

## HEART SPEAKS TO HEART THE GIFT OF RECONCILIATION

### INTRODUCTION FOR CATECHISTS

#### What does it mean to be a Catechist?

A catechist is someone who delivers *catechesis*. The word catechesis derives from a Greek verb meaning 'echo'. In the catechesis of the Church we 'echo' the teaching of Christ Jesus.

#### Two important aspects of Church Catechesis:

1. The instruction passed on in Catechesis is not the personal opinion of the catechist about God. Rather, a catechist passes on knowledge of the faith which she or he has received from the Church and ultimately from Jesus Christ Himself.
2. In instruction provided in the early Church and later, teaching took place in a dialogue of question and answer between the **catechist** (teacher) and **catechumen** (student). Such dialogue presumes a serious engagement on the part of the catechumen. Catechesis stands between the very first announcement of Christ's gospel (which we now call '**Initial Evangelisation**') and the advanced instruction of mature Christians (which we call '**Ongoing Formation**'). Usually, catechesis refers to the particular preparation of candidates to receive the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist).

#### What sort of instruction should the Catechist aim to pass on?

It is very important to note that Catechesis does not merely aim to communicate factual information about Christ's message or the Church's teaching. As St John Paul II suggested, "**The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ**" (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 5) and so also with God the Father through the Holy Spirit. This communion is achieved by a personal transformation on the part of catechumens as they draw closer to Christ, becoming a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17) in His image.

The information which Catechesis aims to pass on is not the same as the intricate and sometimes dry explanations of doctrine given by academic theologians. Catechesis should always engage a catechumen at a personal level, seeking to present a **relationship with Christ** as an attractive and important choice for the catechumen to make.

An engaging understanding of God's revelation may well be passed on more readily by stories and shared experiences than by the rote learning of religious truths. The central narrative or proclamation (the *kerygma*) about Christ (that He suffered for our sins, died and rose to offer us new life with Him) should therefore form the core narrative on which all catechesis is based and which a catechist always seeks to illuminate.

### **How can I prepare to be a Catechist?**

Since Catechesis is principally about passing on the knowledge of Christ which can facilitate an intimate relationship of love with Him, it is most important that the catechist herself or himself renews her or his own **relationship with God**. As Pope Francis writes:

*"The heart of a catechist always beats with this movement: union with Christ – encounter with others. Both of these: I am one with Jesus and I go forth to encounter others. If one of these movements is missing, the heart no longer beats, it can no longer live"* (Address to the International Congress on Catechesis, 27<sup>th</sup> September 2013).

This union with Christ can be facilitated in many ways:

- **by encountering Jesus in the Bible**
- **by spending time in personal prayer**
- **by responding to Christ's call to repentance through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and by receiving Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist**

As a catechist, it is important to remember that God's Word is addressed to you as well as to catechumens and that responding to it may mean accepting its challenge to follow God more faithfully. **Enthusiasm for relationship with Christ is contagious** and is the best way to lead others to faith. A famous prayer of St John Henry Newman asks for God's help to share our faith in this way:

*"Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as You shine,  
so to shine as to be a light to others.  
The light, O Jesus will be all from You; none of it will be mine;  
It will be you shining on others through me."*

It is very important, of course, for you to prepare to teach the particular preparation classes by reading over each session in advance to know the session content and structure. In addition to this essential preparation, it may be useful to read over the relevant topic each week in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, so that you understand the material which you are covering and can answer any questions which arise. If you do not understand all of the material yourself, it may be helpful to ask your parish priest or another catechist or Gregory Stacey, the diocesan Co-ordinator for Adult Formation and Research ([Gregory.stacey@dioceseofleeds.org.uk](mailto:Gregory.stacey@dioceseofleeds.org.uk) or 0113 261 8043). Further useful information about how to prepare spiritually and practically for work as a catechist may be found in Hannah Vaughan-Spruce's *A Handbook for Catechists* (CTS, 2018).

