This resource package has been compiled by Anita Finneran (Project Officer, Evangelisation in Secondary Schools, Catholic Education Office Sydney Archdiocese) to assist secondary schools in opening the treasures of the Church to young people seeking healing and peace with God and the Church Community.

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“God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

The Prayer of Absolution
Rite of Penance #46

The above prayer of absolution is spoken by a priest during the Sacrament of Penance, commonly called today, Reconciliation. Not all penitential services are sacramental in nature. The Church provides opportunities for sacramental reconciliation as well as liturgical penitential services when the sacrament is not available.
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1. THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION AND PENANCE

The following points raised in this section are taken from Rite of Penance Rite of Reception of Baptised Christians into full Communion with the Catholic Church; International Commission on English in Liturgy; EJ Dwyer 2010. Pg 6-7

*Why Do we Need the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Penance?*

Essentially, the sacrament of penance is the healing of our relationship with God and his family which has broken down because of sin. Just as the wound of sin is varied and multiple in the life of individuals and of the community, so too the healing which penance provides is varied. Those who by grave sin have withdrawn from the communion of love with God are called back in the sacrament of penance to the life they have lost. The sacrament of penance is, in one respect, the renewal of our Baptism and allows us the freedom to live the Christian life, to be the people God made us to be.

*The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation*

The following responses to questions asked on the Sacrament of Penance are taken from YouCat – Catechism for Youth, 2010. These questions and responses could be helpful when discussing with teenagers the purpose and relevance of this sacrament today.

**225 What names are there for the sacrament of Penance?**

The sacrament of Penance is also called the SACRAMENT of Reconciliation, of forgiveness, of conversion, or of confession.

**226 But we have Baptism, which reconciles us with God; why then do we need a special sacrament of Reconciliation?**

Baptism does snatch us from the power of sin and death and brings us into the new Life of the children of God, but it does not free us from human weakness and the inclination to sin. That is why we need a place where we can be reconciled with God again and again. That place is confession.

It does not seem like a modern thing to go to confession; it can be difficult and may cost a great deal of effort at first. But it is one of the greatest graces that we can receive again and again in our life—it truly renews the soul, completely unburdens it, leaving it without the debts of the past, accepted in love, and equipped with new strength. God is merciful, and he desires nothing more earnestly than for us, too, to lay claim to his mercy. Someone who has gone to confession turns a clean, new page in the book of his Life.

**227 Who instituted the sacrament of Penance?**

Jesus himself instituted the sacrament of Penance when he showed himself to his apostles on Easter day and commanded 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" (Jn 20:22a-23). [1~39, 1485 CCC]
Nowhere did Jesus express more beautifully what happens in the sacrament of Penance than in the parable of the Prodigal Son: We go astray, we are lost and can no longer cope. Yet our Father waits for us with great, indeed, infinite Longing; he forgives us when we come back; he takes us in again, forgives our sins. Jesus himself forgave the sins of many individuals; it was more important to him than working miracles. He regarded this as the great sign of the dawning of the kingdom of God, in which all wounds are healed and all tears are wiped away. Jesus forgave sins in the power of the Holy Spirit, and he handed that power on to his APOSTLES. We fall into the arms of our heavenly Father when we go to a PRIEST and confess.

229 What prepares a person for repentance?
The insight into one’s personal guilt produces a longing to better oneself; this is called contrition. We arrive at contrition when we see the contradiction between God's love and our sin. Then we are full of sorrow for our sins; we resolve to change our life and Place all our hope in God's help.

The reality of sin is often repressed. Some people even think that guilt feelings should be dealt with in a merely psychological way. But genuine guilt feelings are important. It is like driving an automobile: When the speedometer indicates that the speed limit has been exceeded, the speedometer is not responsible, but the driver is. The closer we come to God, who is all light, the clearer our dark sides come to light also. Yet God is not a light that burns but, rather, a light that heals. That is why repentance impels us to go into the light in which we will be completely healed.

233 What sins must be confessed?
Under normal circumstances, all serious sins that one remembers after making a thorough examination of conscience and that have not yet been confessed can be forgiven only in individual sacramental confession.

Of course there will be reluctance before making a confession. Overcoming it is the first step toward interior healing. Often it helps to think that even the POPE has to have the courage to confess his failings and weaknesses to another priest-and thereby to God.

Only in life-or-death emergencies (for instance, during an airstrike in wartime or on other occasions when a group of people are in danger of death) can a priest administer ‘general absolution’ to a group of people without the personal confession of sins beforehand. However, afterwards, one must confess serious sins in a personal confession at the first opportunity.

235 Can I make a confession even if I have not committed any serious sins?
Confession is a great gift of healing that brings about closer union with the Lord, even if, strictly speaking, you do not have to go to confession.

In Taize, at Catholic conferences, at World Youth Day celebrations- everywhere, you -see young people being reconciled with God. Christians who take seriously their decision to follow Jesus seek the joy that comes from a radical new beginning with God. Even the saints went to confession regularly, if possible. They needed it in order to grow in humility.
and charity, so as to allow themselves to be touched by God's healing light even in the inmost recesses of their souls.

236 Why are priests the only ones who can forgive sins?

No man can forgive sins unless he has a commission from God to do so and the power given by him to ensure that the forgiveness he promises the penitent really takes place. The BISHOP, in the first place, is appointed to do that and, then, his helpers, the ordained PRIESTS. [1461-1466, 1495 CCC]

238 May a priest later repeat something he has learned in confession?

No. Under no circumstances. The secrecy of the confessional is absolute. Any PRIEST who would tell another person something he had learned in the confessional would be excommunicated. Even to the Police, the priest cannot say or suggest anything. Therefore, you can speak candidly and unreservedly to a priest and confide in him with great peace of mind, because his only job at that moment is to be entirely "the ear of God".

239 What are the positive effects of confession?

Confession reconciles the sinner with God and the Church. The second after, absolution is like a shower after playing sports, like the fresh air after a summer storm, like waking up on a sunlit summer morning, like the weightlessness of a diver. Everything is contained in the word "reconciliation" (from a Latin verb meaning "to bring back together, to restore"): we are at peace with God again.
2. SIN AND FORGIVENESS

‘Sin and Forgiveness’ is a challenging topic for young people and for people in general. It can be easy to hide ourselves behind a mask and live a life that does not keep us in full communion with our Church community. The belief that we can be cleansed, healed and forgiven through Jesus Christ gives us hope and is the true meaning and essence of our Christian faith; this can be delivered in a myriad of ways (Refer to Classroom Strategies, later in this resource package). It is important to not ignore the word ‘sin’, rather, we should ‘face it’ and provide our students with the opportunity to critically analyse and reflect on ‘sin’ in the world and in their lives personally.

Being the ‘Year of Grace’ here in Australia and the ‘Year of Faith’ internationally, the following responses to questions asked on ‘Sin and Forgiveness’ are appropriate and relevant to this topic. They are taken from YouCat – Catechism for Youth, 2010.

67 What is sin?

At the core of sin is a rejection of God and the refusal to accept his love. This is manifested in a disregard for his commandments. [385-390 CCC] Sin is more than incorrect behavior; it is not just a psychological weakness. In the deepest sense every rejection or destruction of something good is the rejection of good in itself, the rejection of God. In its most profound and terrible dimension, sin is separation from God and, thus, separation from the source of life. That is why death is another consequence of sin. Only through Jesus do we understand the abysmal dimension of sin: Jesus suffered God's rejection in his own flesh. He took upon himself the deadly power of sin so that it would not strike us. The term that we use for this is redemption.[ 224-237, 315-318, 348-468 CCC]

68 Original sin? What does the Fall of Adam and Eve have to do with us?

Sin in the strict sense implies guilt for which one is personally responsible. Therefore, the term "Original Sin" refers, not to a personal sin, but rather to the disastrous, fallen state of mankind into which the individual is born, even before he himself sins by a free decision. [388-389, 402-404.CCC]

In talking about Original Sin, Pope Benedict XVI says that we must understand “that we all carry within us a drop of the poison of that way of thinking, illustrated by the images in the Book of Genesis, the human being does not trust God. Tempted by the serpent, he harbors the suspicion that God is a rival who curtails our freedom and that we will be fully human only when we have cast him aside. Man does not want to receive his existence and the fullness of his life from God. And in doing so, he trusts in deceit rather than in truth and thereby sinks with his life into emptiness, into death” (Pope Benedict XVI, December 8, 2005).

69 Are we compelled to sin by original sin? No. Man, though, is deeply wounded by original sin and is inclined to sin. Nevertheless, with God's help he is capable of doing good. [405.CCC] In no single case are we obliged to sin. In fact, however, we sin again and again, because we are weak, ignorant, and easily misled. A sin committed under compulsion, moreover, would be no sin, because sin always involves a free decision.
228 Who can forgive sins?
God alone can forgive sins. Jesus could say “Your sins are forgiven” (Mk 2:5) only because he is the Son of God. And PRIESTS can forgive sins in Jesus' place only because Jesus has given them that authority. Many people say, "I can go directly to God; why do I need a priest?" God, though, wants it otherwise. We rationalize our sins away and like to sweep things under the rug. That is why God wants us to tell our sins and to acknowledge them in a personal encounter. Therefore, the following words from the Gospel are true of priests: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn 20:23).

524 What does it mean to say, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us"?
Merciful forgiveness—the mercy that we show to others and the mercy that we ourselves seek—is indivisible. If we ourselves are not merciful and do not forgive one another, God's mercy will not reach our hearts. [2838-2845, 2862.CCC] Many people have a lifelong struggle with their inability to forgive. The deep blockade of being unreconciled is resolved only by looking to God, who adopted us "while we were yet sinners" (Rom 5:8). Because we have a kind Father, forgiveness and reconciliation in life are possible.

70 How does God draw us out of the whirlpool of evil?
God does not just look on as man gradually destroys himself and the world around him through the chain reaction of sin. He sends us Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer, who snatches us from the power of sin. [410-412, 420-421CCC] Without the Gospels we would not know that God sends his Son to us men out of his infinite love, so that despite our sins we might find our way back to eternal fellowship with God. [422-429CCC] The reports about the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus are the best news in the world. They testify that the Jew who was born in Bethlehem, Jesus of Nazareth, is the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16) made man. He was sent by the Father so that /all men might be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (cf. 1 Tim 2:4).
3. TYPES OF PENITENTIAL SERVICES

The Catholic Church allows for four different penitential services. The descriptions of the four rites below were provided by the following sources:

- **Rite of Penance** Rite of Reception of Baptised Christians into full Communion with the Catholic Church; International Commission on English in Liturgy; EJ Dwyer 2010. Pg 6-7
- [www.stjohnsphilly.com/](http://www.stjohnsphilly.com/)
- [www.wf-f.org/Confession-Penance.html](http://www.wf-f.org/Confession-Penance.html)

1. **First Rite of Reconciliation**

The first and most common is private, *individual confession*. This is the most commonly used form of penance service, and most of us are familiar with it.

2. **Second Rite of Reconciliation**

The second type of penance service is usually called a **Communal Penance Service**. This is a form of sacramental confession and mixes public prayer and individual confession of sins to a priest, followed by absolution. There are some legitimate variations in the way in which this is celebrated, but a communal penance service must always include: 1) the penitents sorrow for sin (usually expressed in an Act of Contrition); 2) confession of sins to a priest with absolution given; and 3) an act of satisfaction or penance.

Usually, a communal penance service includes a Scripture reading and brief exhortation by the priest. This is followed by an examination of conscience, and then the entire community prays the Act of Contrition together. Sometimes, a single, general penance is assigned to everyone participating; at other times the assignment of a penance is done during the individual confession.

After the communal part of the ceremony, those present individually confess their sins to the priest and receive absolution (and a penance if it has not been assigned in the communal setting). The Act of Contrition is not repeated privately, because it has been part of the communal section of the service. Note that the words of absolution are said by the priest individually over the penitent. A person who participates in only the communal parts of the service has not been to confession.

3. **Third Rite of Reconciliation**

The third type of penance service is usually called **general absolution**. This is very rare, and to be used only in extraordinary circumstances when the bishop authorises it or practical needs require its use. General Absolution is given only when the number of penitents is large, and the danger of death is great, or a large number of penitents cannot wait for private individual confession because of unusual circumstances such as natural disasters, wartime conditions etc. When general absolution is given, the penitents are given absolution as a group without confessing their sins to a priest, with the understanding that they will go to individual confession at the earliest opportunity.
4. Non-Sacramental Penitential Service

Another type of penitential service is non-sacramental by its nature. This is a liturgy with a penitential theme, a prayer service in which we acknowledge that we are sinners and pray for forgiveness and renewal. Such a service does not involve sacramental confession, and therefore there is no absolution or the remission of sins.

The Ritual of Confession

The Sacrament of Penance is a liturgical action instituted by the Church for the reconciliation of sinners to be in communion with God and with the Church. Catholics are obliged to receive the Sacrament of Penance at least once a year – between Ash Wednesday and Trinity Sunday. This is formally known as the Pascal Precept or Easter Duty. However, the Sacrament of Penance is to be celebrated whenever a person is conscious of serious sin. Regular celebration of this sacrament is encouraged as a means of restoring full unity with God and his Church, and for personal spiritual growth.

