

## 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

<b>Key Vocabulary</b>	<b><u>YEAR 4</u></b> <b>Building Bridges</b> <b>RECONCILIATION</b>
bridges friendship contrition Absolution Sacrament of Reconciliation Examination of Conscience sin penance confession	<p>In order for bridges to be built, a person has to acknowledge wrongdoing, so as to be reconciled to others and to God. This can be formally celebrated in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.</p> <p>Children know and understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Building bridges of friendship</li><li>• The importance of admitting wrong and being reconciled with God and one another</li></ul> <p><b>See Background Notes for Parents and Carers</b></p> <p><b>Week 1:</b> Discuss bridges and their importance. Read 'A Bridge of Friendship' and discuss the questions. Ask children to build a strong bridge with any construction materials and to write words describing a strong friendship around it. They might want to photograph their bridge and share it.</p> <p><b>Week 2:</b> Read the story of the Lost Sheep and discuss the meaning of 'sin'. Read the Greatest Commandment and talk about what it means to 'examine our consciences'. Ask children to write a short story/account about the ways in which God's law of love can be broken and how a bridge might be rebuilt.</p> <p><b>Week 3:</b> Explore what happens in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, reading from Church's Story 3. Look at what contrition and absolution mean. Ask children to make a glossary of all the new words they have learnt about the Sacrament of Reconciliation.</p> <p><b>Week 4:</b> Look at the key vocabulary for this topic and their meanings and use it to remember all we have learnt about building bridges, what sin is, examination of conscience, contrition, absolution and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Celebrate with a simple Act of Worship.</p>

## Year 4

**Year 4** children learn about the importance of building bridges in our relationships with others and with God; what sin is; the significance of an examination of conscience, contrition and absolution; and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

**Week 1:** Find some pictures of different bridges on the internet, Talk about what they do and why we need them. Discuss how they are constructed. A bridge needs to be built from both sides. A bridge must be strong enough for people to walk on. Bridges span or stretch across things. A bridge needs to be cared for and looked after otherwise it will just fall down. Read the story A Bridge of Friendship (see below) and discuss the key questions. *If you have any construction material at home (lego, blocks, card) try building a strong bridge. Write as many words as you can think of to describe a strong friendship and place them around your bridge. You might want to photograph your bridge and share it with your friends on Whatsapp or by text.*

**Week 2:** Read the story of the Lost Sheep (see below) and answer the questions.

People get lost when they deliberately do something wrong, hurting others, themselves or the world they live in. That is what is called 'sin'. It is also anything you choose to do or not to do that spoils or breaks your friendship with God and with other people. Read The Greatest Commandment (see below).

Christians try to build bridges towards one another every day. They 'examine their consciences' to see how they have kept these two commandments. Our conscience is like a voice or feeling inside us. This is the Holy Spirit helping us to respond to God. It is good to think every evening, before you go to bed, about how you have built bridges of love and friendship or, perhaps, broken them through sin. We remember if we have done something that hurt someone else or if someone else has hurt us. We can thank God for all the good and say sorry for the bad and know that God, like the good shepherd, cares about us and loves us. We also must try to forgive those who have hurt us.

When we have made wrong choices the Sacrament of Reconciliation brings us back to God, who forgives us and absolves us from our sins. God's mercy and love is like the tenderness shown in the story of the Lost Sheep. We can be sure God loves us.

*Think about the ways in which God's law of love can be broken. Write a short story/account to illustrate one of these occasions and how a bridge might be rebuilt.*

**Week 3:** Read 'The Sacrament of Reconciliation' from *Church's Story 3* (see below). This Sacrament has been given to us to confess or acknowledge our sins, seek forgiveness and be reconciled to God and one another. Those receiving this sacrament may be sure of the love and mercy of God.

The most important thing that people preparing to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation need is to be sorry for their sins. There is a special word for this – '**contrition**'. When you have had a quarrel with someone, you can never make up unless you are really and truly sorry – that is, if you have contrition. It about realising the consequences of what you have done, the hurt you have caused to others, as well as to yourself.