Ultimately, however, a catechist can only do his or her best to put catechumens in a position to be united to Christ in faith and to receive the grace offered in the Sacraments. **Faith itself and transformation in Christ are gifts from God.** That is why St Paul ascribes the fruits of preaching to God, who works through and alongside our efforts:

*"I planted, Apollos watered, but God provided the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but rather God who provides the growth". (1 Corinthians 3:6-7)*



## What is the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

### What is Reconciliation?

**Reconciliation** is the Sacrament in which our relationship with Jesus and His Church is repaired when we have damaged it through sin. In Reconciliation, acknowledging that our actions have harmed our relationship with God, we confess our sins to God through the ministry of a priest. We express our regret for our sins and undertake a task to help to undo the harms we have caused to ourselves and others. Through Reconciliation, our sins are forgiven so that we can have a clear conscience before God. At a deeper level, this sacrament restores our dignity as children of God, who already share in God's own life and hope for an even closer relationship with Him in Heaven.

*"Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." (Romans 8:17)*

Reconciliation is one of the seven **Sacraments** of the Catholic Church.

### What is a Sacrament?

A Sacrament is an invitation from God, an encounter with Christ through the signs of words and actions as He shares His love with us. These words and actions have their origin in the teaching and actions of Christ Himself.

Just as Jesus called for repentance (Mark 1:15) and forgave sins during his ministry (Mark 2:5), after His resurrection He extended this power to forgive sins to his disciples, saying:

*"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*  
(John 20:22-3)

As catechists, it is a great privilege to be able to pass on our understanding of the significance of Reconciliation to our children.

### The Name of the Sacrament

In the Diocese of Leeds, we have written a book called *Heart Speaks to Heart* to help our children prepare to celebrate this Sacrament for the first time. We have called the Sacrament 'Reconciliation' because this is the word used in *The Way, the Truth and the Life* (the Religious Education programme taught in all our diocesan primary schools).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* identifies five names for this Sacrament (CCC 1423-1424) but privileges the word Penance. Indeed, the Rite (the words and actions prescribed for the celebration of this Sacrament) is called the Rite of Penance. The Sacrament is popularly known, of course, as the Sacrament of Confession.

The five different names for the Sacrament identified in the Catechism are: conversion, Penance, confession, forgiveness and Reconciliation. A description of Reconciliation has been given above. Below there are descriptions of the four other terms:

- **Penance.** Penance traditionally referred to the process of conversion after sin, or the virtue by which people turn away from sin towards God. In a more recent sense, 'penance' is something we do to show that we are sorry for our sins and to repair the damage caused by sin. As part of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the priest gives us a particular penance to perform. But we don't perform penance by ourselves, as if we can make up for sin by our own actions. Rather, our penance helps us to grow closer to God and unites us to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.  
*"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."* (Luke 9:23)
- **Confession.** In Reconciliation we acknowledge our sins to God, asking for his forgiveness, by telling our sins to a priest. Confessing our sins to a priest might seem scary, but admitting what we've done 'out loud' helps us to really feel sorry for our sins. It also reminds us that, as members of the Church, we make our journey with God alongside and through our fellow Catholics. By confessing our sins we are reconciled with God and His Church.  
*"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."* (James 5:16)
- **Forgiveness.** Through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, God forgives our sins. Our penance can sometimes also help us to gain forgiveness from our neighbours.  
*"If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (1 John 1:9)
- **Conversion.** Conversion means a fundamental change in attitude, by which we turn from sin to God. The meaning of conversion is beautifully illustrated in Jesus' parable of the 'Prodigal Son' (Luke 15:11-32). In our journey with God in the Church, conversion begins with the sacrament of Baptism, in which we are united to Christ and freed from original sin. However, conversion is an ongoing process as we repent of our sins after Baptism and grow to know God more deeply. Through Reconciliation, we renew the process of conversion.  
*"I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you."* (Luke 15:18)

## **HEART SPEAKS TO HEART**

### **A Resource to Assist in the Preparation for First Reconciliation**

#### **PREPARATION (before the sessions begin)**

##### **Gather a Team**

It is good practice to have a team of catechists and helpers who will meet before the course begins to pray together, plan the sessions and share out the various tasks. Ask parishioners to pray for the children, their families and the catechists and helpers.