The Sacrament of Penance comprises four parts:

Contrition: Penitents must be aware of their sinfulness and must be truly sorry (contrite) for their sins. “Heartfelt sorrow and aversion for the sin committed along with the intention of sinning no more” is a sign of true contrition. Contrition is the beginning of metanoia which is a profound change of heart reflected in the penitent’s attempt to live the Christian life.

Confession: Penitents openly confess their sins. The confessing of sins flows from their contrition as a consequence of them reflecting on their lives, i.e., an examination of conscience before God. “Confession requires in the penitent the will to open his/her heart to the minister of God, and in the minister a spiritual judgment by which, acting in the person of Christ, he pronounces his decision of forgiveness or retention of sins in accord with the power of the keys.”

Act of Penance: “True conversion is completed by acts of penance.” Penance is not meant to be seen as punishment. It is rather, a clear demonstration to God, the community and the penitent him/herself of a willingness to embrace the Christian life. “The act of penance [is] a remedy for sin and a help to renewal of life.” The priest asks the penitent to do penance. This may be saying prayers and/or performing some other fitting action. This helps penitents to overcome their faults, and make amends for the harm their sins have caused.

Absolution: After the penitent accepts the penance, the priest, representing the community of the Church and acting in the person of Christ absolves the sinner; that is, he grants God’s forgiveness and restores the relationship between the penitent and God’s family. Thus, the sacrament of penance is completed.
4. SCRIPTURAL AND CHURCH TEACHINGS

Below are some scriptural and Church teachings taken from the web page ‘Women for Faith and Family’ http://www.wf-f.org/Confession-Penance.html. These teachings and Biblical verses are based on the topic of sin and forgiveness; they may be used on retreat and may stimulate an interesting discussion with young people.

Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight, and I am no more worthy to be called your son. Luke 15:21

For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. Romans 3:23-25

Jesus said, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me." John 14:6

In [Jesus Christ] we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:14

Then Jesus said to [His apostles], "Peace be unto you; as my Father has sent me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them: "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose so ever sins you remit, they are remitted, and whose so ever sins you retain, they are retained". John 20:12, 22-23

Pope Benedict XVI
"To live life to the full in freedom we must overcome the test that this freedom entails, that is, temptation. Only if he is freed from the slavery of falsehood and sin can the human person, through the obedience of faith that opens him to the truth, find the full meaning of his life and attain peace, love, and joy."

Angelus March 5, 2006

"In order to respond to the call of God and start on our journey, it is not necessary to be already perfect. We know that the prodigal son's awareness of his own sin allowed him to set out on his return journey and thus feel the joy of reconciliation with the Father. Weaknesses and human limitations do not present an obstacle, as long as they help make us more aware of the fact that we are in need of the redeeming grace of Christ."

Message for the 43rd World Day of Prayers for Vocations
March 30, 2006
5. PREPARATION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR A PENITENTIAL SERVICE

Preparation and Set Up Suggestions:

- Prepare a check list - ensure you have all the resources necessary for the overall reconciliation service/retreat. e.g Power-point facilities, computer/laptops, photocopied material necessary in relation to the workshops, prayer/reconciliation service(s).

- Organize a small choir/band at school- invite students to help lead/organise the singing of prayers/songs. Can be simple with a couple of instruments, a guitar, or even acapella. Show them an example of Catholic adoration- video clip (plenty on youtube)

- If possible, by this stage, offer RE team teachers Lectio Divina and Christian Meditation as part of a staff development day so they are familiar with these forms of prayer.

- Prepare readers (students) for Lectio Divina. Provide examples of scripture based on the topic of penance/reconciliation- select and choose the readings. \textit{Note: The readings of the day would be used for the Mass.} However, for the Penance service you may select specific scripture passages to relate particularly with sin/forgiveness.

- For the reconciliation service, create a prayer focus in the centre of the room using the Blessed Sacrament (if possible) and have it surrounded by small tea light candles. Be aware that the candles are positioned so that the candles cannot set anything alight- It can be in the shape of a tower which will focus attention on the Blessed Sacrament. Once candles are lit, turn off the main light. \textit{Note: You may need other candles around the room- depending on the size of the space.}

- Have a CD player/ ipod with contemporary, reflective songs, instrumentals that create a prayerful space/atmosphere. In preparation, you may ask students to provide songs based on forgiveness that help them meditate, bring them closer to God. \textit{Note: Ensure that these songs are checked, appropriate for the service.}
6. AN EXAMPLE OF SECOND RITE RECONCILIATION – AN EXTENDED SERVICE FOR RETREAT/REFLECTION DAYS

The Reconciliation/Penitential Service

- Invite students into the space with soft music in the background. **Note: In your previous session or RE lesson at school ensure that students are prepared to walk in quietly- no talking.** There needs to be a sense of stillness. A good time to conduct a penance service is as an evening activity for an overnight retreat. It would be ideal to have a religious person e.g. priest, brother or nun present. Have two priests (if possible- so contact your priests in advance), ready for the students to have the opportunity for reconciliation at the back of the room.

- The teacher (may be REC, Youth Ministry Coordinator or another teacher – positive way to affirm your teaching staff!!) reminds students of the sacredness of the space. The teacher may want to share the leading with another teacher and/or one of the students.

- Begin with a **hymn/song** that invites all into the presence of Christ- may refer to these themes: Gift of Grace, Openness to faith, healing, calling, listening to God’s voice in our hearts, Come as You Are. **Note: The students in the choir can create the songs and/or even use the ‘As One Voice’ songs/book, Matt Mayer songs etc**

- The Leader/Teacher begins with an informal prayer or a prepared prayer that may include teachers and students (they are all sitting in various points in the room)

*Introductory Prayer*

**Leader:** Lord Jesus,

We are gathered tonight, as a sacramental community, gathered before You, in your Holy presence.

**Pause**

**Student 1:** You are the shining light in the world. Through your life, Your teachings on earth, your death and resurrection, we know the truth! The truth that through YOU we are saved.

**Pause**

**Student 2:** Lord, as you prayed in trembling fear, in the garden of gethsemane, you took the cup and gave up your life so that we may live with you forever,

**Pause**
Leader:
Lord Jesus, Open our hearts tonight, let us hear your voice through your Word, through You Lord! You truly are present, right here, right now in the Blessed Sacrament. We are all welcomed to your banquet, to your Kingdom of Heaven which begins now, the present.

Pause

Student 4: Help us to be open to your mystery, your truth and touch our minds, our souls as we learn to pray,

Student 5: as we learn to connect with You,

Student 6: as we learn to recognize our wrong-doings,

Student 7: as we recognize the sins we think that don’t matter,

Student 8: As we learn to recognize the importance of reconciliation, of forgiveness in our hearts.

Student 9: As we learn to forgive ourselves; knowing that we can be healed, cleansed, forgiven.

Pause in silence for a few moments/minutes.

- Present a video clip on forgiveness: For example: The Prodigal Son - The Prodigal Son- Contemporary Short film- adaptation of Luke 15 (approximately 5 minutes duration) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxfdChYCKYA

- At this point the teacher gently asks students to prepare their posture for meditation; to close their eyes, for students to relax. Note: The position of the body is not essential to meditation, but there are proper positions. For example- the liturgical sitting posture i.e: feet flat on the floor, slightly back; hands on the lap, palms down; shoulders a little bit forward and head slightly bowed. Students are surrounding the blessed sacrament. Some students, even teachers may find this challenging and that’s Ok- it may be a new, powerful experience for many. How often do we get to be still, in a dimly lit room filled with candles and the Blessed Sacrament - Jesus before us? What is important is that all are relaxed and ready for time out to connect with God.

- Begin the Lectio Divina- lead by teacher. Note: In this instance, it may be appropriate to use ‘The Prodigal Son’ or even The Samaritan woman at the well- John 4:5-42.

- Before a student reads the scripture passage slowly a second time, the teacher invites all to focus on a phrase or sentence or image, to share with all once the reading is
completed. **Note:** (*never force anyone to share it- free will is important when it comes to faith or sharing it*). During the second reading the student/leader pauses at times.

- Once the Lectio Divina has happened, the choir or CD/Ipod plays a few songs e.g. Garden by Matt Maher as all pray, or just sit quietly with God. Some may want to write in their journals- reflect on the readings, pray.

- Confession with the priest(s) is offered to students at this point- including individual Act of Contrition.

Prayers of thanks to conclude the service. Allow students and staff to offer up prayers of thanks or once again you may prefer a prepared prayer of thanks for the opportunity to reconcile with God, for the hope we share through Our Lord Jesus Christ. **Note:** You may want to conclude with a group prayer of absolution.

For e.g.

**Leader:** We will say together an act of contrition:

**All:** O my God, I am very sorry that I have sinned against you. Because you are so good and with your help I will not sin again.

- Students leave quietly, when they are ready, or if more appropriate all together (depends on whether this is an evening service at an overnight retreat or a session during a reflection day).

*The Sacramental liturgy service is completed.*
7. PENANCE / RECONCILIATION SERVICES: SACRAMENTAL AND NON-SACRAMENTAL

When creating a penitential/ reconciliation service, it is necessary to be aware that the service immediately becomes sacramental when the ‘act of contrition’ is recited and lead by a priest. Non-sacramental services, also known as liturgical penitential services, do not include the ‘act of contrition’ and therefore, not sacramental. This contains sacramental penitential services and non-sacramental penitential services.

Sacramental Penitential Services

Second Rite of Reconciliation ‘Opening our Clenched Fists’ (Sacramental Service)

The following Second Rite of Reconciliation (Sacramental Penitential Service) was provided by Mary Kleist (Religious Education Coordinator, Bethany College). Whilst this sacramental service is written for teenage girls, it is also appropriate for a boys school (particularly when the reading is based on The Prodigal Son) and can be adapted to suit your College community. The dramatization of the Gospel is a tangible way for students to connect with the theme of reconciliation and the message of God’s unconditional love for us.

Introduction

Leader: As we prepare to receive the Lord Jesus in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, let us be open to grace by opening our hands and laying them palms up on our laps.

Open hands are a symbol of one’s willingness to accept, to forgive and to welcome one another in a gesture of unity and reconciliation. Our open hands are a sign of our desire to receive God’s love and to share this love with those around us.

We begin our prayer with a sign of the cross. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,

All: Amen.

Leader: “Opening Our Clenched Fist”

Did you ever tighten your hand to make a fist? Clench your fingers tight. You can feel the strain down your arm. Likewise, your teeth may clamp shut. If someone handed you an ice cream cone, you would not be able to hold it in your hand unless you opened your fingers and unclenched your fist. Why? Because a closed fist cannot give or receive anything.

Our hearts can be like a clenched fist or an open hand. How do you feel when someone uses your things without asking or turns off the TV while you are watching your favorite show? How do you feel when someone calls you names or puts you down in front of others? Nobody likes being annoyed or having their rights taken away. Sometimes we get angry, even when people hurt us unintentionally. What should our attitude be toward people who hurt us? Should we close our fist tight? Should we close our heart to that person? Should we hold grudges or try to get even?
Or is there another way? Forgiveness is not expressed just in words. It is shown in our attitude, our openness and our readiness to forgive. Are we ready to forgive and reach out to the person that hurt us? Are our hands open, ready to welcome back and forgive? Are our hearts open to give and receive forgiveness?

Leader: May the peace and love of Jesus and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each of us.

All: And also with you.

Leader: None of us can live on our own. We all need the love and support of family and friends to help us be the kind of people that God wants us to be. The relationships we have with each other and with God are what makes us who we are. As we prepare to celebrate reconciliation we believe that God holds each one of us and all that fills the spaces between us in the palm of God’s hand. Sometimes we allow things that really shouldn’t be there to get into those spaces between us, an unkind word, a hurtful action. When we do this we know that something is wrong, something is out of place. God always offers us forgiveness and shows how to mend our damaged relationships. God wants us to put right whatever has disturbed the space between us and those around us. God wants us to be the best we can be as young people, right here and right now.

Leader: As we listen to this Gospel story let us be reminded of the gifts of healing, acceptance, forgiveness, and love.

Gospel Read by a single reader:


Jesus said, ‘There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, “Father, let me have the share of the estate that will come to me.” So the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery. When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch; so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled himself with the husks the pigs were eating but no one would let him have them. Then he came to his senses and said, “How many of my father's hired men have all the food they want and more, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired men."

So he left the place and went back to his father. ‘While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him. Then his son said, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.” But the father said to his servants, “Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we will celebrate by having a feast, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found.” And they began to celebrate.

‘Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. The servant told him, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the calf we had been fattening because he has got him back safe and sound.” He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out and began to urge him to come in; but he retorted...
to his father, "All these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed any orders of yours, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property -- he and his loose women -- you kill the calf we had been fattening."

"The father said, "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found.""

The Gospel of the Lord

ALL: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Read in parts with 5 readers:

Reader 1: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke (15:11-32)

Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father:

Reader 2: Father, let me have the share of the estate that will come to me.

