



The Parable of the Loving Father that we have listened to over the past three sessions is probably the most powerful illustration of the human process of reconciliation and of the theology that makes up the new Rite of Reconciliation. It is the story of the most powerful love of a father whose only thought is to have his son close to him.

### **THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION**

For many of us, this is not the way we have understood the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Maybe we believe we are forgiven when we recite a list of sins, express our sorrow, agree to do something to make up and give some guarantee that we will try to change our ways. But Confession, as we used to call the sacrament, is only one step in the total process of reconciliation.

### **MAKING CHANGES IN OUR LIVES**

This final session is about coming to our senses in the same way the younger son did as he sat in a pig sty pondering on his life's choices. It is about making room for change in our lives when we realise that all is not right with our values and style of life. The Sacrament of Reconciliation addresses our sinfulness rather than our sins. It calls us to look deep into our hearts to uncover the value conflicts and struggles that cause sinful acts and to have a change of heart. There are no set words to be learned when we go to the sacrament, although the children may be given some simple prayers as an initial introduction to the sacrament. There is no right or wrong way of acknowledging our sinfulness. That is up to the individual. The important thing is that we acknowledge the need for a change of heart.

### **TURNING MINDS AND HEARTS TO GOD**

The sunflower is a symbol of change of heart, because it turns its head to the sun in response to the warmth offered to it. We are called to turn our minds and hearts to God through Jesus, and to live a life filled with generosity and love. "This then is what Yahweh asks of you; to live justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God." Jesus needs us to continue the ministry and message of his time on earth. He needs us to speak words of compassion to those who are hurting, to listen with understanding to those who need to be unburdened. Jesus needs us to walk with those who are fearful of the path before them.

### **EXPLORING THE SYMBOL AT HOME**

Plant some sunflower seeds in a pot with your child and together watch them grow as a reminder that they are called to follow Jesus. Show your child how to make a sunflower with a paper plate, some colouring pencils or paint and some sunflower seeds.

At the end of the story the loving father called for a celebration. The parable invites us, too, to celebrate our own experience of forgiveness and reconciliation because we have been through a change of heart, repentance, confession and return. If your child experiences forgiveness he/she will learn to forgive. Let your child see reconciliation happening between adults and family members. When your child is forgiven celebrate with something special.

## PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

### SESSION 4



### The Sunflower

#### BEFORE THE SESSION

- Read the **Reflection on the sunflower**.
- Read the **Scripture passage** and the background notes in the margin.
- **Prepare the questions** for conversation on the reading.
- Have ready the **attendance sheet** and **nametags**.
- Create a **simple prayer space** with the open Bible, a plant, a sunflower and a packet of sunflower seeds or the picture of the sunflower at the end of the session notes.
- Choose the **music** you will use for this session.
- Photocopy the picture of the Sunflower at the end of the session notes.



## NOTES



## WELCOME AND CENTERING

Hand out nametags and greet the children and their parents warmly.

Light the candles in your sacred space, and help everyone to quieten down by singing a song or just listening to quiet music. Then pray:

*Loving God, we thank you for the golden sunflower that turns its head to follow every movement of the sun so it can grow tall and beautiful. Help us to turn to you in love and to grow more like Jesus. We ask this through Christ Our Lord. Amen.*

## THE STORY OF GOD IN MY LIFE



### CONVERSATION ABOUT THE SUNFLOWER

In our prayer we said we want to turn to God in love so we can grow more like Jesus. Let's think about what that means.

Show the picture of the sunflower at the end of these notes.

- What does the face of the sunflower remind you of?
- Why do you think it turns its head to follow the sun?

The sunflower needs the warmth of the sun to help it grow and make good seeds for people and birds to eat, and oil for people to use in cooking.

- Who is someone we can turn our hearts to and follow?

In our last session we listened to the second part of the story of the Loving Father. We heard how the younger son went off and spent all his money on having fun.

- What happened to him?
- What did he decide to do when he spent all his money?
- How did he plan to make things right with his father?

Let's listen to the end of the story. Listen especially for the words that the son wants to say to his father and for what the father says to his son.

### INVITE EVERYONE TO STAND AND LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD.

**A Reading from the Gospel according to Luke**

## THE STORY OF GOD IN SCRIPTURE

Luke 15:21-24





## THE STORY OF GOD IN OUR CHURCH

*The younger son got up and started back to his Father. But when he was still a long way off his Father saw him and was sorry for him. He ran to his son and hugged and kissed him. The son said, "Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son." But his father said to the servants, "Hurry and bring the best clothes and put them on him. Give him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. Get the best calf and prepare it, so we can eat and celebrate. This son of mine was dead, but has now come back to life. He was lost and has now been found." And they began to celebrate.*

### The Gospel of the Lord

All: Praise to You Lord Jesus Christ

### CONVERSATION ABOUT THE READING

In this part of the story the son comes home to make things right with his father.