##### **Roles for Catechists and Helpers (when it is possible to hold sessions physically) include:**

- Setting up the room for the sessions
- Preparing any technical equipment
- Arranging a focal point (especially for prayer)
- Organising refreshments (when possible)
- Welcoming families
- Leading prayer and music
- Working with individuals and small groups – especially for any participants with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and those for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL)
- Acting as the Lead Catechist for the session (a variety of lead catechists over the course would be the ideal to aim for)

##### **Online Resources**

Become familiar with the resources which are available on the website of the Diocese of Leeds (<https://www.dioceseofleeds.org.uk>). Scroll down the Home Page until you come to a series of tiles and click on the **First Sacraments** tile. This will take you to a further four tiles: the tiles **First Reconciliation** and **Catechists' Resources** will provide you with resources to help with the preparation for First Reconciliation. You can access this section of the website by searching for: dioceseofleeds/first-sacraments.

Note that to access the Catechists' Resources tile you will require a password: **Godsgifts20**

##### **Home Learning**

When it is not possible to meet physically, you may be able to meet remotely with children and their parents or carers. **Home Learning Guidance** is available in the **Catechists' Resources** area of the website. Also available there is **Feedback Advice Using Online Platforms** and **Feedback Sheets** (for those families who cannot access online platforms).

### **Safeguarding Advice**

Guidance for Safeguarding is available in the **Catechists' Resources** area of the website (under **Safeguarding Advice**). Please read and carefully follow the guidance given there. Please also ensure that all involved with catechesis are familiar with this guidance.

### **Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities**

Please read the advice given in **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Advice** (in the **Catechists' Resources** area of the website). In the **First Reconciliation** area there are suggestions for **Creative Ways to Engage Children**, which may help some children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities to engage more easily with the First Reconciliation programme.

### **Access the MATERIAL you will need for the sessions:**

1. Acquire (from the Diocese) sufficient copies of *Heart Speaks to Heart: the Gift of Reconciliation* (the First Reconciliation book for the children). The book should be given out to parents and carers at their pre-session meeting. To order copies, please complete and send in an **Order Form** (available in the **Catechists' Resources** area) or contact the diocesan Vicariate for Education ([education.admin@dioceseofleeds.org.uk](mailto:education.admin@dioceseofleeds.org.uk)) at least a month before you require the books.

A story book (*The Marvellous Adventures of Max and Droogo*) is also available with stories inspired by some of our school children; it is designed to be a fun way of engaging children as they prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This also can be acquired from the Vicariate for Education. If acquired, you will need to decide when to give the story book to the parents and carers/children.

2. Download the **Book of Reconciliation Prayers** (available in the **First Reconciliation** area). Give these prayer books out to parents and carers at the pre-session meeting for them to give to their child before the sessions begin. This 'Book' contains the prayers which are recommended in the children's *Heart Speaks to Heart* book; it could be placed in the child's Prayer Place and used by the child for prayer. Also available is a **How to Celebrate Reconciliation** card which could be downloaded now and stored ready to give out to families during Session 4.

Other material is available in the **First Reconciliation** area of the website. You may wish to download some of the following to distribute to families:

- (a) **Glossary:** the **Glossary** explains difficult words in the resource. You may like to distribute the Glossary to adults and carers and/or to the children as you think appropriate.
  - (b) **Feelings Chart:** a **Feelings Chart** is available which helps the children identify their feelings when asked, 'How are you feeling?'
  - (c) **Stickers:** links to a **Sticker Chart** and **Stickers Sheet** are available (under **First Reconciliation – Stickers**). These can be printed off and made available to the children so that they can attach a sticker to the Chart when they have completed a session.
  - (d) **Creative Ways to Engage Children:** many interactive and multi-sensory ways to engage the children who are preparing for Reconciliation are available here.
  - (e) **Extra Activities:** four **Extra Activities** are available for families to complete. They are particularly appropriate to supplement material covered in sessions 2 and 3.
  - (f) **Story Book Advice:** here you will find some help and advice about how to use the story books (*The Marvellous Adventures of Max and Droogo*), if you have acquired them.
3. Acquire a few notebooks (ideally with lined pages facing blank pages so that the children can both write and draw their reflections; otherwise, notebooks with blank pages would be better than lined notebooks). These books would be your store of spare Reflection Books for the children who have not been given a Reflection Book at home.
  4. Download the detailed Catechist Notes for each session. These notes include the words catechists may use for each session: **they are designed for those who are new to the role of catechist but experienced catechists may find them of use too.** Experienced catechists may like to read through them and extract what they find helpful (particularly suggestions for timings for each section of the session and the teaching given at the end of the Notes).
  5. For those who do not have easy access to the internet, you may like to print copies of **Reconciliation Help and Guidance Introduction** (available as a link in **Help and Guidance Sessions 1-5**) and give them out during the parents and carers meeting. Alternatively, you may ask parents and carers to watch the **Reconciliation Introduction** video available as a link in **Videos Sessions 1-5**).



6. Decide on whether you will make **Reconciliation Help and Guidance** notes available for each session or whether you will ask parents and carers to watch the videos in advance of the sessions. If you are going to use the **Help and Guidance** notes, will you give copies to parents and carers in advance of the appropriate session, at the beginning of the session or have the notes available to give out to families who are struggling during the session? If you are going to give the guidance out to parents and carers in advance, you will need enough copies of **Reconciliation Help and Guidance Session 1** to be given out to parents and carers during the parents and carers pre-session meeting.
7. Prepare a box to store equipment required for the course and for each session. This box may include:
  - **Reconciliation Help and Guidance** for each session (to be given out EITHER a session in advance OR at the beginning of the session OR during the session for those who would benefit from seeing the guidance)
  - Pens, pencils, coloured pencils for each group of participants
  - Items for a prayer focal point:
    - Coloured cloths
    - Candle (possibly LED candle – and lighter/matches if an ordinary candle)
    - Crucifix or Cross
    - Children’s Bible (or equivalent)
    - Pictures and prayer cards
    - A statue and/or an icon
    - Symbols to reflect the themes of the sessions
  - First Reconciliation Certificates
10. Download extra activities and pictures you may want to use. The pictures could be put out on tables before participants arrive.
11. Have display boards available (particularly for any work that you have asked the children to do and, if you do the evaluation, to display the participants’ evaluation post-its).



## **Timetable**

- Two to three months before the programme begins, have a letter available in the parishes alerting families to the preparation and informing them of the enrolment process. The letter may also be sent out through schools to families of children in Year 3. A **Specimen Letter to Parents and Carers** which you may use or adapt is available in the **Catechists' Resources** area of the website.
- Reconciliation will be the first of three sacraments which the children will be preparing for in school Key Stage 2. Enrolment for Reconciliation is also a good time to encourage a commitment from parents and carers to enrol their children also for First Holy Communion (in school Year 4) and for Confirmation (in school year 6). Your Reconciliation Enrolment Form could also include such a commitment (see specimen form on the link). A model **Enrolment Form** is available in the **Catechists' Resources** area of the website.
- Invite parents and carers to a meeting and/or arrange individual appointments to enrol the children.
- Arrange a meeting with parents and carers to outline the course and let them know of expectations of them and the children.



## **HEART SPEAKS TO HEART: THE RECONCILIATION RESOURCE**

**NOTE: the resource has been designed to be used in a variety of contexts and in a variety of ways.**

- The timings, number of sessions and venue are arranged locally by the parish (with support from the local primary school where appropriate).
- The resource has been designed with the ***Family Catechesis*** method of delivery in mind, i.e. with extended family involvement, supported by a team of catechists and helpers with a variety of roles (see above for a description of these roles).
- However, the resource may also be delivered using the more traditional catechist-led method of sacramental preparation.