Reader 1: So the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery. When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch; so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled himself with the husks the pigs were eating but no one would let him have them. Then he came to his senses and said:

Reader 2: How many of my father's hired men have all the food they want and more, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired men.

Reader 1: So he left the place and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him.

Reader 2: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.

Reader 1: But the father said to his servants,

Reader 3: "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we will celebrate by having a feast, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found."

Reader 1: And they began to celebrate.

Reader 1: Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. The servant told him:
Reader 4: Your brother has come, and your father has killed the calf we had been fattening because he has got him back safe and sound.

Reader 1: He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out and began to urge him to come in; but he retorted to his father:

Reader 5: All these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed any orders of yours, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property -- he and his loose women -- you kill the calf we had been fattening.

Reader 3: My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found.’

Reader 1: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

Examination of Conscience

Leader: We thank God for making each one of us special. We thank God for the goodness that is in each one of us. We thank God that each one of us, and all that exists, is being carefully held in God’s hands. Jesus saw beauty and goodness in all the people he met. He sees the beauty and goodness in each one of us too. Jesus spoke words of love and forgiveness and healing to all he met. He showed us how we should treat others. Jesus speaks words of love, forgiveness and healing to you too.

Pause:

Let us recall relationships that we have damaged.

Reader 6: O my God, help me to remember the times when I didn’t live as Jesus asked me to.

All: Help me to be sorry and to try again.

Reader 7: We damage relationships when we ignore others….

All: God forgive us. Teach us to love.

Reader 6: We damage relationships when we try to bully others….

All: God forgive us. Teach us to love.

Reader 7: We damage relationships when we are not truthful……

All: God forgive us. Teach us to love.

Reader 6: We damage relationships when we are selfish…

All: God forgive us. Teach us to love.
Reader 7: We damage relationships when we are unkind……
All: God forgive us. Teach us to love.
Reader 6: We damage relationships when we are too busy……
All: God forgive us. Teach us to love.
Reader 7: We damage relationships when we are full of anger……
All: God forgive us. Teach us to love.
Reader 6: We damage relationships when we are unable to forgive……
All: God forgive us. Teach us to love.
Reader 7: We damage relationships when we are unable to love……
All: God forgive us. Teach us to love.

Leader:

God, our loving Father, we place ourselves before you and come to you with open hands. We know well our weaknesses. We have hurt others and there are many good things that we have failed to do. Help us with the guidance of your Holy Spirit to seek ways to renew our relationship with you and with others, especially during these Lenten days. We ask this in Jesus’ name.

All:  Amen.

Let us pause now to examine our conscience before we confess our sins.

Individual confession and absolution

Leader:

You are all invited, in turn, to go to the priest and name an area of weakness in your life for which you would like forgiveness. You will then be invited to say an act of contrition and the priest will give you absolution.

Please respect this time of silence. You may want to re-read the Gospel reading or the prayers reflecting on relationships.

Reflection while the music plays in the background.

Two songs: “Into your hands” and “Enfold me in your love”.

Leader:

God, our loving Father, we place ourselves before you and come to you with open hands. We know well our weaknesses. We have hurt others and there are many good things that we have failed to do. Help us with the guidance of your Holy Spirit to seek ways to renew our relationship with you and with others, especially during these Lenten days. We ask this in Jesus’ name.

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Please respect this time of silence. You may want to re-read the Gospel reading or the prayers reflecting on relationships.

Reflection while the music plays in the background.

Two songs: “Into your hands” and “Enfold me in your love”.
After all students have had the opportunity to spend time with the priest and when all are returned (or about 5 minutes before the finishing time) we will say together an ‘act of contrition’:

**All:** O my God, I am very sorry that I have sinned against you. Because you are so good and with your help I will not sin again.

**Leader:** Let us thank God for forgiving us and healing the spaces between us. Let us pray together with confidence to God our Father in the words Jesus taught.

**All:** Our Father, Who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy Will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

**Sign of Peace**
Before we leave here today let us offer one another a sign of peace.

**Final Prayer**
**Leader:** God of love and compassion. You have forgiven our sins and sent us your peace. Help us to forgive each other and work to establish peace in the world. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

**Blessing**
**Leader:** May the God of mercy and forgiveness show you love
May Jesus Christ our brother show you love
May the Spirit of God show you love
May God bless you now and always, Father Son and Holy Spirit.

**All:** Amen.

**Leader:** Go in the peace and forgiveness of Christ.

**All:** Amen

*If you want/have time* **Closing Song: The Light of Christ**
Two Sons

Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that will come to me." So the father divided the property between them.

A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery. 'When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch; so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled himself with the husks the pigs were eating but no one would let him have them. Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's hired men have all the food they want and more, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired men."

So he left the place and went back to his father. 'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him. Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we will celebrate by having a feast,

because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began to celebrate. 'Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. The servant told him, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the calf we had been fattening because he has got him back safe and sound." He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out and began to urge him to come in; but he retorted to his father, "All these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed any orders of yours, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property -- he and his loose women -- you kill the calf we had been fattening."

"The father said, "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found."
Hurts and Healing – *True to You* Retreat Reconciliation

*The following Penitential/Reconciliation Prayer Service was provided by Gerry Mahony, Religious Education Coordinator for De La Salle College Revesby. This service is sacramental as the ‘Sacrament of Penance’ is offered for students. However, if it is not offered, once again it becomes a liturgical penitential service (non-sacramental). This service gently invites students to reflect on themselves, to be ‘true to God’ by opening them up to their own ‘truths’ about themselves and their relationship with God. The three main symbols used are: The Mask (Who is the person I share with the outside world?), The Heart (Who am I, when I am perfectly and totally myself?), The Rock (What is it that makes me the unique person that I am?)*

**Aim:**
- Students should consider the need to be reconciled with their past, within the context of their community, family, friends, self and their God.

**Resources:**
- Rough stones
- Reflective music
- Sacred “pond”
- Floating candles
- Non-permanent OHP pens
- Overhead transparency sheets cut into strips
- Bleach
- Masks
- Journal
- Coloured cloth

**Small Group:**
- Students with their specially chosen stone enter the darkened room in silence. A water sacred space with floating candles is in the centre of the room and reflective music sets the tone.

- Students sit down in room and are asked to look at the stone closely:
  - Feel the rock between their hands.
  - Feel various smooth/rough edges of the rock.
  - Notice the variation in the colour of the rock.
  - Look carefully at its texture.
  - Your rock is made up of various textures, colours and grooves. It may not appear perfectly smooth or uniform in colour. It is unique.
  - It’s the variation in this rock that makes it unique. Imperfections are an essential part of its beauty.
• Direct students to listen quietly to the music and read the following passage to themselves:

  I am broken
  And in need of healing
  I am proud
  You call me to humility
  I am selfish
  You call me to give and not count the cost
  I am self-centred
  You call me to put others before myself
  I am human with many rough edges and failings
  You rejoice in my humanness
  You Jesus offer salvation
  You enter my life each moment of my existence
  And you save me from myself

• Leader reads the following passage to the group:

  Jesus was a devoted Jew who was familiar with the many laws in the Hebrew Scriptures. There were many people who were illiterate and confused by these laws. Jesus condensed this list of laws into two major ones: love of God and neighbour.

• Ask students to look at their stone and ask them to reflect privately on these questions:
  - Are our hearts sometimes like these stones? Hard, rough edged, closed to the needs of those around us?
  - Can we change our hearts? Can we open them to God and to the needs of others, so that we can achieve those things in life we yearn to achieve?
  - Can we improve our relationships with those we relate to, so that we can assist them in achieving their goals and indirectly our own?

• Teacher leads in the following examination of conscience:
  Leader: Our response is “Lord, change our hearts”.
  When we forget the beauty of our childhood dreams...
  When we lose sense of the important things in our life...
  When we fail to acknowledge family, friends and work as a way to achieve our goals...
  When we allow the worries of life to overcome the achievement of our hopes...
  When we feel the struggle is too much and the dream too distant...
  When we don’t acknowledge the passion of others expectations...
  When we fail to develop our relationship with God and others...

• Invite the participants to share their inside mask with others in their small group.

• Students are now invited to write down on clear strips of plastic something they wish to say to God about one of the masks they wear and how such a mask is preventing them from being their true self. This will be a confession of sinfulness, and a desire to strive to be more “true to you” and to others.
• Invite the young people to close their eyes and listen to the sounds in the room. When everyone is settled, ask them to put on their mask, this time with the inside out. This should be done quietly and reverently. Ask them to respect everyone’s privacy by not looking around to see what people put on their inside mask.

• When everyone is quiet, make the following points in your own words:
The side of the mask that is facing out is the side we usually try to hide from others. We may try to hide our fears, our insecurities and our doubts. We may try to hide that we take joy in certain things, like being with our family. We might even try to hide things about ourselves that we’re proud of. But this is the side of us that God sees and no matter what is on our inside mask, that is, what is in our heart, God knows about it and loves us. God challenges us to move beyond some of the things that prevent us from being our best self, but in spite of those things, God loves us. Nothing we can ever do will cut us off from God’s love.

Another challenge that God places before us is to allow other people to be who they really are. When we put people down or ridicule them, we force them to wear their outside mask, even though it may not always be their true self. We owe it to one another to be true to the self God created us to be and to value that truth in others.

• Read Psalm 139 which promotes the idea that the one person who knows us totally is our God, and even though we may not be comfortable with what is behind the mask, he loves us entirely.

• Invite the group leaders to untie the mask of every young person in their small group. As they do so, encourage them to say something like, “Be true to you. Be true to your God”.

• Pass the candle around the group. Invite each person to complete the statement, “I believe...” as it applies to themselves, their God or God’s relationship with the world. Assure them that if they would rather not say anything, they do not have to. They should just hold the candle for a few seconds, and then pass it to the next person. You may want to start this process with one of the group leaders or a young person who is likely to say something. This will set the tone for the rest of the group.

• Throughout this session, a chaplain will provide the opportunity for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. After each student goes to Reconciliation, (with their stone and plastic strip), they will be asked to drop both in the sacred pond (which will clear away their writing- symbolic of them being forgiven by God). [demonstrate this]

• Close with the following prayer:
  
  Forgiving God, take away our stony hearts and give us hearts ready to love. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

• Students will also have the opportunity to write affirmations throughout this session.
Non-Sacramental Reconciliation Prayer Service:

The following Liturgy of the Word and Examination of the Conscience was provided by Mary Kleist, Religious Education Coordinator, Bethany College.

**Equipment**
- Masking tape
- Cross on the floor
- Blindfolds
- Reconciliation CD
- PowerPoint and music
- Reflective Music
- Masks made by the students
- Pen and Paper
- Bare tree branch in space
- Cut out of leaves/masking tape

**Time:** 1 hour

**LARGE GROUP**

Instruct students to assemble at the arranged time, bringing with them their masks (constructed in an earlier session) and their folder and a pen.

They enter the area quietly and do not necessarily sit with their friends.

Quiet music while students enter the room.

**GATHERING SONG**

**EXPLANATION OF SERVICE:**

The session leader explains

- The purpose of the Liturgy of the Word, including a personal examination of conscience, relates to the theme of God present with them always and what we have explored so far today regarding perceptions of ourselves and others. Our life is a journey and it is not something that done in isolation. It is a process involving others. Journeying together is fun, it is nurturing and it is life giving, but in reality the choices we make and our decisions are not always the right ones and they damage us and our relationships with others and with our God.

- Sometimes we fail to be who we really are. We put on a mask. We cover up our sinfulness, even from our selves. But no matter how many masks we wear we cannot fool our God. God knows us completely. God called us into being and continually challenges us to be a 'new creation.'

- In this Liturgy of the Word and examination of conscience we are going to use our masks symbolically. In the centre of the room you will notice the taped cross. In the time that we spend here, each one of us, staff and students alike will surrender our mask onto the cross as a sign of our participation in this community and as sign of our desire for healing and wholeness. Our masks will gradually form the cross, the symbol of God's saving forgiveness.

- This is an ‘alone time’, a rare opportunity for silent reflection and the chance to be completely honest with ourselves, to reflect on our life journey so far and to look ahead.
SONG

BANDAGING OF EYES.

Hand out fabric strips and have the students cover their eyes loosely.

READING

Blind man (Mark 10: 46-52)

As Jesus left Jericho with his disciples and a large crowd, Bartemaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting at the side of the road. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout and to say, 'Son of David, have pity on me.' Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him here.' So they called the blind man. 'Courage', they said, 'get up! He is calling you.' So, throwing off his cloak he jumped up and went to Jesus. Then Jesus spoke, ' What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'Master let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Go, your faith has saved you.' And immediately his sight returned and he followed Jesus along the road.

The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE: Students remain blindfolded.