There are two different ways of celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation, individually visiting the priest or within a Service of Reconciliation

At the end of the Sacrament of Reconciliation the priest says the words of **absolution**. The priest gives the person a penance to fulfil. Sometimes it is a prayer to say or sometimes the priest might ask the person to do something extra. When we do something wrong and then later feel sorry about it, we want to make up for it in some way. Then, after the person prays an Act of Sorrow, the priest raises his hands as a sign of God's love and says the words of forgiveness and absolution. He asks God to forgive and absolve the person from their sins. To be absolved of sin means to be free from sin. This is what the priest says:

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

This sacrament is a special way to experience God's love and peace. The person usually stays in church or in a quiet place to say their penance, if it is a prayer. They will thank God for this opportunity to experience his love and forgiveness and promise to try to do better.

Make a glossary of all the new words you have learnt about the Sacrament of Reconciliation in a grid (see below)

**Week 4:** Look at the key vocabulary for this topic and use it to remember all we have learnt about building bridges, what sin is, examination of conscience, contrition, absolution and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Celebrate with a simple Act of Worship (see below).

Week 1

### **A Bridge of Friendship**

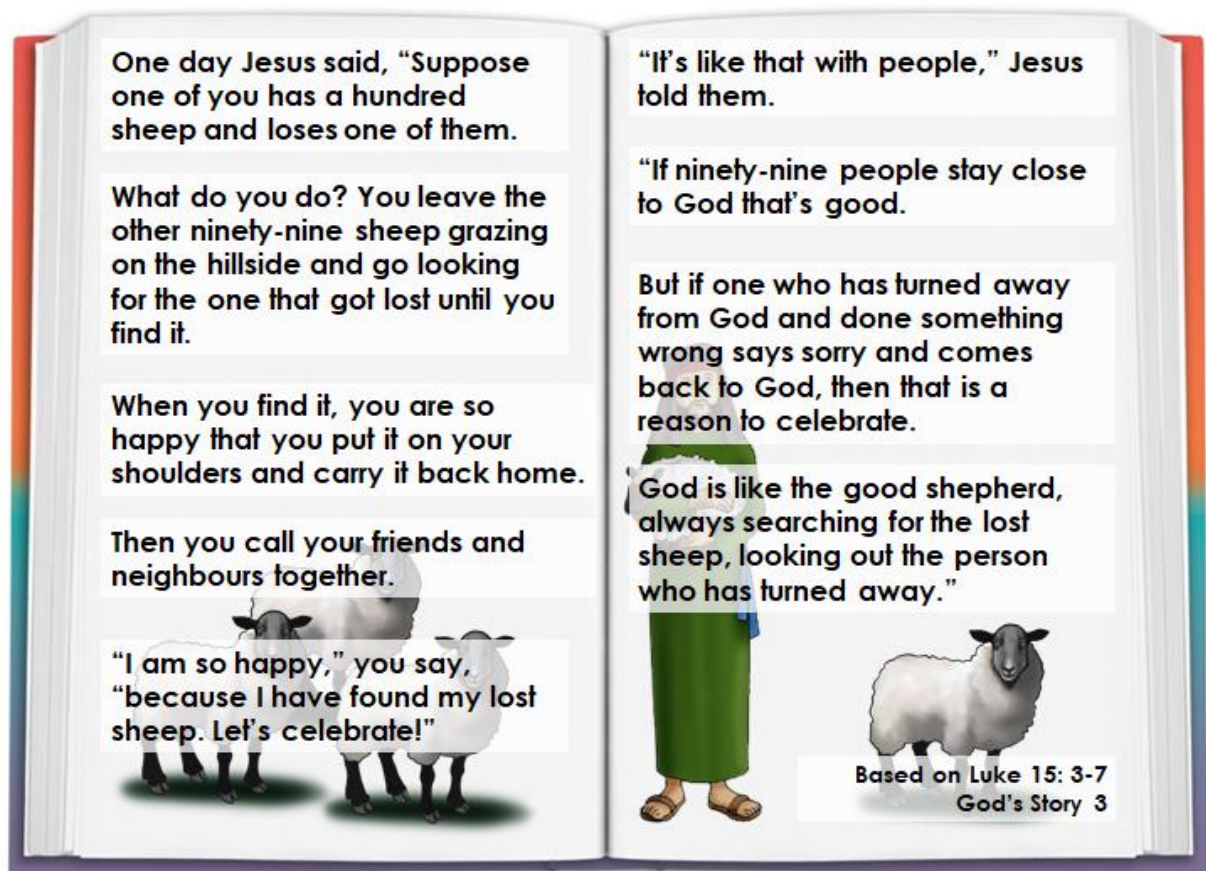
When I started school, I met Charlotte. She was standing by a table looking shy. I said, "Hello I'm Poppy!" and she said, "Hello!" We were friends from then on. We sat at the same table to do our work. We both liked ICT best in school and we worked on it together. Charlotte is good at art so she helped me and I'm good at science so I helped her. We shared jokes and laughed together. We were also friends with Lucy and Will. I liked Charlotte, but then things changed. Charlotte went and sat by Emily one day to share her new book. I thought she would come back and sit by me, but she didn't. At playtime, she stayed with Emily and I played with Lucy and Will. I wondered how I could build a bridge of friendship to Charlotte.