### **Resource Contents**

There are **five sessions** which follow a similar format:

1. An illustration of a biblical scene (from a story mentioned in the session) and an **opening prayer** (2 pages).
2. Reflection inspired by a **family story** (2 pages). Prompted by a story of a grandfather and his twin grandchildren (Grandpa, Jess and Ryan), participants share what they have been doing since last time and discuss any thoughts and questions they may have. The children could have been invited to record their answers to these questions in advance in their Reflection Books, so that they have something to say in the sessions and something to look back on in future sessions.
3. Reflection on **the virtues** (2 pages). Practice of the virtues helps the children to grow in friendship with Jesus and become like Him. A particular virtue (e.g. thankfulness, honesty, bravery) has been chosen for each session for the children to learn about and to apply in their own lives.
4. **Bible Journaling** (2 pages). A story from the Bible (reflecting the theme and virtue of the session) is read and participants are encouraged to write, draw and colour-in words and thoughts which struck them as the story was read.
5. **Elaboration** on the biblical story, **discussion and activity** (2 pages). Usually at this point, the biblical story explored by Bible Journaling is set in the context of the biblical and salvation story as a whole and its significance considered. Participants are invited to talk together about what they have read and complete an activity together.

6. Further **opportunities to reflect** (2 pages) on the faith journey of the children and on the meaning of Reconciliation. Stories from the lives of the twins (Jess and Ryan) will help clarify the teaching on Reconciliation and make it more accessible for the children.

**Note:**

In the fourth session, there are 2 pages indicating how the children should celebrate their First Reconciliation. A card which gives more detailed information (**How to Celebrate Reconciliation**) is available to download and give out during this session. Catechists may wish the children to practise Reconciliation during this session or at another convenient time.

7. **Things to do at home or in church** (1 page). The catechists should read through this section and elaborate on the home activities suggested there.
8. **Evaluation**. This is not in the book – and is not obligatory! It may be useful, however, to spend 5 minutes asking children and families these two questions towards the end of each session:

- (a) **What did you enjoy in the session?**  
(b) **If we were to do the session again, what could make it even better?**

Ask participants to consider these two questions and write down one answer for each question on post-its (which you may make available on the participants' tables) and then stick the post-its on boards. It would be good practice for catechists and helpers to gather for 5 minutes after the session (when participants have departed) to reflect together on the session and what participants have written on the post-its.

9. **Concluding prayers** (2 pages). There will always be an opportunity in this section for Catholic Meditation (called Quiet Prayer in the resource).



## What material in the resource is it essential to cover?

Ideally each session would be quite short, lasting no longer than an hour. There is a lot of material in the resource and it may not be possible to do it all in such a short period of time. To make sure that what is essential is covered within the session, we suggest the following sections be definitely included:

1. The opening prayer
2. Sharing of what the children (and families) have done since last time
3. The introduction of the session's virtue
4. A biblical story (either the story explored by Bible Journaling or another story which is described or narrated on the following page)
5. An opportunity to *Talk Together* about the virtue and/or biblical story
6. Coverage of important aspects of the sacraments of Baptism or Reconciliation (p.20 on Baptism; pages 34 and 48 on the Examination of Conscience; p.62 on the 'steps' of Reconciliation; pages 64-65 on the practicalities of celebrating Reconciliation; some of the questions on page 78)
7. The concluding prayers (especially the opportunity for Quiet Prayer/Meditation)

You may wish to omit some of the material in the resource and add your own material and activities which have worked for you in your past experience as a catechist for First Reconciliation.

You may like to add songs to sing at the end of each session. You may then need to find time within the session to teach the children the songs.

## Drawing and Colouring

On the 'Bible Journaling' pages the children are encouraged to write and draw their thoughts in the blank margins.