Reader 1. As we travel through life, there are many times when we are called to help those who need us. Those people who are lonely, the person who is isolated, or the friend in need. Sometimes we fail to read these due our blindness. For the times when we have ignored those who are different to us........ we ask your forgiveness. R

Reader 2. As we travel through life, there are many challenges we will encounter. These are opportunities for self-discovery and growth. Sometimes we fail to recognise these opportunities due to blindness. For the times that we have failed or refused to see...... we ask your forgiveness. R

Reader 3. As we travel through life, we are challenged to make decisions about the direction our lives will follow. Sometimes we make the wrong decisions – sometime hurting ourselves - We do not consider the value of our bodies, abusing them, we make choices... we damage ourselves............For the times that we have made decisions which have been detrimental to ourselves........................we ask your forgiveness R

Reader 4. As we travel through life, we are challenged to make decisions that have impact on the lives of others. Sometimes we make the wrong decisions – and the results hurt others - We participate in things that are destructive of others, ignoring them, backstabbing and destroying reputations, spreading rumours , and cheating on those we love - those we call family and friends. We damage the lives of others. . For the times that we have have made decisions which have stopped us growing......... we ask your forgiveness R
Reader 5. As we travel through life, we take with us all those experiences of our lives so far. There are times on our journey that we are not brave enough to reach out to others. Sometimes we are not even honest enough to own our gifts and qualities. Instead we journey, wearing a mask, locking others out of relationship and destroying our own potential. For the times we have been too afraid to take off the mask to our family, our friends and our God.... we ask your forgiveness.

At this point the students are asked to take off their blindfolds and place them on the floor beside them.

PowerPoint and Song: By Your Side

TIME FOR WRITING:

Students are given the instruction to take their journals and to write on it an area of their journey that they want to leave behind. It might be a mask that they wish to surrender or perhaps an area where they feel they need forgiveness.

When they are ready, each individual approaches the sacred space and surrender their masks onto the cross.

Music plays until this process is complete. Tell the students to take their time and that this is a time for them to be alone.

READING ONE:
A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Yahweh our God speaks to us saying:
Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed each of you;
I have called you by your name; you are mine.
Should you pass through deep waters, I shall be with each of you;
If you have to go through raging rivers, they will not swallow you up.
If you have to walk through fire, you will not suffer and the flames will not overwhelm you.
For I am Yahweh, your God, I am the Holy One, your Saviour.
Since I regard you as very precious
You are honoured and I love you.
So do not be afraid, for I am always with you.
The word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God
RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 125

Response: What marvels the Lord worked for us!
Indeed we were glad.

1. When the Lord delivered Zion from bondage,
it seemed like a dream.
Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
on our lips there were songs.
2. The heathens themselves said: 'What marvels
the Lord worked for them!'
What marvels the Lord worked for us!
Indeed we were glad.
3. Deliver us, O Lord, from our bondage
as streams in dry land.
Those who are sowing in tears
will sing when they reap.
4. They go out, they go out, full of tears
carrying seed for the sowing:
they come back, they come back, full of song,
carrying their sheaves.

Second Reading Philippians 1:3-6.8-11

Every time I pray for all of you, I pray with joy, remembering how you have helped to
spread the Good News from the day you first heard it right up to the present. I am quite
certain that the One who began this good work in you will see that it is finished when the
Day of Christ Jesus comes. God knows how much I miss you all, loving you as Christ
Jesus loves you. My prayer is that your love for each other may increase more and more
and never stop improving your knowledge and deepening your perception so that you can
always recognise what is best. This will help you to become pure and blameless, and
prepare you for the Day of Christ, when you will reach the perfect goodness which Jesus
Christ produces in us for the glory and praise of God.

The word of the Lord

All: Thanks be to God
GOSPEL:

Narrator  A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke:
Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about
seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking about everything that had
happened. As they talked and discussed things, Jesus himself came up and
walked beside them; but they were kept from recognising him. He asked them:

Jesus  What are you discussing as you walk along?

Narrator  They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them named Cleopas, asked him:

Cleopas  Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have
happened there in these days?

Jesus  What things?

Cleopas  About Jesus of Nazareth.

Companion  He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.

Cleopas  The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death and
they crucified him. And what is more, it is the third day since all of this took
place.

Companion  In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early in the
morning and did not find his body.

Cleopas  They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angel, who said he was
alive.

Companion  Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women
had said.

Cleopas  But they did not see him

Jesus  How foolish you are, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have
spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?

Narrator  And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was
said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Pause) As they approached the
village to where they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going on further.
But they urged him strongly:

Companion  Stay with us, for it is nearly evening.

Cleopas  The day is nearly over.

Narrator  So he went to stay with them. (PAUSE) While he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and
began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him
and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other:

Cleopas  Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked to us on the road and
opened the scriptures to us.

Narrator  They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven
and those with them, assembled together saying:

Disciple 1  It is true. The Lord has risen and appeared to Simon

Narrator  Then the two told what had happen on the way, and how Jesus was
recognised by them when he broke the bread.

HOMILY
PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION: Direct student attention to the tree branch on the space.

We are going to bring this tree to life through our prayers and an offering of ourselves. During this time of intercessory prayer you are asked to take a leaf and to write onto the leaf a gift that you are going to share with others as you journey through life. When you have decided on your gift, place it on the tree as a sign of your willingness to journey with others and with God.

PRAYER - Our Father.

SIGN OF PEACE

CLOSING PRAYER:

Healing God, we thank you for the many blessings you bestow on us on our journey. We know that you are always journeying with us. When the road is rough, you support us, when the turns are sharp, give us courage, and when we lose our way gently guide us back to you.

All: Amen.

FINAL SONG
Forgiveness - The Light of God (Non-Sacramental)

The following reconciliation prayer service ‘Forgiveness - The Light of God’ is found in ‘Reconciliation Services’ written by Donal Neary SJ, pgs 58-61’. This is an excellent way to engage students on the topic of ‘forgiveness’. The strong symbolic use of candles and examination of the conscience used with the liturgy of the word, challenges young people to identify their weaknesses and to recognize that we can be forgiven; to see the light, find hope through Jesus Christ.

1. This service of reconciliation is suitable for school or a school retreat day.
2. Necessary for the Service: candles, decoration, posters etc for the central place or places of the ceremony.

HYMN

PRAYER
God of forgiveness and love, you are with us always.
Help us, for our part, to stay close to you.
You have given us the gift of life.
You call us to grow, to develop our talents and to reach our full potential.
You want us to make the world a better place.
May your love and concern for others be made present through us.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

READER 1:
St Paul tells how disciples of Jesus and the chosen ones of God should live.

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Colossians.

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive each other. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.(Colossians 3:12-15.)

(Five students take a candle each and light it from the central candle on the table. They hold the lit candles aloft as they read their prayer below.)

READER 2:
There have been times in my life when I haven't been as good a person as I might have been. I have caused problems at home. I have been quarrelsome and lacking in
understanding towards my family. This has caused hurt and was wrong. It destroyed the light of Christ in me.
(Pause. The first smaller candle/light is extinguished.)

READER 3:
There have been times when I haven't made the most of opportunities given to me. I have wasted time. I haven't always used to the full the talents God has given me, particularly in regard to school. I've been lazy. This has been wrong. It destroyed the light of Christ in me.
(Pause. The second smaller candle/light is extinguished.)

READER 4:
There have been times when I've been unfair to my friends and broken my promises. I have talked about them to other friends in a damaging way. Sometimes I have ignored people. I have been choosy. I have been a bad example to my own peer group. This has been wrong. It destroyed the light of Christ in me.
(Pause. The third smaller candle/light is extinguished.)

READER 5:
There have been times, God, when I have neglected my relationship with you. I have not prayed or have been very careless when praying. I have been unsettled at Mass or even missed it altogether. This has been wrong. It destroyed the light of Christ in me.
(Pause. The fourth smaller candle/light is extinguished.)

READER 6:
There have been times when I've been dishonest with people around me. I've told lies because I hadn't the courage to own up. I haven't always respected others or their belongings. I've been slow in returning things I've borrowed. This has been wrong. It destroyed the light of Christ in me.
(Pause. The fifth smaller candle/light is extinguished.)

LEADER:
Sometimes we have blown out the light of Christ in our own lives. We recall now the ways in which we may have done so over the past year.
- Have you been helpful at home? Do you always do what you are asked? Or do you moan and try to get out of helping?
- Have you lost your temper at home? Maybe you shouted at someone, or slammed a door, or refused to talk?
- Have you always remembered the way God sees you? Have you treated your home as special? Have you failed to treat the people with whom you live with kindness, understanding and compassion?
- Are you always honest? Or have you lied to someone? What is your attitude to so-called ‘little white lies’?
- Are you a good friend? Have you hurt one of your friends? Have you been unkind because you were hurt or annoyed?
• Are you kind to the other students in our class? Have you hurt someone's feelings this year? Have you made it difficult for others to get to know you?
• We pause now and take some time to look at our lives, to be more sensitive to what our conscience says. (Pause.)

HYMN

Together now, we acknowledge our failures to live the Christian message of love, as we say: I confess to almighty God ...

READER 2:
Lord, I promise to be a better person at home, making a special effort to love and respect my family, thereby bringing your light into our world.
(Pause. The first smaller candle/light is relit.)

READER 3:
Lord, I promise, with your help, to respect life more, especially my own. I will use my talents more fully in the future for your service and for the service of others, thereby spreading your light in the world.
(Pause. The second smaller candle/light is relit.)

READER 4:
Lord, I will be a better friend in the future. I will try to be more loyal and caring. I will be careful not to belittle people by talking about them to others. In this way I will spread your light in our world.
(Pause. The third smaller candle/light is relit.)

READER 5:
Lord, in the future, with your help, I will try to be a better person. I will stay close to you in prayer and will be more attentive at Mass. In this way I will spread your light in our world.
(Pause. The fourth smaller candle/light is relit.)

READER 6:
Lord, I will try to be more honest. I will respect others and their belongings. I will tell the truth. In this way I will spread your light in our world.
(Pause. The fifth smaller candle/light is relit.)

LEADER:
Loving God, source of our life, you know our weaknesses. May we reach out with joy to grasp your hand and walk more readily in our ways. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

ALL: Amen.

HYMN
‘What You Do To Others, You Do To Me’ is a sacramental penitential prayer service taken from ‘Reconciliation Services’ written by Donal Neary SJ. This service invites young people to be aware of the injustices that do exist. For e.g issues such as homelessness and our own personal responsibility to make a difference. Social Justice is a topic that young people feel strongly about and this service offers them the time to reflect on where they fit in the puzzle of life and how they can contribute to society in a positive way- being true to who they are individually. The Beatitudes taken from Matthew’s gospel leads all to listen to their own personal calling and challenges them to look at who they are and how to contribute to people in need. Note: In addition to this prayer service, St Vincent de Paul and Catholic Mission provide great resources that may be helpful. (Note: You may contact them either on-line at their Head Office)

I. This service of reconciliation is suited for a prayer/reflection day for young people.

2. Necessary for the Service: candles, decoration, posters etc for the central place or places of the ceremony. For the gospel activity, bread, coke, blanket, bandage or medicine, teddy bear or football book.

WELCOME
All are welcome to our service. We'll listen to the word of God where Jesus says that what we do for others we do for him. We ask his love and forgiveness for all of us:

PRAYER
Lord Jesus, you are our brother, look on us with love; you are the Son of God, look on us with forgiveness; you are the Word of God, look on us with kindness; you are the son of Mary, be with us always, brother and friend. Amen.

GOSPEL:
The words of Jesus about helping others is a call and a challenge to examine how we do this in our lives. (This reading may be read, followed by a short drama; or the drama may stand by itself)

A reading from the gospel according to Matthew: Jesus said to the people: 'When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and give you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a
stranger and welcome you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' (Matthew 25:31-40.)

ACTING THE GOSPEL:
Eight people in centre representing the eight needs; eight more bring to the people in the centre what is needed.

I was hungry and you gave me food - someone brings food to the person in the centre.
I was thirsty and you gave me drink - someone brings water or coke.
I was naked and you clothed me - blanket put around someone.
I was sick and you visited me - someone is bandaged.
I was bullied and you rescued me - person crouches and walks free at another’s touch.
I was a stranger and you welcomed me - handshake offered.
I was ignorant and you brought me to school - book given to a person.
I was lonely and you took time with me - teddy bear or football given to a person.

REFLECTION ON LIFE:
Have I bullied anyone? Lord have mercy.
Have I physically hurt anyone? Lord have mercy.
Have I used another just for my own needs or greed? Lord have mercy.
Have I neglected to pray or think of God? Lord have mercy.
Have I been mean in any way? Lord have mercy.
Have I treated people different from myself badly in word or action? Lord have mercy.

May the God of love and tolerance look kindly on each person here, forgive our wrongdoing and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

VISUAL OF SIN
Each person brings to the centre of the ceremony a symbol of personal or social sin:
A broken bottle for the ways people are violently treated; a torn photo for the destruction of people’s creativity; a torn tape or broken mobile phone for the ways we destroy communication among us; some street litter for how we destroy the environment; crushed fruit for how we crush life among us; a broken friendship bracelet for our failures in friendship.

SACRAMENT OF PENANCE/RECONCILIATION
The students go to confession and/or place the symbol at the candle; on their way back they are given a cross as a sign of forgiveness. This cross can be made of stiff paper or pieces of wood. The teacher or priest gives the cross. Some words of Jesus may be written on the cross.
REFLECTION
We like to think that if something went wrong, we’d get a second chance.
A mistake in a job, a misjudgment in work, a let down in love, and we hope we would not be written off for it.
Or things we do that are mean and wrong; like children stealing something in the kitchen or telling lies - we’d like another chance.
This is Jesus today - the one who always sees that a person can change, do better, act differently the next time.
There’s always another chance and a next time with Jesus.
And as he has done for us; he asks us to do for each other.
Even when we’ve been badly let down.