- What did he say to his father?
- What did the father do?

The son was prepared to do anything if only he could be close to his father again.

- What did the father do to show that he wanted his son to be one of the family?
- What would you have done if you had been the father?
- What do you think God expects us to do when someone hurts us?
- Why do you think Jesus told this story?

Learning how to follow Jesus is something that takes a long time. It can take a whole lifetime! We might try hard, but still be selfish instead of loving. We might have to say, "I'm sorry" over and over again. Sometimes we might feel that we ALWAYS have to say it.

- What do we know about how God feels about us?  
(God loves us and wants us to be happy.)

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation God is the loving father to us. After we have said our "sorry" prayer, the priest asks us to do something or to say a prayer to make up for the times we have been selfish. This is called PENANCE. Penance means "making up".

Let's think about what we have learnt about the Sacrament of Reconciliation from the story of the Loving Father.



## CELEBRATING TOGETHER

### SOMETIMES WE HURT OTHERS BY WHAT WE SAY OR DO

- What is the little word we use for being selfish and hurting others? (Sin)

### WE WANT TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT

- We think about the good things we have done and about the times we have hurt others by what we have done or what we have failed to do.

### WE SAY SORRY

- What are the words we use to make things right with God?

### WE TRY TO MAKE UP FOR WHAT WE HAVE DONE

We call this doing PENANCE.

- What might the priest ask you to do for your penance? (Say a prayer or do something kind.)

### WE TRY HARDER TO BE A BETTER PERSON

We can remember the sunflower.

- What does the sunflower remind us to do?

### WE ARE CLOSER TO GOD AND TO ONE ANOTHER AGAIN

We can be happy because when we make things right it's like being hugged by God, so

### WE FEEL GOOD ALL OVER

*Ask everyone to join hands and make a circle. Place the words of Isaiah inside it.*

*With soft music playing in the background, ask a parent to pick up the piece of paper and read the words of Isaiah.*

This is what God says to us: "I hate what is wrong. I love what is fair. Just as the earth makes things grow, so will I make fairness grow in the hearts of all people." (*Adapted from Is. 61:8,11*)

LEADER: Let us pray for peace in our hearts and in our world. The response to our prayer is **HELP US TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT IN OUR WORLD**

LEADER: God, give us leaders who will show us how to care for your world.

ALL: **HELP US TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT IN OUR WORLD**

LEADER: God give us leaders who will show us how to care for people who are poor, sick or sad.

**BLESSING  
AND  
DISMISSAL**

ALL: HELP US TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT IN OUR  
WORLD

LEADER: God, send us people to show us how to care for  
those who have nowhere to live.

ALL: HELP US TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT IN OUR  
WORLD

LEADER: God, help us to always remember your love so that  
we will live like Jesus.

ALL: HELP US TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT IN OUR  
WORLD

*Choose a child to place the sunflower picture under your plant.*

PARENT: The sunflower will remind us to turn to God who loves  
us, and to follow Jesus by trying to turn selfishness  
into kindness.

*Invite parents to place their hands on their children's shoulders for  
the blessing.*

LEADER: Loving Father, you are with these children as they make  
their journey to your forgiveness in the Sacrament of  
Reconciliation. Open their ears and hearts to the  
teaching of your son, Jesus. Fill them with the Spirit of  
love, peace, joy and kindness. Amen.

*Invite the parents to hug their children.*



Like a sunflower that follows every movement of  
the sun,



I turn to you to follow you, my God.  
(From: *Like a Sunflower*, Carey Landry)

# THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION



The sacrament is usually celebrated in one of two ways:

- When I go to the priest by myself. This is called 1<sup>st</sup> Rite.
- When I go with my family and friends, we sing, listen to readings, reflect together on our lives, say sorry together and then go to the priest to confess sinfulness and receive absolution. This is called 2<sup>nd</sup> Rite.

SOMETIMES WE HURT OTHERS BY WHAT WE SAY OR DO.  
We say that we sin.

WE WANT TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT

We think about the good things we have done and about the times we have hurt others by what we have done or what we have failed to do.

WE SAY SORRY TO GOD

We go to the priest and talk to him. We say a sorry prayer.

WE TRY TO MAKE UP FOR WHAT WE HAVE DONE

We call this doing PENANCE. The priest might ask us to say a prayer or do something kind for someone.

WE TRY HARDER TO BE A BETTER PERSON

We can remember the sunflower and turn back to God's way.

WE ARE CLOSER TO GOD AND TO ONE ANOTHER AGAIN

We can be happy because when we make things right it's like being hugged by God, so

WE FEEL GOOD ALL OVER