You may also like to suggest that the children use other blank parts of pages for colouring, writing or highlighting, e.g. on pages 6-7 children could highlight key words in different colours (e.g. "journey", "Reconciliation", "prayer", "virtue") and/or write a chosen virtue from the list and draw a design round it in the space at the top of page 7; in the space in the bottom right hand of page 13, children could write other questions they have; etc.

## PARENTS & CARERS MEETING

Arrange a meeting with parents and carers before the first session with the children. During this meeting catechists should distribute the First Reconciliation book (*Heart Speaks to Heart: the Gift of Reconciliation*) and explain to parents and carers that they will need to read through some of the introductory material in the book at home with their child before the first session.

During the meeting catechists should make sure that they include the following:

1. An introductory time of prayer (perhaps using the prayer used at the beginning of each session in the book: it first occurs on page 11).
2. Read the following powerful quotation from *YOUCAT for Kids* as an introduction to the meeting:  
*"[T]he transmission of faith cannot be delegated to books or media. Faith can only be awakened by the oldest method in the world: from heart to heart, from person to person. The greatest books, the coolest movies cannot replace parents or grandparents saying: 'I believe in Jesus. Can I show you how wonderful that is?' Or: 'Come on, let's find out more about our good Lord'"* (*YOUCAT for Kids*, Preface).
3. Give out at the beginning of the meeting:
  - (a) The timetable of the preparation sessions and the date of First Reconciliation.
  - (b) Any other information parents and carers need to know, e.g. that parents and carers journey with their children as they prepare for First Reconciliation (and that, in the case of Family Catechesis, at least one adult should accompany the child during preparation sessions).
  - (c) Enrolment forms (if this has not already be done). A specimen **Enrolment Form** is available online and is suitable to use when enrolling children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Be clear about when you want the forms returned.
  - (d) A book for each child (the resource *Heart Speaks to Heart: the Gift of Reconciliation*).
4. Explore some pages of the book with parents and carers (especially pp.1-9) and ask the parents and carers to do the same with their children before the first session.
  - (a) **Page 3**. Ask parents and carers to turn to page 3. They should make sure that the children fill in this page with their name and the day they begin their preparation for First Reconciliation, which could be either the day they receive the book from their parents (or carers) at home or the date of the first session.

- (b) **Page 6.** Read this page with parents and carers. As you read about the Prayer Place and Reflection Book add this information for parents and carers:

### 1. **Prayer Place**

Ask parents and carers to help their child establish a Prayer Place at home or (if this is difficult) establish a place where they can pray together as a family. For the Prayer Place ask parents and carers to encourage each child to make it special by placing on a small, cloth-covered table various objects which remind the child of their friendship with Jesus: a crucifix or cross; an LED candle; a children's Bible; holy pictures and/or statues and prayer cards; cards the children will receive as part of their preparation e.g. a *Book of Reconciliation Prayers* and *How to Celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation*, etc. This may be the time to distribute the *Book of Reconciliation Prayers* to parents & carers.

One way of praying we will recommend during Reconciliation preparation is **Quiet Prayer**. In Quiet Prayer we sit still, close our eyes, listen to our breathing and quietly repeat to ourselves a few words of prayer. Tell parents and carers that the meeting will end with an example of Quiet Prayer so that they can pass on the details of how to pray in this way to their children and pray with them too.

### 2. **Reflection Books**

These are notebooks which should be obtained by parents and carers for each child and given to the child before the first session.

The children should be assured that what they enter into their Reflection Book will be private and confidential (though they may ask an adult to help them fill in the book if they need support).

The children should record at least one thing that has stood out for them in the session or something they have learnt (something about the virtue or the Bible or about the Sacrament of Reconciliation). Parents and Carers could encourage the children to decorate the front cover of their Reflection Book.