PRAYER
Lord God,
Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth.
Lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust.
Lead me from hate to love, from war to peace.
Let peace fill our heart, our world, our universe.

BLESSING
May the Lord God bless us with patience with ourselves, so that we can do our best in his service;
May he bless us with patience with others, so we can understand when and be tolerant.
And may we always be blessed with his patience with us,
The Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.

HYMN
The following Reconciliation prayer service can be adapted using the Youtube links and suggested songs at the end of this resource book. You may choose to add more material in this service.

**Reconciliation Prayer Service**

**Greeting**

**Leader:** We gather to remember God's mercy and love. Our God is a kind and merciful God, always willing to forgive us.

**Response:** All praise and glory to you, God.

**Opening Prayer**

**Reader:** Merciful Father, we thank you for your love. Open our hearts and our minds to your presence. Help us to live as followers of your Son, Jesus Christ, and to ask forgiveness when we fail to do this. We ask this in your name.

**Response:** Amen.

**Bible Reading**

**Reader:** Let us listen to the story of the Forgiving Father. (Read Luke 15:11-32 from the Bible.) The word of the Lord.

**Response:** Thanks be to God.

**Prayer of the Faithful**

**Leader:** God calls us to love. Think about the times we have ignored this call. Let us ask for God's forgiveness.

**Reader:** For the times we have failed to pray and worship God,

**Response:** Lord, have hear our prayer.

**Reader:** For the times we have not treated other people fairly,

**Response:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Reader:** For the times we have not helped those in need,

**Response:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Reader:** For the times we have lied or cheated,

**Response:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Reader:** For the times we have failed to forgive others,
Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

*The Lord's Prayer*

**Leader:** Let us pray the great prayer of reconciliation, the Our Father. Our Father ... 

*Sign of Peace*

**Reader:** Lord, forgive us as we forgive others. As a sign of our reconciliation, we offer each other a sign of peace.

Response: Peace be with you.

*Closing Prayer*

**Leader:** Loving Father, we are your children. We thank you for the gift of your forgiveness and mercy. Help us to always follow Jesus Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Response: Amen.

If you will have individual confessions, ask the students to proceed to the area you have reserved.
8. PRAYERS

The use of symbols when praying, offers young people the opportunity to physically connect as they are praying. ‘Intention Tree’ and ‘Tridium Prayer’ is provided from the text ‘Seasons of Celebrations: Prayers, Plays and Projects for the Church Year’ written by Patricia Mathson. The concept of using a butterfly in ‘Intention Tree’ could be changed using another analogy for boys, For e.g. Tracing a football and scoring a try. Create ‘try posts’ etc.

Intention Tree

A way to encourage petitional prayer during the Easter season is the "intention tree." The students write their personal intentions on butterfly cut outs and hang them on a tree." A branch brought in from outside and placed in a pot or a small decorative white tree purchased from a craft store work well for this project.

Trace butterfly symbols on different colors of construction paper and duplicate enough so that the students have plenty of choice of colours.

Explain what you mean by intentions. Intentions are whatever needs, large or small, a child wants to pray for. For example, a child may write a prayer for a sick pet, a dying relative, world peace, good grades, suffering due to war, homeless people, or family problems.

After the students have written their intentions and signed their initials on the butterfly, have them cut the butterfly out, punch a hole through the top, and feed and tie a piece of yam through the hole. Each butterfly is then hung on a branch.

Choose one intention to pray especially for each day the students are in class. The intention tree reminds the students to pray for their own needs and the needs of others.

This idea can also be used during other seasons by changing the symbols. Leaves can be used in the fall, snowflakes during the winter, crosses during Lent, and flowers in the summer.
Triduum Prayer

The following short prayer service can be used as part of a lesson on the Triduum. The teacher reads the part of the leader and three pre-selected students each read one of the petitions. The entire class joins in the response.

Leader: Dear Jesus, we gather together today to recall the events of the Triduum. This is a holy time when we celebrate your saving death and triumphant resurrection.

Child 1: You gave us the gift of the Eucharist on Holy Thursday. May we always live as your people.

All: You are our light and our hope.

Child 2: You died on a cross on Good Friday. Help us to die to all things that keep us from following you.

All: You are our light and our hope.

Child 3: You rose to new life on Easter. May we always live as your creation and proclaim the good news to all people.

All: You are our light and our hope.

Leader: We thank you for all you have done for us. We pray that all people will come to see your life, death, and resurrection as a sign of hope. We ask this in your name.

All: Amen.

Praying this prayer together helps students to recall the events of the paschal mystery and to celebrate the victory of Christ's resurrection.
The prayer below is an appropriate prayer, showing young people how to address the sins in their own lives and to personally recognize and accept God’s forgiveness. This prayer is taken from the web page http://www.christian-marriage-today.com/prayer-for-forgiveness.html.

**A Prayer for Forgiveness**

Lord, you are a forgiving God. So I come today asking for your forgiveness. Father, my desire is to do your will, to be more like you, and to please you in every way.

Father I know that you hate sin, but I thank you that you love me unconditionally despite the wrong I may do.

I know that it is your desire that I be holy as you are holy. So Father I ask that you would wash me and cleanse me of all unrighteousness.

Forgive me for using my words as weapons instead of for encouragement. Forgive me for any thoughts that caused you shame.

Forgive me if I repaid evil for evil instead of doing good.

Search my heart oh God, and reveal to me anything that is not pleasing to you.

*(Take a moment right here and listen to what God reveals to you. If God brings any sin to your mind include it in your prayer)*

Thank you Father for forgiving me, for washing and cleansing me. Thank you for loving me even when I fall short of your glory.

Thank you Lord that you keep no record of my wrong. Thank you that I am a new creature through Christ Jesus.

I love you Father and I know that you love me. I will bless your name forever more, Amen.
Prayer for Freedom from Resentment - Patricia Thomas

God, help me to look with soft eyes upon all who are a part of my days, especially..

Break through the barrier of my scrutinising views.

Transform my inner landscape into a peaceful place of acceptance.

Pull back my projections and criticisms.

Replace my mean measurements and my biased expectations with an openness that allows others to be.

Cleanse me of everything that clouds my perceptions and blocks the sunlight of the spirit.

A Mid-Winter Prayer - from 11th Celtic Wheel of the Yearby Tess Ward

From the rising of the midwinter sun to its setting
Scatter the darkness with the light of your love, O Shining One.
Make me short on mean thoughts, long on offering words of comfort
Make me short on being driven, long on paying attention
Make me short on focusing only on my own, long on looking beyond
Make me short on obsessive lists, long on spontaneous acts of kindness
Make me short on mindless activity, long on time to reflect
Make me short on tradition as a habit, long on re-discovery and re-owning
Make me short on rushing and tiring, long on walking and wondering
Make me short on false festive jollity, long on stilling and rooted joy
Make me short on guilt, long on being merciful to myself
Make me short on being overwhelmed, long on peaceableness as I set forth this day
‘Prayerful Examination of Our Lives’ was provided by Patricia Thomas, Faith Formation and Evangelisation Adviser- Eastern Region. This prayer could be used for both staff and students. It offers all a chance to reflect on their lives and their personal relationship with God.

Prayerful Examination of Our Lives

(Isaiah 42: 1-7)

Thus says the Lord:

Here is my servant. ... chosen ...

• Do I see myself as God's servant? Have I been faithful in serving God and others? Am I humble enough to admit that the world doesn't revolve around me and my needs?

• Do I really believe that I am "chosen" by God? Do I treat myself with dignity and respect by caring for my health - body, mind and spirit? Am I prone to put myself down, rather than seeing the possibilities God creates for me?

He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street

• When I confront difficulties in my life, do I become pessimistic and complain about how things are? Am I willing to bear my crosses willingly, without calling attention to myself?

• Have I been willing to trust in God, and look for ways to move forward in my life?

I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon from the prison those who sit in darkness

• These words are about our mission, as Christians, to spread God's light in our world and bring healing to the broken. Have I been willing to be God's presence in my world?

• Do I eagerly respond to people in need, or do I avoid those who need my help?

• Do my words and actions set people free, or do I try to control others and use them to meet my own needs?

• Is the world a better place because of my words and deeds?
9. MEDITATIONS

Offering staff and students opportunities for prayer and reflection individually and as a College community is essential for faith development and formation. The Faith Formation and Evangelisation Team at the Catholic Education Office utilize a variety of forms of prayer e.g. Christian meditation, Lectio Divina. The following meditations can be used for staff development days, retreats and/or reflection days.

Nature Walk – A Walking Meditation
To observe the practice of walking meditation, we:

- Walk at a slower pace;
- Relax our hands, in any position that is comfortable, i.e., at our sides, lightly clasped in front or in back, or resting in our pockets;
- Walk lightly, without any particular destination;
- Time our breathing with our steps – for example, three slow steps on the in-breath and four slow steps on the out-breath;
- Keep ourselves gently focused, by silently saying your own breath prayer, i.e.; “You in me and I in You”.
- Breathing in each word . . . “You in me” and breathing out each word “and I in you”.
- Stop occasionally, breathing three deep breaths, to be truly present to our God who is our being

Apostles' Meditation
How would you feel if Jesus approached you and asked you to follow? Jesus’ call of his apostles is our call as well.

Read to the students the following paraphrase of Mark 1:16-20. Ask the students to close their eyes and imagine that they are there the day Jesus walked along the seashore and called his first followers.

If possible, play a recording of background sound effects of waves coming ashore. Reflective instrumental music is also enhancing. Read the story in a deliberate style. Pause often to allow the students to absorb the scene and the power of Jesus’ words.

It was mid-afternoon as the man walked along the shore of the sea of Galilee. His eyes absorbed the bright sunlight as it struck the water. He heard the sound of seagulls as they circled overhead. This man from Nazareth looked out over the water as far as he could see. This man was Jesus.

Soon he saw boats appear on the horizon. The fishermen were returning from a day at sea. The boats grew larger and larger in appearance as they came closer to shore. People came from everywhere along the docks to unload the fish from each
boat. Out of the way, Jesus waited, watched, until the last of the fish was carried away.

Then he walked up to the first boat. In the hull stood a man, his face weathered by the sun and wind. Behind him stood another man with similar features. They were brothers. Jesus called, "Simon Peter and Andrew. Come, follow me." —

"We are coming, Lord," they replied. Peter and Andrew dropped their nets and walked to where Jesus waited.

They followed Jesus further along the seashore. He stopped at another fishing boat. Two other brothers, James and John, were mending their nets. He called to them, "James and John, follow me." They left their father Zebedee and their hired workers in the boat and followed him.

Today, Jesus calls you. What do you need to leave behind? "Come," Jesus calls to you. "Come, follow me." How will you answer him?

Provide some additional time for quiet reflection. Do not follow this meditation with discussion. Rather allow the students to come to a personal resolution to Jesus’ invitation.
Meditation materials

Below are samples of posters and bookmarks which can be printed from the disc provided.
10. CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

The following teaching strategies/activities/session ideas can be used both for a retreat and/or in the classroom.

- **Testimony:** The teacher invites a person (already organized months in advance) a speaker to engage the youth with a 15-20 minute powerful testimony on forgiveness and how they came to understand the relevance and importance of the sacrament of reconciliation in the 21st Century. Provide set questions and have students discuss in small groups.

- **EEKK** (Eye to Eye, Knee to Knee) Students in a circle face a student part of an inner circle. At various questions, students swap partners- directed by the teacher. 
  
  **Suggested Questions:**
  
  - Consider a time when you felt God’s forgiveness in your life? What happened? Did it alter/change your faith?
  - Why do we need forgiveness?
  - Is forgiveness/reconciliation important today? Why?
  - We often hear the phrase ‘I can forgive, but I won’t forget’. Is this true forgiveness? What is it to reach true forgiveness?

- Listen to the song ‘Pray for Forgiveness’ by Alicia Keys. Reflect on the song. Journal. What is the meaning of the song? What is the message in the story? Why do we need to pray for forgiveness?

- In groups of 3-4 create a Christian/Catholic contemporary song based on the topic ‘Reconciliation-Forgiveness’. It would be a valuable opportunity for the students to perform at their song at a College liturgy or for an assembly as part of prayer.

- Select 40 photos based on sin and forgiveness. Each student selects one and shares with another person their reason for selecting that photo. What does it speak to their heart at this time? What may appear to be clearly sin or forgiveness may not be for another. Note: You may share as a whole group. Discussion on perspectives.

- Dramatisation of the forgiveness narratives in New Testament. (Refer to ‘Into the Desert, Dr Dan White). Provide readings and related scriptures/prayers.

- Excellent teaching strategies/activities in the ‘World Youth Day ’08 CEO material’ on examples of prayer services on Reconciliation.

- Analyse texts with the focus of ‘no forgiveness’:
  
  Discuss with students the negative impact of un-forgiveness in our hearts and in our lives.
  
