



Renewed

Your Journey to First Reconciliation

PARENT INFORMATION SESSION

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1. Introduction

As a catechist, you have been blessed with the opportunity to share the faith. For First Reconciliation preparation, you are going to work with children who are around 7–8 years old (2nd grade). For most of the children in your preparation class, this will be their first sacrament after Baptism. In addition to the good work that you are going to do, it is important to keep parents in mind. They are very important to the development of a child's faith life.

The *Renewed* program keeps this reality in mind by providing resources to assist you in the important—and sometimes challenging—job of engaging and motivating parents. Remember, the last time their child received a sacrament was as an infant or young child, and the last time many parents have experienced faith formation education was their own Confirmation preparation program.

The goal is to set a tone that encourages and empowers parents to be deeply integrated in sacramental preparation. For many, this will be a big shift and departure from their previous experiences. Some have been struggling through the reality of weekly Mass attendance with young children, and others, though they are seeking the sacraments for their children, haven't had much engagement with the parish since Baptismal preparation.

The parents that you are going to encounter have a desire for their child to receive the Sacrament of the Reconciliation. There will be some parents who are confident in the faith, and there will be some who don't know why they want their child to receive the sacrament; they are simply following family tradition. Be encouraging and give them the support, tools, and guidance that they will need to fully participate in this journey. It is important to engage parents in their faith as well. Whether they realize it or not, their child has been called at this time and at this point in their lives to prepare for these sacraments, and God is eager to do something in their hearts as well as the heart of the family. It is important to remember that learning about and meditating on the mysteries of the faith can benefit everyone whether, it is their first time, or their one thousandth time.

Keeping all of this in mind, as you prepare to lead your class through *Renewed: Your Journey to First Reconciliation*, we recommend that you begin with a Parent Information Session to engage parents and to get them excited to journey with their child.

The four goals of the Parent Information Session are to:

1. Introduce parents to the *Renewed: Your Journey to First Reconciliation* program
2. Educate parents them about the Sacrament of Reconciliation
3. Encourage them to take seriously their role as the primary educators in matters of the Faith

4. Equip them with the *Renewed Online Parent Certification* course and other resources that will help guide them through the journey

The purpose of this guide is to assist you in preparing and conducting a Parent Information Session. Here you will find:

- A checklist of things to consider before, during, and after the Parent Information Session
- A sample framework for a one-hour Parent Information Session
- Sample letters for parents

Ideally, the same instructor(s) who will lead candidates through the *Renewed: Your Journey to First Reconciliation* program will also facilitate (or at least be introduced at) the Parent Information Session. This will provide optimal continuity between parents and their children.

2. Preparing for the Parent Information Session

- Plan and schedule your Parent Information Session prior to beginning the program. Allow approximately one hour for the session.
- Use the sample “Invitation Letter to Parents” to announce your meeting.
- Prepare to watch and discuss the first *Renewed Online Parent Certification* video “Session 1: An Invitation” video. This video was designed to be shown during the Parent Information Session. *Note: This video can be viewed within your Renewed Leader’s Access course, and it is featured within the Renewed Online Parent Certification course.*

In this powerful, 14-minute video, Father Mike Schmitz, Emily Wilson-Hussem & Daniel Hussem, and Sister Josephine Garrett connect to parents’ hearts in a down-to-earth way, encouraging them to take an active role in their children’s First Reconciliation preparation.

Within this guide, you will find talking points and discussion questions to promote discussion and engagement following the video.

- [Optional] Prepare to watch and discuss the *Renewed Online Parent Certification* video “Session 2: Mercy” video. Depending on time and your goals for the session, this video can be shown during the Parent Information Session or parents can watch the video on their own within the *Renewed Online Parent Certification* course. *Note: This video can be viewed within your Leader’s Access course, and it is featured within the Renewed Online Parent Certification course.*
- In this 9-minute video, Father Mike Schmitz will present the beauty of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Prepare to review the *Renewed Online Parent Certification* course and embedded Parent’s Guide.