A friendship is like a bridge between people - it needs to be strengthened, maintained or repaired.

- Q What brought Charlotte and Poppy together as friends?
- Q Why do you think the friendship faded?
- Q What do you think about Poppy?
- Q What do you think Charlotte might do?
- Q How will the story end?
- Q Has anything like this ever happened to you?
- Q How did you feel?
- Q What did you do to mend the friendship?

Week 2

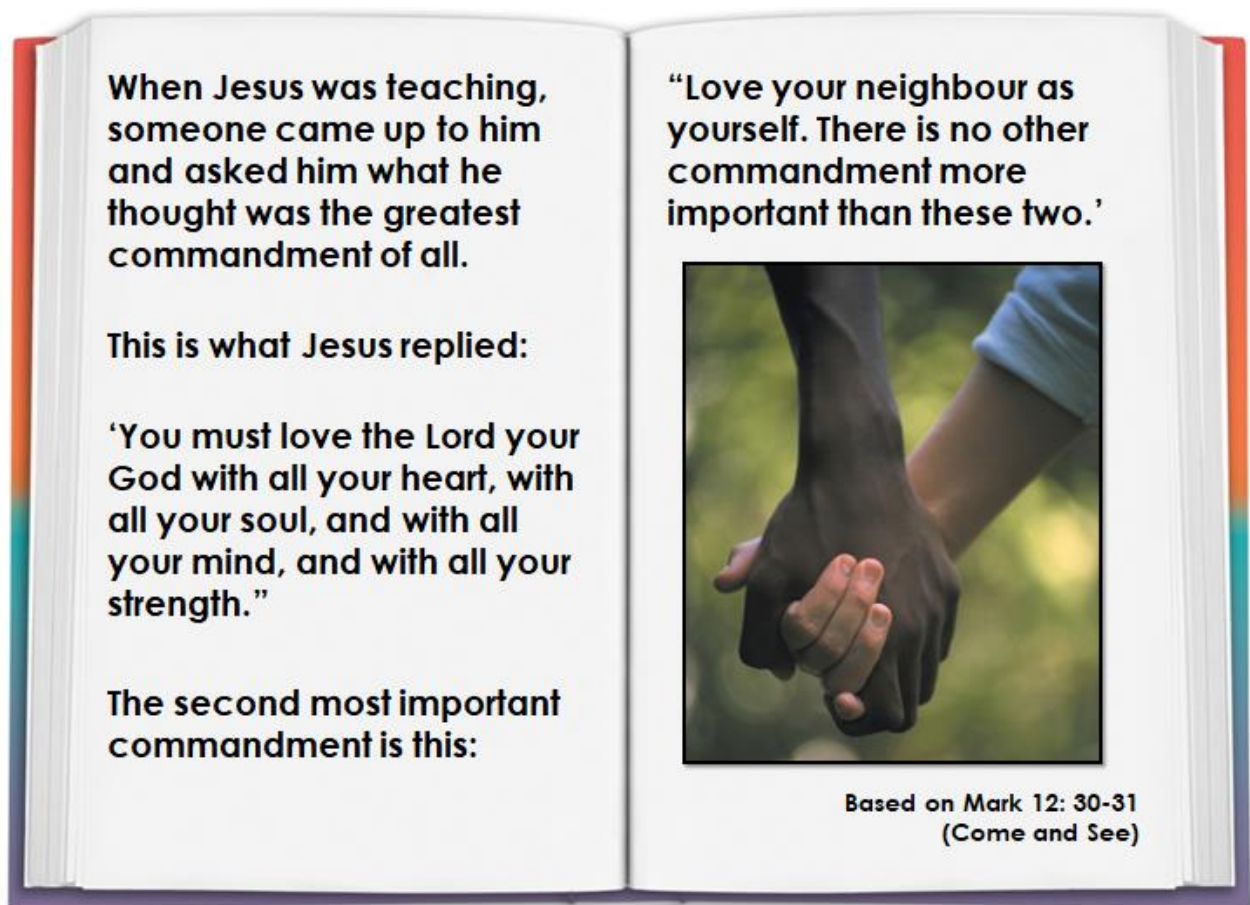
The Lost Sheep



- Q What did the story of the 'lost sheep' mean to you?
- Q Did it surprise you that the shepherd would go to find the one lost sheep?
- Q When are the times you might see yourself as the lost sheep?
- Q What does this story tell you about God?

Week 2

The Greatest Commandment



- Q** Which is easier – to love God or to love your neighbour? Is there a difference?
- Q** Why do you think love of God and love of our neighbour is so important?
- Q** What would be another commandment?



## 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 do these words mean?

Word	Meaning
Reconciliation	
Sin	
Examination of conscience	
Contrition	
Penance	
Absolution	



**Act of Worship  
Year 4  
“BUILDING BRIDGES”**

***The importance of admitting wrong, and being reconciled  
with one another and God.***

**Gathering**

**Together**

You might like to set up a focal table:

Table, cloth and a candle

Bible if possible

Model bridge (or drawing or illustration)

Flash cards - “Contrition”, “Absolution”, “Reconciliation”

Welcome to our liturgy to celebrate the topic “Building Bridges”.

We gather together today **In the name of the Father...**

As we light our candle, let’s remember that God wants all of us to be reconciled as friends of God, and of each other.

Christians try to build bridges towards one another every day. They ‘examine their consciences’ to see how they have failed to love God and their neighbours. Our conscience is like a voice or feeling inside us. This is the Holy Spirit helping us to respond to God. If we pay attention to the Holy Spirit, it will help us to know if something is good or bad. Let us think in silence for a moment about how we have built bridges of love and friendship this week or, perhaps, broken them through sin. We can thank God for all the good and say sorry for the bad and know that God, like the good shepherd, cares about us and loves us.