  - e.g. Revenge – Series coming up- This is not a story about forgiveness.
  - No Apologies - Bon Jovi
CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES

The following list of strategies are some of the most common co-operative learning processes that may be incorporated into developing a culture of collaboration in the learning environment. These learning strategies are found in Dr Kate O’Brien’s and Dr Dan White’s text book ‘Desert Wisdom- Contemporary Teaching Strategies and Lesson Ideas for the Religious Education Classroom’. They provide excellent learning strategies and can be used for the topic ‘reconciliation’.

2.5.1 CAROUSEL BRAINSTORMING
2.5.2 CHAIN REACTION
2.5.3 DIALOGUING
2.5.4 EEKK
2.5.6 JIGSAW DISCUSSION
2.5.7 JUST ME, PAIRS, FOURS
2.5.8 MIX FREEZE SHARE
2.5.9 NUMBERED HEADS TOGETHER
2.5.10 ONE, TWO, THREE
2.5.13 RALLY TABLE
2.5.14 READ-N-REVIEW
2.5.15 ROUND ROBIN

For Example:

2.5.1 CAROUSEL BRAINSTORMING

Each issue or question is posted on a large sheet of paper around the room. Learning teams move from sheet to sheet and spend a set amount of time brainstorming possible responses for each question. The role of recorder rotates around the group. One of the benefits of carousel brainstorming is the opportunity it provides to have participants interact as they walk around the room.

On the topic of reconciliation learning teams can spend time brainstorming their responses to the following questions:

- Why do we need forgiveness in our lives?
- What is it to forgive your neighbour?
- How do we overcome hurt with forgiveness?
- Why do we sin? (Note: You may want to refer to YouCat questions/answers in Chapter 1)
- Why is it powerful to ‘give the other cheek’? or ‘forgive our brother/sister 77 not just 7 times’?
- Why do we have the sacrament of Penance/Reconciliation? What are the benefits of confession today?
Another example you could use is: 2.5.8 MIX FREEZE SHARE

Students are asked to move around the classroom. At a given signal, students freeze and turn to the person closest to them. A question is posed and discussion ensues. The strategy to be used to form groups of varying sizes: form a triad; form a foursome.

Using the above strategy, as described by Dr Dan White and Dr Kate O’Brien, you could also create a scenario/ moral dilemma based on ‘sin and forgiveness’ and then pose the question at the end.

For example:

Instruction: Students are walking around the classroom until the teacher calls out ‘Freeze’. Move to the closest person and discuss the following scenario:

1. Scenario: A young girl experiences cyber-bullying. She is traumatised and clearly affected by this situation. One day the cyber-bully realizes the hurt she has caused for this girl when her own parents log on to her Facebook and confront her. From the discussion with her parents the cyber-bully girl suddenly has a change of heart and seeks forgiveness from the girl she bullied. Should the cyber-bullying girl be forgiven? Why? Why not?

Instruction: Students continue now to move around the room until the teacher calls out ‘Freeze’ again. Now move into groups of three’s.

2. Scenario: A boy is playing soccer in the park with his mates. His best friend said he couldn’t make it to soccer, that he had homework to do. Following the soccer game, as he was walking home, he happens to see his best friend talking to his girlfriend. What should he do? Confront? Forgive? Have they done anything wrong?
The following story was provided by Patricia Thomas. This is an excellent way to demonstrate the power of forgiveness and the importance of the process. To begin to forgive we need to start building ‘bridges’, opportunities to reconnect and make peace with our ‘neighbour’. Using short stories with young people can be really effective in both the classroom or on retreats.

**The Bridge Builder - Anonymous**

Once upon a time two brothers who lived on adjoining farms fell into conflict. It was the first serious rift in 40 years in farming side by side, sharing machinery, and trading labour and goods as needed without a hitch. Then the long collaboration fell apart. It began with a small misunderstanding and it grew into a major difference, and finally it exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by weeks of silence. A reconciliation was utterly unthinkable.

One morning there was a knock on John's door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter's toolbox.

'I'm looking for a few days work,' he said. 'Perhaps you would have a few small jobs here and there. Could I help you?'

'Yes,' said the older brother. 'I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my neighbour, in fact, it's my younger brother. Last week there was a meadow between us and he took his bulldozer to the river levee and now it is a creek between us. Well, he may have done this to spite me, but I'll go him one better. See that pile of lumber curing by the barn? I want you to build me a fence – an 8-foot fence - so I won't need to see his place anymore. Cool him down anyhow.'

The carpenter said, 'I think I understand the situation. Show me the nails and the post hole digger and I'll be able to do a job that pleases you.'

The older brother had to go to town for supplies so he helped the carpenter get the materials ready and then he was off for the day. The carpenter worked hard all that day measuring, sawing, nailing.

About sunset when the farmer returned, the carpenter had just finished his job. The farmer's eyes opened wide, his jaw dropped. There was no fence there at all. It was a bridge – a bridge stretching from one side of the creek to the other. A fine piece of work - handrails and all - and the neighbour, his younger brother, was coming across, his hand outstretched.
'You are quite a fellow to build this bridge after all I've said and done.' The two brothers stood at each end of the bridge and then they met in the middle, took each other's hand, finally reconciled. They turned to see the carpenter hoist his toolbox on his shoulder, 'No wait, stay a few days. I've a lot of other projects for you,' said the older brother.

'I'd love to stay on,' the carpenter said, 'but, I have many bridges to build.'

**SHORT STORY- REFLECTION/DISCUSSION ACTIVITY FOR A SENIORS RETREAT/REFLECTION DAY**

The story below is fictional as are the characters and events. The places and churches named in this text do exist, however, the events and characters that visit the church and other places are fictional.

**The Prodigal Daughter- A Story of Forgiveness and Hope. (Anonymous)**

Hi. My name is Maria Rodriguez and I want to share with you my story.

I am a young woman, nearly twenty two years old, and so much has already happened in my life. You might look at me right now and think ‘Yeah right, what’s a girl like you experienced so far? You’re only a few years older than me.’ Well, if you’re willing to listen as you read, this story just might save or change your life.

You ready? … Here it goes.

I am a typical young girl, raised in a Portuguese family household, who just wanted to finish school, get an education and get married. That’s typical right? What you would expect, right? Well, the question is ‘What is typical or just plain normal?’

I grew up in in Ashfield and spent most of my time doing anything Portuguese because my background is Portuguese and my parents wanted me to hold onto my heritage. I grew up with two older brothers, a sister and my mother- ‘I call her Mamae’. My dad, ‘Papai’, sadly died in a freak car accident on his way home from work. Typical? Not really. But it was something I just had to accept- growing up without my Papai. So I pushed that part of my life to the back part of brain and decided to leave it there. The trouble is with doing that, you soon realize it stays there until one day you have to face it again.

My mother raised us to be strong in faith and educated. Education was so essential, vital to surviving and being respected by the Portuguese community. It was the key to success. For my mother, it was the key to survival living in Sydney, Australia. What was really important to my mother was a firm belief in our Catholic tradition and values.

Every Sunday morning, we would pile into the car like ducklings (dressed in our finest clothes) and make our way to St Thomas Becket Catholic Church (for the early 8.15am
Mass said in Portuguese) in our '86 white Mitsubishi Sigma. We did what other practicing Portuguese Catholics generally did. Rather than do classical ballet or basketball, I did Portuguese dancing and attended Portuguese school on Saturdays. Don't get me wrong, I loved doing all the social alternatives and couldn't wait until Friday night to go to the Sydney Portugal Community Club and meet up with my friends. As usual, we would order "bacalhau", which is in Portuguese "cod fish".

My mother was strict and I was grateful for her protective guidance. I did reasonably well at school (my eldest sister did better than I did) but I got into my university course and that's what mattered. What also really mattered, was that my mother was happy. She had done her job, or so she thought.

So, the next chapter, of my life was to complete my nursing degree at Sydney University, meet a 'nice Portuguese boy' and settle down. This scenario sort of happened until things went a little pear shaped. This is the part of the story, where I don't like who I became (for a short period of around two years), a person who clearly needed her father around. It was the first time in my life that I realized I needed my father.

I met this guy and he seemed like a lovely guy; he was tall, dark and handsome. His name was Carlos. He was quite reserved and a quiet type of guy. To be honest, I wasn't really that interested in him in the first few months while we were dating, but I began to like him and ignore some of the qualities, or traits to his personality that I thought didn't matter. I should've trusted my instincts at the time; even my best friend didn't think he was my type.

As you know, attending Mass every Sunday was really important until I started to be distracted and slowly lose focus on practicing my faith. My mother started to notice, but I didn't, and thought my mother was over-reacting. I was eighteen and felt like I was old enough to make my own decisions.

It didn't happen overnight, but the way I lived my life at the time slowly changed like a dissolve effect into another scene, within a movie. My world revolved around Carlos and what he saw was important. I began to visit his family and grandparents on Sundays and I would just say "I'll go church next week". Soon, I began to live an immoral life, a life that was against the teachings of our faith and I began to dig a big hole of darkness, thinking I was lost forever. I started to lose sight of what was important, as I was blinded by 'love', or what I thought was love.

So, I thought the right thing to do was to get married. By this stage, I was not living in my mother's house (as my mother gave me an ultimatum to leave him) and had moved into my boyfriend's parent's home. One morning, my boyfriend's father strolled casually into the kitchen, with a cigarette hanging off, almost stuck on his lip, and declared that we should pick a date and get married. I didn't expect for it to happen this quickly but it just seemed the right thing to do- especially as I knew the community would be talking. That's what I was told. It didn't matter that I was in a spare bedroom- I had done the unthinkable and moved in with him and his family. In my eyes, I was no longer seen as a pure clean young woman. I had changed my situation by a wrong decision and was no longer in control of my life. Yet, there still was a part of me that wanted to do the right thing by God.
We went to one Catholic church locally, and the priest there said that he wouldn’t marry us. We were gob-smacked. Who was this priest to judge us? How did he know that it wasn’t right? He thought it was too rushed, that we needed time to prepare. You’d think that I would’ve taken that as a sign, a message from God, but I was still not open and I thought that I had to get married. I then went to another church and the nun from the parish there said the opposite, “You must get married as soon as possible”. Of course, what were people going to say?

To cut a long story short, the marriage lasted only eleven months. At nineteen, I thought he was ‘the’ love of my life yet something was missing in my life. I began to work on my relationship with my mother and this infuriated my then husband. He held a huge grudge and could not let go of the resentment that he felt towards my mother and the rejection that he experienced from her. I was in the middle. It was easy to forgive my mother—after all she is my mother but Carlos couldn’t forgive. The more I wanted to have a relationship with my mother, the worse his resentment became. His lack of forgiveness ate away at his soul and I realized that it would eat me up to.

This was the point where I know that I returned to my God. God was always waiting for me, but it was an experience that I had to go through. My prayer is that you don’t have to go through a similar experience. Although I felt like the woman who was a sinner in the scriptures who had a bad name in the town, I saw the light and realized one day that just, maybe, I could be forgiven; I could start over and be cleansed, healed and forgiven.

I made a decision and went to my Parish church, pleading ‘God, is this the life you have planned for me?’, and I asked my spiritual mother, Mary, ‘Give me the courage to either save my marriage and/or my life?’

A month later, I discovered the courage that God had instilled in me and returned home to my mother. Remembering the parable of the prodigal son, I had become the prodigal daughter in today’s world. I remember thinking at the time, ‘Would my mother accept me back as I am?’.

Because of this experience in life, I knew I had changed forever. But it was in Jesus Christ that I came to fully understand hope and the freedom to change my life and follow God’s way. Like my mother, or your father, God will always wait, with an open heart and take you back. That’s the beauty of our faith.
Photo Reflection Activity

Create your own images or pictures and ask students to reflect on them in relation to a scripture verse based on ‘forgiveness’. An example below has been provided.

Jesus says “Come to me as little children…”
How can we truly come to Him as children of God?
Matthew 19:14

Above: Ursula Ana Finneran and Marija Sikic
11. E-LEARNING - INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY TOOLS

ICT is a positive and important way young people communicate with one another. The following ICT tools and ideas are taken from Dr Kate O’Brien’s and Dr Dan White’s book ‘Desert Wisdom- Contemporary teaching Strategies and Lesson Ideas for the Religious Education Classroom’ pgs41-44.

Referring to the information technology ideas below, you may apply these tools to the topic of reconciliation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERACTIVE TOOLS</th>
<th>AUDIO TOOLS</th>
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| **3.2.10 ANIMOTO**
  www.animoto.com                                       | **3.2.18 AUDACITY**
  [link](http://audacity.sourceforge.net)               |
| **3.2.11 COMIC LIFE**
  http://comiclife.com                                   | **3.2.19 PODCASTING**
  [link](http://blog.podcast.com/)                        |
| **3.2.12 FLIP VIDEO**                                   | **3.2.22 VOKI**
  [link](http://www.voki.com/)                            |
| **3.2.13 GLOGSTER - INTERACTIVE POSTER**
  [link](http://www.glogster.com)                         | **3.2.23 BUBBL.US**
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| **3.2.18 WORDLE**                                       | **3.2.28 WORDLE**
  [link](http://www.wordle.net/)                          | [link](http://www.wordle.net/)                         |
12. Reading Resources on Forgiveness Narratives

The following reading resources on the forgiveness narratives provide background reading for teachers on the cultural context of the times. These stories are taken from Dr Dan White and Dr Kate O’Brien’s ‘Into the Desert- Cultural Snapshots Chapter 10, pgs 96-101. This resource provides teachers with a clear description of the times and the meanings behind these narratives. You may like to use teaching strategies that highlight the cultural context of the times.