During the session, it would be good to highlight the features of the course and the Parent's Guide, as well as focus on the "Family Time" activities so parents can prepare to engage with their children after each lesson. If you have time, walk through a sample lesson, so they know what to expect!

- Review the *Renewed* "Frequently Asked Questions" resource (available at Ascensionpress.com), which is a great overview of the program and will equip you to answer questions during the information session.
- Consider offering refreshments and snacks for the session.
- Keep track of attendance (i.e., have a registration/welcome table). Follow up with parents who do not attend. *Note: A sample "Letter to Parents Who Did Not Attend the Information Session" is included.*

3. Parent Information Session Outline

I. Introduction (3 minutes)

Introduce yourself and any other leaders who will be facilitating the program. Explain the outline for the session.

- First, they will view and discuss a video introducing them to *Renewed: Your Journey to First Reconciliation*, their child's preparation program for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Second, they will discuss the sacrament and their role as parents in their child's preparation for receiving it.
- Finally, you will present the *Renewed Online Parent Certification* course. This is also a good time to share your schedule for the year.

II. Opening Prayer (2 minutes)

Open the session with a prayer. If a priest or deacon is available, ask him to offer the prayer and a blessing. If not, you can (in your own words) ask for the Holy Spirit to guide the meeting, and then ask everyone to join in a well-known prayer such as the Hail Mary or Our Father.

III. Parent Video & Discussion (20 minutes)

Play the *Renewed Online Parent Certification* video "Session 1: An Invitation."

Talking Points:

- Begin by asking for a show of hands of how many people can remember their own First Reconciliation.

- Then ask how many remember the experience as a pivotal moment in their life of faith. (Few will likely remember it this way, but the main point is to get them engaged and thinking about the sacrament).
- No matter where you are within your faith journey, it is important for you to know that your family is unique and unrepeatable. You and your family are a gift to the Church.
- You have brought your child here to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. As a family, it is important that you journey with your child.
- Whether you realize it or not, your child has been called at this time and at this point in their life to prepare for this sacrament, and God is eager to do something in your heart as well and the heart of your whole family. It is important to remember that learning about and meditating on the mysteries of the faith can benefit everyone whether this is their first time, or their one thousandth time.

Discuss the following questions:

1. What did you learn about the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a child or what have you learned about the sacrament during your own faith formation journey?
2. Up until this point, how have you viewed Confession? Is Confession something you dread or something you long for?

[Optional] Play the *Renewed Online Parent Certification* video “Mercy.”

Discuss the following questions:

1. Father Mike says that sins are “garbage” and priests are like God’s garbage men. He says that Confession is one of the most joyful, inspiring, and humbling places in the world because he gets to encounter people who were lost and are now found—people who have not given up. What is your relationship with the Sacrament of Reconciliation? What if any of these points helped you to see the Sacrament of Reconciliation in a new way? If you have given up, what steps can you take to help you return to the love and mercy of God?
2. Father Mike reveals that in the confessional, he is better able to see his own soul and heart. He has experienced humbling moments that have helped him to recognize sin in his own life. Reconciliation may feel like something we “have to do,” but what are some practical steps you can take in your heart and mind to shift your thinking to one of gratitude that Reconciliation is something you “get to” do? A gift you “get to” receive rather than something you “have to” do?

IV. Explanation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (15 minutes)

Use the following points as a guide to explain the sacrament in your own words.

An Overview

Note: You may want to present to parents that the following information is meant to help them connect with their child when talking about the sacrament. It can be hard to break down such big concepts for little minds that most adults have a hard time understanding.

- Present that along with Anointing of the Sick, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a Sacrament of Healing.
- Explain that God desires to be in relationship with each and everyone of us. Just like other relationships that we have in our lives, when we do things that we should not do, we need to ask for forgiveness.
- Explain that like a parent when we do something wrong and try to hide, God desires to find us and help us to heal and restore our relationship with him. This is why Jesus gave us the gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation – so we always know we have a place to return and seek forgiveness and to receive God’s mercy and love.
- One of the main questions that people and even children have about Reconciliation is, “ Why do I need to confess my sins to a priest? Can’t I just say I am sorry to God in my own personal prayer?” Share that Reconciliation is a gift Jesus gave us, his people, because he knew we would need it.

