

Choosing wisely is important. Christians try to live as Jesus lived. There are some things that will help in making a good choice; to pray and ask for help, to get advice from someone you trust and know makes good choices and to think about the possible consequences of the choices.

We all know that we are supposed to make the right choices. But we also know that at times we do not succeed. Examine your conscience for a moment and think of a time when you deliberately made a choice you knew wasn't the right

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation we celebrate God's love and mercy. God is just like the forgiving Father in the story of the Prodigal Son. In the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation the Church also calls people to confess their sins, ask for forgiveness and be reconciled to God and to one another. During the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Act of Contrition, also called the Prayer of Sorrow, is said. Let's say that prayer together now for all the times we made choices we are sorry about...

**O my God, because you are so good,
I am very sorry that I have sinned against you
and with the help of your grace I will not sin again. Amen**

Going

For the next week we will try to remember to examine our conscience every night before we go to sleep. We will think about what we have done during the day – the good choices we have made for which we can say thank you, and the bad choices for which we can say sorry.

Let us pray together:

**Holy Spirit, you are with us when we choose.
For our good choices and the joy of making them, we thank you.
For the joy they bring us and others, we thank you.
For our wrong choices, we are sorry.
For the hurt we have done to others, we are sorry.
Help us to take time to think.
We ask you to help and guide us, Amen**