**Note:** catechists may decide that the Parish should obtain the Reflection Books, in which case, catechists will need to distribute them at this meeting. **Reflection Book Advice** is available as a link under **Extra Information and Advice** (in the **Catechists' Resources** area).

- (c) **Page 7.** Read this page with parents and carers. As you read through page 7 add this information:

### **The Virtues**

Living the virtues (like thankfulness and honesty and love) helps us to live like Jesus and become the best person we can be. Encourage parents and carers to help their children to understand the different virtues and ways of living out the virtues in daily life, e.g. how do we show thankfulness or honesty or love in what we say or do? Parents and carers can set a good example of virtuous living!

- (d) **Pages 8-9.** Inform parents and carers that each session will begin with a story about a grandfather and his grandchildren. Read pages 8-9 with parents and carers to introduce them to the three characters (Grandpa, Jess and Ryan). Parents and carers should then introduce the characters to their children.

Each session will begin with a conversation between Grandpa and the twins (Jess and Ryan) to stimulate sharing of thoughts at the beginning of the session. The children will be asked to read these pages in advance to prepare for sharing thoughts at the beginning of the session.

Ask parents and carers to **turn to pages 12-13** and read through the conversation found there between Grandpa and the twins and (in particular) draw their attention to the questions at the bottom of page 13. Ask parents and carers to ask their children to read these pages and think about the questions on page 13 and invite them to record their answers in their Reflection Books in preparation for sharing thoughts at the beginning of Session 1.





- (e) **Pages 16-17.** Ask parents and carers to turn to page 16. On pages 16-17 there is an example of 'Bible Journaling':
- During the session a story from the Bible will be read.
  - Each child will be asked to underline words on page 17 that stood out for them during the reading of the story.
  - Following a little discussion together (as families or groups of children) each child should write down and/or draw their thoughts about the story and the words that struck them in the large margin to the side of the text of the story.
  - The child will be able to finish this off and decorate it later at home.

Page 16 has already been illustrated as an example of what Bible Journaling looks like – but it still needs colouring in!

**Audios** of the **Bible Passages** are available which may be used. They ensure that the Bible stories are read slowly and meditatively.

5. If you decide to ask parents and carers to read the **Help and Guidance** material or watch the **Videos** in advance of sessions, inform them of how they should access the material. Familiarity with the material will help parents and carers with the children during the sessions (particularly if conversation comes to a halt or answers are not known). If you are giving out the **Help and Guidance** in advance, give out the **Reconciliation Help and Guidance Session 1** now and ask parents and carers to look through it before the first session.
6. In short, below is **a list of what parents and carers should do at home with their children before the first session**. You may like to read this list out or print this out for parents and carers as a summary of the points made above. Before the first session, parents and carers should:
- (a) **Give the child their First Reconciliation book (*Heart Speaks to Heart: The Gift of Reconciliation*)**
  - (b) **Invite the child to fill in page 3**
  - (c) **Explore pages 6-9 with the child**
  - (d) **Ask the child to read pages 12-13 in preparation for Session 1**
  - (e) **Give the child the *Book of Reconciliation Prayers***
  - (f) **Provide the child with a Reflection Book**
  - (g) **Ensure that the child establishes a Prayer Place**

7. At the end of the meeting with parents and carers, catechists should give out **Reconciliation Help and Guidance Introduction** and **Session 1** to those who cannot access the videos.  
You may also like to consider issuing a commitment to be signed by parents and carers to support their children as they prepare for First Reconciliation. This commitment should be returned before they leave the meeting. The terms of this commitment should be determined by the Parish Priest
8. Inform parents and carers that they will need to provide certain information about their child before the celebration of First Reconciliation (e.g. date and place of the child's Baptism). Let them know when and how you will require this information.
9. Concluding Prayer for the meeting. Take this opportunity to introduce 'Quiet Prayer' (Meditation) to parents and carers:
  - Provide introductory information: invite parents and carers to sit quietly (they may close their eyes, have their feet firmly on the floor with straight backs and hands on knees). Tell them that you will soon say a short phrase (e.g. "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me"; "Come, Lord Jesus"; "Come, Holy Spirit", etc.); you will repeat this phrase a few times (with short periods of silence between each repetition); parents and carers should repeat the phrase silently to themselves until a signal is given to end the time of meditation (perhaps a bell is rung)
  - After this introductory information, ask parents and carers to sit in stillness. Quietly and slowly, ask them to be aware of:
    - Any tension (especially in backs and shoulders) and try to relax
    - Sounds outside the room
    - Sounds within the room
    - Their breathing
  - Say the phrase (perhaps two or three times) and then allow 2-3 minutes of silence
  - Give the agreed signal to end the Meditation
  - Lead parents and carers in a concluding prayer, e.g. the Our Father and the Sign of the Cross