John 20:19, 22–23: “One the evening of that day, the first day of the week, Jesus showed himself to his apostles. He breathed on them, and said to them: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

We can always apologize to God in our personal prayer, but we may always wonder if we are really forgiven. When the priest says the Words of Absolution, we no longer need to wonder if we really are forgiven.

Mortal and Venial Sins

This year in class, your child will learn about two types of sins: mortal sins and venial sins. It can be hard to talk to your child about these two types of sins. A simple way to explain the differences to your child is through an analogy.

- Venial sins are like bruises or scrapes to the soul. They can be healed with some ointment and a bandaid, or in this case blessing yourself with Holy Water or asking for forgiveness at Mass.

- Mortal sins are like big spiritual injuries, similar to breaking a bone. You need help from a doctor after breaking a bone, so it can heal properly, and you need help from a priest after committing a mortal sin, for your soul to heal properly.
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1493: “One who desires to obtain reconciliation with God and with the Church must confess to a priest all the unconfessed grave sins he remembers after having carefully examined his conscience. The confession of venial faults, without being necessary in itself, is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church.”

It's About Friendship

- Explain that Reconciliation is much more than reflecting on all the things we have done wrong and bringing them to a priest in Confession. It is much more than “hell avoidance.” Rather, it is all about relationships and restoring our relationship with God. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1468 states:

“The whole power of the Sacrament of Penance consists in restoring us to God’s grace and joining us with him in an intimate friendship.”

Explain that First Reconciliation is the beginning of a deeper, more mature, personal life in Christ. Throughout life, we are going to sin. We are going to fall. God gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation because he knew that this was going to happen. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a gift to restore our relationship with God.

- Often, Reconciliation can seem like a punishment to children. It immediately brings up the notions of good and bad, right and wrong, heaven and hell. We want to stress to your child this year that Jesus was thinking of us when he gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He knew we would need it. Jesus didn’t die on the Cross to offer us his mercy just one time. He offers us his mercy as often as we need it. Reconciliation is not about confessing what we have done wrong so that we feel better. Reconciliation is about having a relationship and restoring a relationship with Jesus.
- Another analogy that might be helpful in explaining this to your child is that of a birthday party.

Imagine that a good friend sends you an invitation to a birthday party, but you are too busy and you don’t respond, and you don’t go to the party. A week later, you run into your friend at the store. Your heart starts beating fast, you begin to sweat, and you want to run away. You don’t mention that you missed the party, and your friend doesn’t want to bring up the party and make you feel bad for not coming. Neither of you says anything, and you go on as normal, even though you are both hurting. We never want to pretend and go on

as normal with Jesus when we know we have messed up. Reconciliation is about honoring our friendship with Jesus and not letting too much time go by before we say sorry and begin anew.

Closing Reflection Questions

1. As your child progresses through this sacramental preparation period, how can you mirror God's love and mercy within your home? What are some practical things you can do or are you doing to help them to understand love, mercy, and forgiveness?
2. As a family what do you think your family's unique mission is in the Church? How can you practically discover, discern, and foster that mission in your family day-to-day?

V. Review the *Renewed Online Parent Certification* course/Final Instructions (5 minutes)

- Display the *Renewed Online Parent Certification* course.
- Review the layout and move through a sample lesson of the embedded Parent's Guide.
- Encourage parents to make a commitment to complete the certification and hand in the certificate of completion, so they are more prepared to engage their son or daughter throughout the journey.
- Distribute any additional resources (e.g., schedules, checklists, forms) and communicate any logistical details concerning the retreat, rehearsals, and other requirements.
- Ask if parents have any questions or comments.
- Assure parents that you will be available throughout the program to address any questions or thoughts that they would like to share.