We have been reflecting on the importance of building bridges of love and friendship. A friendship is like a bridge between people. A bridge needs to be cared for and looked after – otherwise it just falls down. Friendships need to be strengthened, maintained or repaired.

**The Word  
of God**

Jesus wanted everyone to know that God’s capacity to love and forgive was never-ending, and no matter what they did wrong, they would always be forgiven. This Gospel reading illustrates this. Let us sing ‘Alleluia’ to greet the Gospel.

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke.

**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).*

“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. What do you do? You leave the other ninety-nine sheep grazing on the hillside and go looking for the one that got lost until you find it. When you do find it, you are so happy that you put it on your shoulders and carry it back home. Then you call your friends and neighbours together. “I am so happy,” you say, “because I have found my lost sheep. Let’s celebrate!” “It’s like that with people,” Jesus told them. “If ninety-nine people stay close to God, that’s good. But if one who has turned away from God and done something wrong, says sorry and comes back to God, then that is a reason to celebrate. God is like the good shepherd, always searching for the lost sheep, the person who has turned away.”



The Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Response to  
The Word**

The Sacrament of Reconciliation brings us back to God, who forgives us and absolves us from our sins. God’s mercy and love is like the tenderness shown in the story. We can be sure God loves us.

A way we can express our sorrow for the times we have been like the lost sheep and wandered away from God is by making an Act of Contrition or Act of Sorrow.

Examine your conscience for a moment to think about a time when you knew you chose to do the wrong thing.....

Now in order to repair and strengthen our relationship with God let us make an Act of Contrition together....

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

As a symbol of the bridge building that we have done with God, let’s do what we would do in Mass: shake the hand of the person standing next to you, and offer them the Sign of Peace saying **“Peace be with you”**.

**Going  
Forth**

Before we finish, let’s make a promise to God that we will try to build a bridge of friendship towards someone every day, as well as take time at the end of each day to build our bridge to God by saying sorry for having done wrong.

