

LEARNING  
CENTERS for **First**  
Reconciliation,  
First Eucharist,  
and the Whole Community

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# Introduction

Learning centers, at first commonly called learning stations, are an example of a paradigm shift in education. This new model or method for learning seems to have sprung up simultaneously in many places at once. At first, learning centers were used for math, science, and geography, as schools searched for interactive ways for children to better grasp what they were expected to know. Educators also wanted to provide for the different learning styles and abilities of children and allow them to work at their own pace. Thus creative teachers started developing learning centers, stations, or stops where learners could complete a specific activity—with tools and directions provided—on their own and following their own timetable.

Directors of faith formation around the country began to examine the possibilities of using this model with learners and parents as they explored new ways to “hand on the faith.” They discovered that because this model can be used with almost any doctrinal content, it is a practical way to involve parents more fully in preparing their children for the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist.

The learning centers in this book are meant to supplement whatever textbooks children are using. They offer families and children the opportunity to work together informally as they share faith and prepare for the sacraments. Learning centers help families do this in a non-intimidating, educational, and enjoyable way. For the whole community, they offer a way to spend meaningful time with parish children while joining in the process of learning about and living the faith. As with any parish endeavor, this “whole community” aspect is very important.

Learning centers for sacrament preparation have many additional benefits. They give children the opportunity for interactive and creative learning about reconciliation and Eucharist, in addition to what is covered in their textbooks. They give families the opportunity to do hands-on tasks with their children and thus discover new ways to share their faith. Both parents and children learn more about the sacraments in this kind of informal setting. Learning centers also offer the opportunity for more flexible scheduling of sacrament preparation classes. They give directors of faith formation the opportunity to observe children and parents working together, and thus determine which centers offer the greatest learning opportunities.

A few practical points:

- If possible, before the families begin their visits to the learning centers, review briefly with them the sheet of directions: the goal, the Church teaching, what they will learn, etc.
- Make copies of the suggested readings from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and post them at the appropriate centers so those who wish can read them.

- Make certain that each center has all the supplies needed, and enough of each supply.
- For each center, put a marker on the page where the families can find the Bible passage for that center.

The learning centers in this book have been successfully used in several parishes with very positive feedback from both children and families. We hope you will also find them valuable and well worth the time it takes to organize and set them up.

These learning center activities can be scheduled in two ways. All participants can come at the same time, for example from 4:00 to 6:00 PM on two different evenings. Or families can come during a span of time at their own convenience, for example on a Saturday afternoon between 1:00 and 5:00 PM. (Encourage families to allow at least three to four hours to thoughtfully visit all the centers and complete the activities.) In the Appendix you will find Gathering Prayers that you can use with both options.

Special thanks to Carol Mercord, Religious Education Director at St. Joseph Parish in Prescott, Wisconsin, for her support and helpful advice as she used these learning centers, and to Barbara Havel for her endless patience in helping me prepare this manuscript.

# Learning Centers for First Reconciliation

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Sample

# Building Self-Esteem

## Goal

To understand that self-esteem and self-worth are gifts from God. These gifts help us love God, self, and others.

## Church Teaching

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 307, 1700–1876

## What You Will Learn

To recognize that everyone has dignity and worth

To recognize that God's forgiveness is for everyone

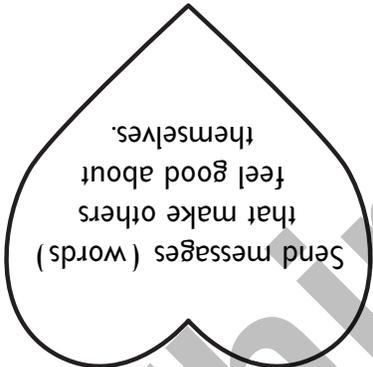
## Supplies for this Center

Bible

Game board, dice, and markers (buttons, pennies, markers from other games, etc.)

## Directions for the Activity

- Together, read Genesis 1:26–31. What does this passage teach us about our dignity and worth?
- To use the board game, *We Are God's Work of Art!* determine who begins.
- Throw the dice and move the marker as indicated by the numbers on the dice.
- Follow the directions on the space on which you land.

I am unique!		I am unique!	I am glad to be me!	I am a good friend when...	<p>The Bible tells me so...</p> <p>Look up and share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* 1 Corinthians 3:16-17</li> <li>* Luke 1:49</li> <li>* Matthew 10:29-31</li> </ul>	We are made in God's image.
My family is special!	<p>Ways I can let each family member know how much I appreciate him or her.</p>	<p>Ways I can let each family member know how much I appreciate him or her.</p>	<p>Ways I can share talent I have with others.</p>	<p>Send messages (words) that make others feel good about themselves.</p> 	I love you!	
I feel good!	<p>Thank God for someone who makes me feel good.</p>	<p>Tell the person to your right something special about him/her.</p>	<p>Ways I can share talent I have with others.</p>	<p>What is something special that makes you happy?</p> 	I am happy!	
	I feel good!	What is SPECIAL about you?	What is your talent?	I am happy!		

# We Are God's Work of Art!

(Ephesians 2:10)

# Families Forgive

## Goal

To reinforce that it is within the family and/or church community that we learn forgiveness.