## PREPARATION BY CATECHISTS FOR THE SESSIONS

- 1. Timings:** try to keep catechesis to **one hour**. However, when it is possible to meet in person, you may want to allow for about 1 hour 30 minutes in total for contact with participants (15-20 minutes before the catechesis begins for arrivals and refreshments and 5-10 minutes at the end for anyone wishing to ask individual questions and more socialising).

Some timings to deliver each section of the resource are given in the Catechist Notes for individual sessions. These timings are simply suggestions and actual timings may depend on how a particular group is responding to a session. It is important, however, to be clear about start and finish times: always try and finish at the time you have set, even if you haven't covered everything in the session.

- 2. Setting up the room:** make sure that there are sufficient tables to meet social distancing requirements (when these regulations have been removed, you may like to encourage participants to sit in groups of up to 8-10). Think about the lighting you will use and the background music as families arrive: some quiet, prayerful music may help establish the right atmosphere as participants are settling, ready to begin.
- 3. Light refreshments** (when possible).
- 4. Have equipment ready** (see ideas for a Catechists' Box on page 9).
- 5. After each session:** meet as a team of catechists for 5 minutes evaluation to discuss these 2 questions:
  - What went well in the session?
  - What could have been done better?
- 6. Display boards:** consider displaying some of the children's work either in the place where the catechesis happens or at the back of your local church.



## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

1. **Retreat:** you may like to organise a retreat for First Reconciliation candidates.
2. **Rehearsal:** it is good practice to arrange a rehearsal before the celebration of First Reconciliation. This will be an opportunity for the children to practise (or practise again) how and where they are to celebrate the Sacrament (face-to-face, in a Confessional, etc.), what they are to say, etc.
3. **Continuing the Journey:** as a follow-up to First Reconciliation, you may like to suggest that parents engage (or re-engage) with *The Wednesday Word* as a way of continuing reflection on the scriptures and how to put the message of Christ into action (and particularly if *The Wednesday Word* is distributed through the local primary school).

See the links under **Continuing the Journey - After First Reconciliation** in the **Catechists' Resources** area of the website for more suggestions about how families can continue their journey in faith after First Reconciliation. There is a **Recommended Books** link for information about books which parents and carers may find useful to help them educate their children in the practice of the faith (e.g. children's guides to Holy Mass, Bibles and Bible story books, prayer books, etc.).

## EXTRA ONLINE MATERIAL

Elsewhere in the **Catechists' Resources** area, you'll find links for:

**Certificates** to mark the children's enrolment for Reconciliation and the first sacraments; for the participation of parents & carers in the preparation sessions; and for the children to mark their completion of preparation.

**Extra Liturgy and Prayer Resources** including two Rites of Enrolment which you may like to use for enrolment of the children during Holy Mass (when this is possible).

**Feedback Surveys** which provide advice and models for obtaining feedback about the preparation from **Parents and Children**. There are also links to a **Reconciliation** Feedback Survey for **Catechists** to complete. We'd be very grateful if you would complete the survey and send it to the Vicariate for Education to help us modify and develop our resources.

**FINALLY:** we hope you enjoy the resources and your time of preparation with the children and their families. Let us keep each other in prayer.