

PREPARATION FOR THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE: BEST PRACTICES

Office of Catechesis, Archdiocese of Indianapolis

Spring 2016

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:36)

In the gospel according to Luke, Jesus asks us to be merciful, because God the Father has first been merciful to us. Pope Francis reflects:

*At times we are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father’s action in our lives. For this reason I have proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy as a special time for the Church, a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective.
(Misericordiae Vultus 3)*

One important way that God shows us his mercy is through the Sacrament of Penance.

We take time to “gaze even more attentively” at this sacrament during the seasons of Advent and Lent, throughout the RCIA process, and in preparation for First Holy Communion. At all times, this sacrament is available as a well-spring of God’s mercy for those who partake of it.

All Catholics are called to be witnesses of God’s mercy for those preparing to receive the Sacrament of Penance during this Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, “a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective.”

Parents and catechists are called to help their candidates and students identify the signs of “the Father’s action” in their lives. Helping them to prepare for this sacrament will help them to see God’s mercy and love at work in the life of each person.



The next page contains some suggestions from parish administrators of religious education who volunteered to share what works well in their sacramental preparation programs for the Sacrament of Penance. Keeping in mind Sacred Scripture and the teaching tradition of our Church while teaching about this sacrament, especially:

1. The Ten Commandments
2. The Beatitudes
3. The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy

Look through the suggestions on the next page for some helpful sacramental preparation ideas!



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Engage parents

- Offer a parent meeting one month before children celebrate the Sacrament of Penance.
- Encourage parents to share an example of a positive experience they had when receiving the Sacrament of Penance.
- Proclaim a scripture reading about the Sacrament of Penance.
- Provide an hour of catechesis on the Sacrament of Penance, at an adult level.
- Deliver materials for parents to take home and continue their children's preparation.
- Invite parents to lead by example and participate in the Sacrament of Penance on a regular basis (the second precept of the Church says at least once a year, but monthly is a good goal).

Take a field trip

- Give the group a tour of the confessional. Show them around and help them feel comfortable.
- Offer a step-by-step examination of conscience with age-appropriate questions.
- Explain the Rite of Reconciliation, and role-play a mock "confession" so participants will know what to expect.

Make it a group effort

- Hold a Sacrament of Penance "Family Night," where parents and children are invited to celebrate the sacrament.
- Offer the Sacrament of Penance as part of a First Communion retreat day.
- Inform the group of scheduled Lent or Advent Penance Service opportunities.

Offer a variety of activities to engage all types of learners

- Design a project that helps students understand God's mercy.
- Decorate candles to be lit from the Easter candle after participating in the sacrament. Provide catechesis on the symbolism of this action.
- Offer a prayer night on different kinds of prayer (alone, as a group, drawing, spoken, etc.) ending with the Sacrament of Penance.