## Church Teaching

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 1657

## What You Will Learn

To “make up” with family members whom you have hurt

To experience forgiveness within your family

## Supplies for this Center

Bible

Four to six pencils, glue

Worksheet: Ways to Make Up, one for each family

Small 2 x 2 pieces of various colors of tissue paper, approximately six pieces per person

## Directions for the Activity

- Together read Luke 19:1–10. Share what this passage means to you. What made Zacchaeus happy?
- Discuss with one another the need to “make up” with those we have hurt. Give an example of how forgiveness can be experienced anywhere, but especially within your family.
- Together fill out the worksheet and complete the suggested activity. Glue several pieces of tissue paper together to make a flower for your sheet as a sign of forgiveness.

# Ways to Make Up

Zacchaeus was forgiven. He made up for any wrong he had done by paying back what he had taken (Luke 19:1–10). We, too, can make up when we have done something wrong.

## Complete the following sentences

When I quarrel with a family member, I make up by \_\_\_\_\_

When I disobey a rule, I make up by \_\_\_\_\_

When I am unkind to a sister or brother, I make up by \_\_\_\_\_

When I hurt someone in my family, I make up by \_\_\_\_\_

## Here are some ways I can make up

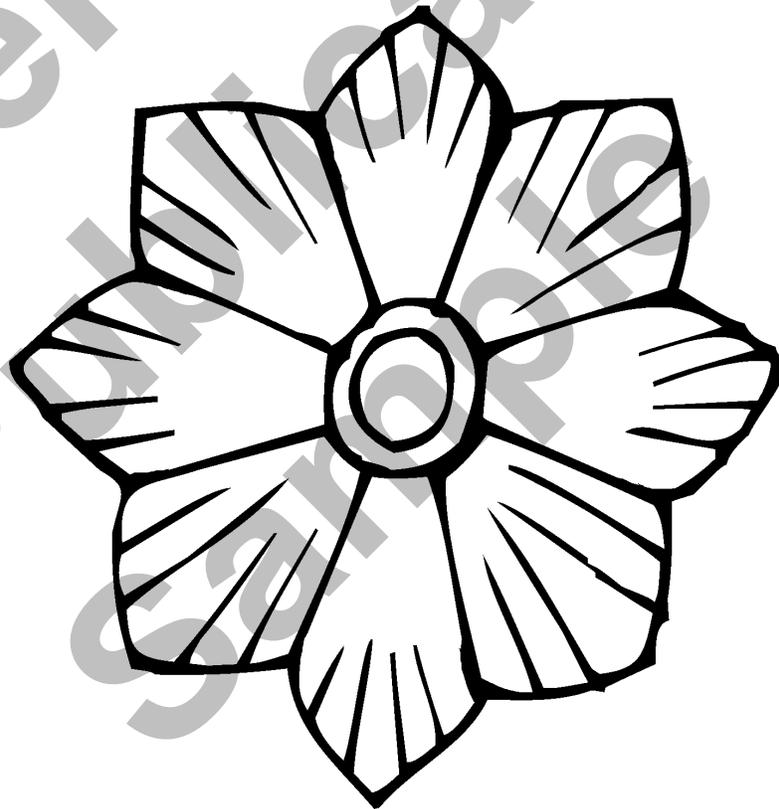
Admit I was wrong.

Ask for forgiveness.

Try to do better.

Shake hands or hug.

Paste your tissue flower here



# Making Peace with God and Others

## Goal

To learn that the sacrament of reconciliation calls us to make peace with others, to be reconciled with them. It also calls us to be reconciled with God.

## Church Teaching

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 1657, 2840

## What You Will Learn

- To talk about the words “apologizing,” “loving,” and “forgiving”
- To name people who need or want your forgiveness
- To think about ways to thank, ask forgiveness, and apologize to others

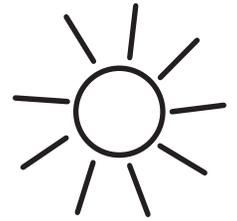
## Supplies for this Center

- One coupon booklet for each child
- Four to six pencils
- Stickers to decorate the coupons (optional)

## Directions for the Activity

- Read Matthew 5:23–24. Discuss ways to make peace with others in your home, your school, or the world.
- Give your child one of the coupons. Ask him or her to quietly think about others they should forgive or to whom they should apologize. Discuss this with them.
- On the coupon have the child write his or her name and the name of the one to receive it. Suggest that he or she decorate it. (Encourage him or her to actually give it to the person when appropriate.)

# My Reconciliation Coupon Booklet



To: \_\_\_\_\_

I am sorry for: \_\_\_\_\_

Please forgive me! This coupon is good for one hug!

From: \_\_\_\_\_



To: \_\_\_\_\_

I am sorry because: \_\_\_\_\_

I will try my best to do better. Please forgive me!

From: \_\_\_\_\_



To: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for loving me all the time! I am trying to be the best I can be!

From: \_\_\_\_\_



To: \_\_\_\_\_

I apologize for my words or actions that hurt you.

I love you. Will you forgive me?

From: \_\_\_\_\_