For example:
- Ask students to present a monologue from Zacchaeus’ perspective, Jesus’ or even a perspective from someone in the crowd (an observer).
- Write a diary entry as Zacchaeus, recalling your experience with Jesus. When was the moment that you felt forgiven? Then create a ‘wordle’ using your diary entry.
- Claymation activity- group task (Cooperative learning) where students create characters and then create a short film using movie maker. For this activity ‘Prezi’ could also be used for story board. (*Note: Please refer to the previous chapter on E-Learning for other ways to explore these forgiveness narrative*)


Cultural context

STORY CONTEXT:
- The town of Jericho lies near the southern end of the Jordan River- not far from the Dead Sea. Jesus and his disciples would have followed the Jordan Valley down from Galilee prior to making their way up to Jerusalem.

- When special dignitaries were approaching a town, it was commonplace for the local residents to go out to meet them in a large group. The further they travelled from the town centre, the greater the respect being shown to the dignitary.

- Unlike with other wealthy citizens, the Jewish crowd would not give way to a collaborator. A tax collector could have risked his life by being caught in the middle of a surging crowd.

- As a rich man Zacchaeus performed two undignified public acts in an honour and shame society. He ran ahead of the crowd and climbed a tree: these were the actions of children.

- It is likely a sycamore tree was chosen because it has low, easy to climb branches and a dense foliage in which Zacchaeus could hide.
TAX COLLECTOR:

- The tax collector was generally a local person who had acquired the rights to collect taxes for the Romans for a pre-determined up-front fee annually. The tax collector would then endeavour, sometimes unscrupulously, to recover his investment by taxing merchants to make a profit. Taxes or tolls were generally charged on goods (salted fish) being sent to other regions for sale.

- Taxes were collected only with Roman coins. Generally devout Jews would have avoided carrying Roman coins as they depicted the 'deified' Roman emperor which made the coin idolatrous (Changing coins in the Temple- Ch 5.7).

- Tax collectors were seen as collaborators with the occupying force and were considered 'unclean' under rabbinical law. Tax collectors were viewed as having attained power without fulfilling the traditional Jewish requirements of an honourable birth and devotion to learning the Torah.

INTERACTION WITH JESUS:

- For a visitor to invite himself to someone's house was inappropriate. For Jesus, a rabbi, to choose to visit a sinner's house was totally unacceptable, especially as it would defile him ahead of his journey to the Temple in Jerusalem.

- Exaggerated language ('half of my possessions ... to the poor') in Middle Eastern culture was not so much to be taken literally: it is meant to show a genuine sign of good faith that proper restitution would be made. In fact, if Zacchaeus had not exaggerated the listeners would not have believed he was sincere in his intentions.

- The reference to repaying anyone who had been cheated four-fold (or 400%) was the harshest penalty that would have been applied under Roman Law for making reparation to the Roman Emperor. Jewish law only required a person to pay full restitution plus 20%.

- In an honour and shame society, to affirm someone as the 'son of Abraham' was the ultimate acknowledgement of an individual's worth and dignity as a Jew.

SCRIPTURAL CONTEXT:

This story occurs immediately after Jesus heals the blind man on his way into Jericho (Lk 18: 35-43).

By joining both stories together readers can see that Jesus' ministry was both to the oppressed (the blind man) and the oppressor (a tax collector for the Romans).

Related Cultural Sources: The Temple (5. 1) and Potential for Shame (I .3)
The Woman Caught in Adultery – John 8: 1-11

Cultural context

MOSAIC LAW:
- For many centuries Middle Eastern culture has traditionally closely associated the honour of the family with the sexual behaviour of its women. Violation of this code was extremely serious and, at times, resulted in women being killed by their own families.
- Under Mosaic Law, if adultery was proven both partners would have been killed by stoning (Lev 20:10). The law also required two witnesses to the fact, not including the husband. It would have been expected that the witnesses had accompanied the Pharisees and would have been available to speak up when they confronted Jesus.
- If the woman was caught in the act of adultery it was evident that her partner would also have been apprehended. Yet, surprisingly, no reference is made to the man involved.
- Roman law at the time denied the Jewish authorities their previous freedom to put anyone to death without Roman sanction (this power was taken from the Sanhedrin in about AD 30). As the scene occurred in the Temple precinct, Roman soldiers would have certainly been in attendance nearby and could have intervened if an unlawful execution was about to take place.

RESPONSE OF JESUS:
- Jesus was once again being placed in the dilemma of making a statement in favour of Jewish or Roman law (ie the payment of taxes to the Romans). A failure to support Jewish law would have lead to charges of being irreligious and disrespectful to the Jewish Torah. On the other hand, support of the Roman law would have lead to accusations of collaboration with the hated occupying Gentiles.
- Furthermore, if Jesus failed to speak up for the woman, his teachings about the mercy of God could have been ridiculed.

HONOUR AND SHAME:
- In an honour and shame society, a person who stepped forward and proclaimed themselves ‘sinless’ would have opened themselves to ridicule. In particular, the eldest person present would have been expected to provide a lead to the community.
- The failure of the plan to discredit Jesus would have meant that the anger and condemnation directly towards the woman would have been transferred to Jesus (an example of ‘costly love’ on behalf of Jesus - Ch 1.4).
- The very public embarrassment suffered by the Jewish authorities would have further hardened their resolve to discredit and eliminate the itinerant preacher from Galilee.
SCRIPTURAL CONTEXT:

- To fully understand this story readers have to refer to the earlier passages of Chapter 7, where Jesus was attending the Festival of Booths in Jerusalem and stood up and drew parallels to himself and God ('Let the one who believes in me drink .. .' Jn 7:37-38) as suggested in Isaiah 55:1-3.

- The statement once again antagonised the chief priests who ordered his arrest. However Jesus was supported by the people and the officers could not carry out the orders. The next day a woman supposedly caught in adultery was brought forward in order for another plan to discredit Jesus to be enacted.

Related Cultural Sources: Role of Women (2. 9) and Jewish Law (5.6)

A Sinful Woman Forgiven – Luke 7: 36-50

Cultural context

STORY CONTEXT:

- The acceptance of an invitation to a household by a rabbi was generally considered a great honour. It also indicated that the Pharisee would have considered his guest an equal.

- With a celebration of this nature the entire village, including the woman, would have been aware of the impending dinner.

- The guests at the dinner would recline at a table, resting their left side on cushions in order to eat with their right hand, as dictated by customary manners. Consequently a guest's feet are exposed to the perimeter of the room and on display to servants and onlookers.

- Upon entering a house a guest would be welcomed by a kiss of greeting and invited to sit on stools around a broad U-shaped dining couch. Hands and feet would be washed by water and anointed by olive oil.

- Within the Jewish religious codes rabbis were strictly warned not to talk to women in any public place- not even to their own wives.
HONOUR AND SHAME:

- The failure to bestow the basic courtesies of hospitality would have been perceived as a significant insult.

- In an honour and shame society, kneeling and kissing someone's feet was a sign of great weakness and vulnerability (this was reserved only for slaves). One only kneels before God.

- Middle Eastern women generally kept their hair tied back and covered as a sign of piety and modesty. It would have been expected that Jesus would have been embarrassed by the woman letting down her hair and touching the feet of a male and would have delivered a stern rebuke.

- The phrase 'I have something to say to you' was a local idiom that implied the speaker wanted to make a point that would not necessarily be appreciated by the listener.

- Similarly, the public rebuke to the Pharisee with respect to the lack of hospitality would have been the source of great surprise to the assembled guests, as such issues would have been expected to have been settled in private.

RESTITUTION FOR SINS:

- In the Jewish tradition, sinners who broke the law were expected to not only acknowledge their sin but also to arrange for appropriate compensation (Zacchaeus - Lk 19:1-10) as well as committing themselves to following the law in the future.

- For a prostitute, demonstrating contrition was especially difficult as, by and large, she would be unable to provide appropriate compensation. Her preparedness to bring an expensive task of perfume with which to anoint Jesus was possibly a sign of her contrition.

SCRIPTURAL CONTEXT:

- This passage, focusing on the compassionate forgiving power of God, complements a similar theme in Matthew (18:23-35) where a servant is forgiven a large debt and then fails to forgive a fellow servant a smaller debt. It also highlights the dual nature of sin: acts that a person should not commit, and responsibilities (debts) that one has failed to fulfil.

Related Cultural Sources: Banquets (3.6) and Promotion of Honour (1.2)
The Parable of the Prodigal and his Brother – Luke 15: 11.13

Cultural context

SETTING FOR THE STORY:
- The shortage of arable land, and the need to gather into villages for protection, suggests the story was situated within the context of a village community. Hence the local townspeople would have been public witnesses to the dishonourable events that transpired.

- The term 'prodigal' means recklessly wasteful (the son) or alternatively extremely generous (the father).

INHERITANCE LAWS:
- The foundation of Jewish inheritance laws is that the sons are their father's heirs. Under the law the eldest son would receive a double share, of the father's goods.

- Transferring an inheritance was generally a two-stage process. Firstly, as a father was becoming elderly and ready to retire he would assign the family assets to his sons as he saw fit. The second stage, the right to sell, could only occur after the father had passed away. The son further compounded his rejection of the father by liquidating his portion of the assets a few days later.

- The son's request for his inheritance was akin to him saying "I can't wait for you to die". This comment would have been seen as a totally degrading insult. The only honourable option open to the father was to eject his son from the household.

- Jewish culture had strict sanctions with respect to losing or wasting one's inheritance, especially by selling assets to Gentiles. If this occurred the community would conduct a 'kezazah' ceremony that would symbolically and physically cut off the individual from his people.

SOURCES OF SHAME:
- The entire context of the parable is set within traditional Middle Eastern understandings of an honour and shame society.

- The father's acquiescence to the demand to obtain an inheritance would have been perceived as great weakness, and would have brought great shame on the household.

- The awareness of the impending shame of a kezazah ceremony would have motivated the son in the search for employment to replenish his assets before he could return home.
• The father’s actions in continually watching out for his son at a distance (beyond the village boundaries) and running to greet him suggests that he was endeavouring to spare his son the experience of o kezazah ceremony by publicly embracing him. It was also a source of great embarrassment for adult males to run in public.

• Embracing his son, who had lived with Gentiles and had cared for pigs (the major animal food group that was forbidden for Jewish consumption) would have left the father ritually unclean.

• The offering of a cloak, a celebratory banquet and, most importantly, the family’s signet ring, was indicative of full acceptance back into the family unit. The signet ring, which could be used as a seal, allowed a son to transact business on behalf of the family.

• The elder brother’s public refusal to attend the banquet was also a source of great dishonour to his father, compounded by the fact that the father left the banquet to personally beg his son to attend. Such an act was not simply a minor disagreement, but could have caused a permanent severing of a family relationship within Middle Eastern culture.

Related Cultural Sources: *Ritual Purity (5.4) and Potential for Shame (1.3)*
The following readings connect the scripture verses to context, tradition and wisdom teachings. These are provided by ‘Youth Engaging Scripture’, Dennis Kurtz, St Mary’s Press, Christian Brothers Publication, USA 2007. Pages (92-93, 84-85)

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Mathew 15:21 - 28

Context Connection

Jesus’s earlier command to his disciples provides the context for this Sunday’s Gospel: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:5-6). With these words, Jesus sends forth the Twelve to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of heaven. In this statement, Jesus dearly affirms the traditional Jewish understanding that salvation is first for the Jews. This norm provides the backdrop for the story of the Canaanite woman.

Jesus leaves the Gennesaret area, located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, and travels a short distance to the district of Tyre and Sidon, located on the Mediterranean Sea north of Israel. This area is now part of Lebanon. It is not clear whether Jesus has entered the district of Tyre and Sidon when a Canaanite woman approaches him. Canaanite is an ancient name used for the pagan inhabit- ants of the land of Canaan, the area where Abraham eventually settled, as well as the Israelites upon their return from their slavery in Egypt. Matthew wants his audience to know that this woman is a Gentile, a non-Jew. Even though she is not a Jew, the Canaanite woman uses a Jewish expression of prayer and a messianic tide to address Jesus. Jesus ignores her and does not immediately respond to her request. Meanwhile, the disciples urge Jesus to get rid of her because she is drawing attention to them with her shouting. According to the culture of the day, if someone asks another person for mercy, there is an expectation that the request will be granted. 'This expectation could have added to the disciples' discomfort because the crowd would now be watching them to see if Jesus would grant the request of a Gentile woman.