VI. Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

If a priest or deacon is available, ask him to offer a final prayer and blessing. If not, you can thank God in your own words for the time together and ask for the Holy Spirit to guide and fill all of your hearts as you begin this journey. End with a well-known prayer like the Hail Mary or Our Father.

4. Following the Parent Information Session

- Follow-up with parents to ensure they are all set-up in the *Renewed Online Parent Certification* course, and remind parents that you are available to answer any questions that they may have.

- Send along a letter of explanation to those parents who did not attend the Parent Information Session. Use the sample “Letter to Parents Who Did Not Attend the Information Session.”
- Remember to actively engage with parents during the preparation session. Face-to-face conversations, emails, and phone calls all go a long way to help keep parents connected.
 - Photos: Parents love to see photos of their children. Get parents to sign a photo release, so you can take and share pictures of fun class activities.

5. Sample Letters

Invitation Letter to Parents

To be used to invite parents to the First Reconciliation Parent Information Session. We recommend that you print it on the official letterhead of your school, parish, or organization. Please modify as needed.

[Date]

Dear Parents of [customize to fit your situation]

We are thrilled to introduce our First Reconciliation preparation program, *Renewed: Your Journey to First Reconciliation*. The goal of the program is to offer your child a powerful, life-changing experience as he or she prepares to receive God’s mercy through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

It is our hope that *Renewed* will not only offer your child a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Catholic Faith but also win over their hearts at this critical time in their lives. The program has been carefully designed to address and answer your child’s fundamental questions about life, forgiveness, and mercy and to call your child to embrace a life of faith.

Let’s face it—our world is full of distractions and detours that can easily set a young person on the wrong path. Nothing can take the place of a strong faith in God: not friends, money, or education. It is our faith that gives us our identity and our direction in life. The Church recognizes that you, as parents, are the primary educators of your children in matters of faith and morals—and the *Renewed* program offers you a unique opportunity to join your child as he or she journeys through the Catholic Faith.

To learn more about the program and your role in preparing your child for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we invite you to attend a Parent Information Session on [add date/time] to be held at [location]. The meeting will not only inform you about the program but also offer you ideas and tools to confidently engage and encourage your child during their preparation.

At the Parent Information Session, we will get you set-up with the *Renewed Online Parent Certification* course, which answers questions you may have about Reconciliation and provides helpful conversation starters and family activities to help you play an active role in your child's faith journey. We will begin teaching *Renewed* on [start date].

Thank you for your time and interest in this important stage of your child's spiritual development. We look forward to seeing you at the Parent Information Session.

Sincerely, [Name]

Letter to Parents Who Did Not Attend the Information Session

To be sent to parents who were unable to attend the Parent Information Session.

[Date]

Dear Parents of [customize to fit your situation]

We are sorry you were unable to attend the Parent Information Session on [add date/time].

It is our hope that our First Reconciliation program *Renewed: Your Journey to First Reconciliation* will not only offer your child a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Catholic Faith but also win over their hearts at this critical time in their lives. The program has been carefully designed to address and answer your child's fundamental questions about God's love and mercy and to call your child to embrace a life of faith.

Let's face it—our world is full of distractions and detours that can easily set a young person on the wrong path. Nothing can take the place of a strong faith in God: not friends, money, or education. It is our faith that gives us our identity and our direction in life. The Church recognizes that you, as parents, are the primary educators of your children in matters of faith and morals—and *Renewed* offers you a unique opportunity to join your child as he or she journeys through this sacramental preparation period.

The *Renewed Online Parent Certification* course answers questions you may have about the Sacrament of Reconciliation and provides helpful conversation starters and family activities to help you play an active role in your child's faith journey. We will begin teaching *Renewed* on [start date].

Thank you for your time and interest in this important stage of your child's spiritual development.

Sincerely, [Name]

More questions? Please contact us, we'd love to hear from you!

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