The woman is persistent and kneels before Jesus, saying, "Lord, help me" (15:25). Jesus responds, "It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs" (15:26). It is common, at the time, for the Israelites to refer to themselves as the children of God and to the Gentiles as dogs. Despite being called a dog, the Canaanite woman cleverly and quick-wittedly respond, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table" (15:27). The woman seizes the opportunity to show her tenacity in the face of silence, adversity, and insult. Jesus acknowledges this display of courage and tenacity in the woman and grants her request. Jesus names the Canaanite woman’s strong will and persistence in faith as the reason her daughter is healed.
Tradition Connection

Jesus reveals that God wants everyone to enter into the Kingdom of heaven. It is not reserved for an exclusive or select group but is available for all. Jesus, however, never diminishes in any way God's gift of free will, but his life does serve as a blueprint of how to enter into the Kingdom of heaven if we so choose. To enter the Kingdom, we must accept the word of Jesus. Faith in Jesus, and in his Father who sent him, is the key to salvation. Everything else is based on this fundamental belief (see CCC, number 151). We don't have to be perfect to be in the Kingdom, but we do have to be willing to let the Holy Spirit help us grow more perfect in our love and forgiveness.

In the New Testament, we often read that the Kingdom of heaven is for those who are poor in spirit. This refers to those who are willing to do God's will and to place Gospel values before individual personal gain. The Canaanite woman gives witness to this kind of person by putting her daughter's needs first and by seeking out Jesus to heal her daughter of the demon regardless of the personal cost to her. Because the Canaanite woman is able to let go of wanting to control God, and because she places her faith in God, she is able to witness to the disciples that trust in the will of God leads to grace.

Wisdom Connection

This story points out that the Canaanite woman's great faith is the one criterion that Jesus judges as most important; therefore, the criterion for being a member of a Christian community should be based on one's faith in Jesus Christ and not on one's origin of birth, such as being a Jew or a Gentile. This is a break from the traditional Jewish understanding that salvation is first and, therefore, exclusively for the Jews. A glimpse of God's plan of salvation is foretold in Isaiah's vision of a time when the house of God "shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (56:7). But the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter is the first indication that this time has arrived and that there is a place for Gentiles in God's plan of salvation. Salvation now extends beyond "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24). Salvation is for everyone.
Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 13:24-30

Context Connection
This Sunday's Gospel is another parable that involves a farmer and the sowing of seeds. The landowner takes great care to sow good seed. However, by the cover of night, an enemy comes and sows weeds in the same field. The landowner is surprised to discover that weeds are growing among his good seed. At the time of Jesus, it was common for families to feud with other families. Sometimes one family would even sabotage the crops of the family they were feuding with in order to decrease productivity.

Now that the landowner has discovered the weeds, he has to make some decisions. He knows that the seed he purchased and used to plant the field was good, so he does not have to confront the person who sold him the wheat. The servants advise him to immediately pull out the weeds, avenging the action of his enemy who planted the weeds and thus correcting the wrong. In a surprising response, the landowner says, "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest" (13:29-30).

On the surface, it seems that the landowner admits defeat. But appearances can be deceiving. In reality, the landowner is a shrewd man and a wise farmer. From his experience, he knows the wheat is strong enough to compete with the weeds for nourishment and water and that it will grow to maturity; therefore, at harvest, he not only gathers the grain into his barn but also gathers the weeds as an unexpected source of fuel.

In a society more familiar with "an eye for an eye" rather than reconciliation, the landowner's victory in the end-despite what seems like a passive response-is powerful. Another lesson is that God's Kingdom on earth has already arrived and that goodness and evil coexist. The story of the wheat and weeds illustrates that all people have not accepted the teachings of Jesus, but that Jesus's word is good and nothing is able to change that fact. From the landowner, we learn the virtues of tolerance and patience. Just as the landowner asks his servants not to pull out the weeds for fear of destroying the good wheat, God asks believers to restrain from forcibly rooting out what may, from our limited experience, seem to be evil.

Tradition Connection
The Church comprises many different kinds of people, but all are on the way to holiness. Another way to say this is that the Church is a gathering of sinners who are caught up in the salvation of Jesus because of the cross and who, together, are helping one another become holy (see CCC, number 827); therefore, we acknowledge the existence of sin in our world and in ourselves for we are all in the process of journeying toward perfection. It is a process of becoming in which good and evil exist simultaneously within each of us. The option of choosing good or evil always exists because God created humans and
angels as creatures with intellects and free will; sometimes our choices, however, do not lead to perfection. In light of the Revelation of God's Word, we call this sin.

Sin does exist, and for us to deny that is to be less than truthful. In our relationship with Jesus, the Word made flesh, we come to recognize this reality in our own lives. When a believer is able to recognize sin in her or his life, she or he then has the option of making a choice to conduct her or his life more consistently with the message of Jesus-to love God and one another more fully (see CCC, number 386).

Salvation is an active process that we can choose to participate in each day. Conversion can happen at any stage in the life of a human being; therefore, we need to be patient, like our heavenly Father is patient, as God's plan of salvation unfolds in each of our lives.

**Wisdom Connection**

The reality of the good wheat and the weeds growing in the same field gives rise to the unresolved question of how good and evil can coexist. The parable does not try to answer the question but simply states that the reality exists. Perhaps before we can resolve why goodness and sin exist in the world, we must first honestly accept that both exist within ourselves. Jesus came to redeem the whole person. Jesus is the Revelation that sin has existed from the origin of man. The flawed part of humanity cannot be explained away with clever terminology but must be honestly recognized and named, thus allowing the grace of God to redeem the flawed part of humanity.
13. YOUTUBE LINKS AND SUGGESTED SONGS, MOVIES AND MUSIC.

The following are Youtube resources/clips/slideshows based on sin, forgiveness and the power of Reconciliation:

- **The Prodigal Son**: Contemporary Short film- adaptation of Luke 15. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxfdChYCKYA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxfdChYCKYA). This slide show is an excellent resource for boys. It is included in the sacramental extended service.

- **Casting Crowns - Who Am I?** [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBcqria2wmg&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBcqria2wmg&feature=related). This is a modern Christian band that offers young people great opportunity for reflection on their relationship with God.

- **Hold Me, Lord**: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUMUSZ21mZI&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUMUSZ21mZI&feature=related). A Catholic song good for reflection, particularly for senior retreat (students experiencing tiredness from their studies etc.) Could be used following confession or during a penitential service.

- **You Raise Me Up**: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sza4rh1YzsM&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sza4rh1YzsM&feature=related) (senior level) suitable for retreats/ reflection days. Highlights God’s love and His grace connecting young people to their families and college community support.

- [http://www.forgivenessweb.com/RdgRm/poems.htm](http://www.forgivenessweb.com/RdgRm/poems.htm) These are poems based on forgiveness)

- [http://www.poemsaplenty.com/poems/category/index.php?id=51](http://www.poemsaplenty.com/poems/category/index.php?id=51) This web page has a range of modern poems by contemporary writers on the topic of forgiveness. May be used in either English and/or Religion classes.

- [http://theforgivenessproject.com/stories/](http://theforgivenessproject.com/stories/) The Forgiveness Project is an excellent web site which would be great to use with teenagers. There are many stories on restorative justice, healing through forgiveness.

- [http://www.textweek.com/movies/reconciliation.htm](http://www.textweek.com/movies/reconciliation.htm) This site provides a wide selection of films based on forgiveness. The site provides explanations and summaries of the films. *Note: You would need to ensure that it is appropriate for the right age group.*
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0382037/
This link is a review on the film ‘Forgiveness’ Directed by Ian Gabriel.

http://www.myfoxboston.com/dpp/morning/the-power-of-forgiveness-20101018
This is an article about two stories on forgiveness. It also provides the visual footage of the moment of forgiveness in court. Actual events that were powerful stories in the media.

http://www.powertochange.ie/changed/index_Forgiveness
These are stories that show the ‘power to change’ through forgiveness. Many stories are provided on this site.

http://www.ocp.org/search?query=forgiveness&page_type=song
This is Catholic web site called ‘Catholic Oregon Press’ that includes a list of songs on forgiveness. Purchases of MP3 downloads of songs is available.

http://www.songfacts.com/category-songs_about_reconciliation_or_forgiveness.php
This is a website that provides secular songs accompanied with lyrics and summaries by the artists/performers themselves. However, choose carefully and listen to the songs and ensure that they are appropriate for the classroom or liturgy.

http://www.xt3.com/library/list.php?libraryContent=sin+and+forgiveness&categoryId=
Excellent source of multi media resources based on reconciliation.

Suggested Book Resources Pages

- Parish Reconciliation Services: Margaret Anna Banta, 121994, Twenty Third Publication.
- Reconciliation Services for Children: Gwen Costello, 1002. Twenty Third Publication.
**Movies and Documentaries**

Select relevant films on the topic of reconciliation/forgiveness:

- **Babbets Feast** - Danish film written and directed by Gabriel Axel, 1987.
- **Forever Strong** - Directed by Ryan Little, written by David Plier, 2008
- **The Tall Story** - Indigenous Tragedy in Palm Island (documentary report) Tony Krawitz, 2012

**Suggested songs**

- Matt Mayer songs e.g **Garden** - is ideal for an evening reconciliation service. *Turn Around* - is a realistic view of the addictions that many young people will become exposed to (if not already) and the power of God’s love through His forgiveness. It clearly also identifies the struggles that young people experience where they don’t feel heard. However, Mayer sends the message that it is a choice to ‘turn around’ our lives. 

  *Alive Again* - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keK80e23Ez4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keK80e23Ez4) *(this song was used heavily in the promotion of WYD Madrid)*

- Fr Robert Galea. - One in particular that would be ideal for reflection after Communion or during a Liturgical Penitential Service is ‘**Only By Grace**’. 

  [www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBwJaeExK-Y&feature=relmfu](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBwJaeExK-Y&feature=relmfu)  

  *Another moving song that really highlights the message of ‘coming as we are’ to Jesus is ‘**At the Foot of the Cross**’ taken from the ‘What a Day’ album. Refer to this youtube video clip  [www.nme.com/nme-video/youtube/id/3Sb4TH__KHL/search/at-the-foot-of-the-cross](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keK80e23Ez4). This is a beautiful, reflective song.*

- Songs with Short commentaries by the artists  


  e.g **Forgiven Me** - Tina Campbell (singer) of Mary Mary explained this song to **SoulTracks**: "It’s just talking about taking responsibility for your past, or about someone else doing something to you, because bad things happen to good people, but this songs gives you the strength to forgive yourself and start over."
Forgiven- Relient K lead singer Matthew Theissen (from the liner notes of Wow Hits 2008): "This song is about a rough situation I went through - a close friend said some things about me that weren't totally kind and weren't totally accurate. The way I dealt with it was by immediately saying, 'Alright, I'm going to forgive you and just get over it and hopefully you can do the same thing for me, and we can just move along.' If I sit and stew on something, it can worsen the situation, whereas if I just forgive, it definitely prevents ulcers. It is really not an issue anymore, but it was very therapeutic to write about."

- **Prayer for Forgiveness**- Alicia Keys [www.aliciakeys.com/us/music/element-freedom/pray-forgiveness](http://www.aliciakeys.com/us/music/element-freedom/pray-forgiveness). This site provides Alicia Keys’ and view on forgiveness. With young people, particularly girls being influenced by the celebrity world, Alicia Keys expresses her perspective on forgiveness and the importance for it in our lives.

- **Higher**-Written by Gary Pinto and Diesel - performed by gary Pinot and Jimmy Barnes. It's is uplifting and great song to use towards the end of a retreat. Generally, Gary Pinto ‘Take back Our World’ is a good album that the youth would definitely relate to.

- **‘The Best of You’ and ‘Walk’**- Foo Fighters. These secular songs relate to young people, opening them up to being true to themselves, recognizing the 'brokenness in their lives'. Often we can take on the victim attitude 'It’s not fair' or ‘Is someone getting the best of me?’ It opens young people up to their own truths about themselves through the topic ‘sin and forgiveness’. How do we face adversity? How do we face it as Christians in this world? The teacher leads students through a journey of prayer and healing within their reconciliation service. Jesus himself was crucified and yet He still asked God to forgive them.

- **Amen**- Leonard Cohen An interesting song that would be good for discussion. Analyse the song- the meaning(s), the interpretation of the song in the way it is sung etc.

- **Prodigal Son**- The Rolling Stones. This song is based on the parable of the Prodigal Son.
• **WYD 08 - Way of the Cross** is a music/video clip ‘Shadow of Your Cross’ - Joel Engle [www.youtube.com/watch?v=h14WTylklsU&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h14WTylklsU&feature=related)

• **I Am** - Mark Schultz. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-HIKxSZSA&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-HIKxSZSA&feature=related). This is a music video clip reminding us that it is God and through Jesus we are saved. Shows Jesus as the healer and redeemer, reminding us that we have hope. He ‘I AM’ is the beginning and the end.

• **You're Not Alone** - Meredith Andrews [www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJlsSpJ_VtA&feature=relmfu](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJlsSpJ_VtA&feature=relmfu). This song addresses loneliness, hurt. This song certainly brings hope and comfort for young people experiencing loneliness, bringing them back to Jesus Christ.

• **The CD - Gift of Grace** - Gina Ogilvie, Published by Willow Publishing Pty Ltd.
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