

## **Session One:**

### **The Treasure of Seeking and Being Found: Journeys and Questions**

#### **I. Introductions**

- A. Leader welcome**
- B. Opening Prayer: from Thomas Merton**
- C. Logistical information & overview of the evening**
- D. Leader starts introductions:**
- E. Participants share personal information**

#### **II. Stories of Journeys**

- A. Leader shares personal story of faith, away from faith, back to faith.**
- B. Other leaders and participants share their stories**

#### **III. Who is God?**

- A. Discussion: Our images of God**
- B. God's Nature: Love, Truth, Fidelity**
- C. Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit**
- D. The God who seeks....**

#### **IV. Who am I?**

- A. Discussion: How do I see myself in relationship with God?**
- B. Human Person, made in the image of God**

- C. Child of grace from baptism
- D. Body, Mind, Memory, Will—always free to choose

**V. What do I want from the Returning Catholics group?**

- A. Description of classes, Companions on the Journey (mentoring)
- B. Discussion

**VI. Closing Meditation: “I thirst...”**

- A. Meditation from *Mother Theresa’s Secret Fire* about Jesus’ thirst for us, how much God yearns for us. It was written by the priest who heads her seminary and reflects her version of devotion to Divine Mercy.

## General Directions for the First Week:

What is important is a sense of hospitality, comfortableness, and community. Be there early. Have someone at the door to the building and any turning point where someone might get lost. Be low key, but friendly. As people come in, introduce yourself and make small talk. Have chairs arranged so all are immediately part of the group—nobody on the edge. Start on time, but leave the hospitality folks at the doors for an extra 10 minutes or so. Remember your own vulnerability will set the tone. Give enough information about yourself in the first introductions that people will have a sense of who you are—not just name, family information, job, and how long you've been in the parish, but that you have two cats and absolutely love dark chocolate—little details. When you and members of the team tell your stories, focus on turning points and vulnerability. It is best for this meeting if team members are interspersed around the room, so there is a mixture of new and seasoned as stories are told. Be prepared for tears from some, lots of conversation from others, quiet from a few. Work to make all welcome. The content of this session, IV and V, are best delivered by someone comfortable talking theology, able to mix Church teaching with personal story in a clear, focused way.

Handouts:

Thomas Merton's Prayer

Overview of Treasures and the Returning Catholics Process

Meditation: "I thirst for you...."

Questions for Reflection this week

## Overview of Returning Catholics at Good Shepherd

Winter, 2012

### Class Topics:

January 10	Treasure of Seeking and Being Found: Journeys and Questions
January 17	Treasure of Creed: What We Believe and Why It Matters
January 24	Treasure of Mass and Eucharist: Center of Worship; Center of Life
January 31	Treasure of Teaching Authority: Not Just Knowing What to Do, But Why
February 6	Treasure of Grace and Reconciliation: Always God's Child, Always a Prodigal
February 13	Treasures of Sacraments and Prayer: Being Touched by God Again and Again
February 21	Treasure of Community: Sharing, Serving, Caring, Community

Meetings: Tuesday evenings at 7:00 pm in Room 1 of the Parish Life Center

Mentoring: A companion to listen, talk, walk, support, and accompany you, at any time.

## **Week 1: Topics for Reflection**

- 1. What are the significant events in my life journey?**
- 2. When have I sensed God close to me?**
- 3. When have I felt separated or distanced from God?**
- 4. Who in my life has helped me draw closer to God?**
- 5. Who has seemed to pull me away?**
- 6. Where is the door of my heart now? In my questions? In a relationship? In an event? What draws me now?**
- 7. When I think of returning to full communion with the Church, what thoughts and feelings emerge?**
- 8. Am I having—or have I had—a fight with God? What’s that fight about?**
- 9. Or did I have a disconnect with the Church? Was there an incident? What has kept me away?**
- 10. What comes to mind when I hear “God thirsts for me”?**

## I. “I thirst for you.”

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock” (Rev 3:20).

It is true. I stand at the door of your heart, day and night. Even when you are not listening, even when you doubt it could be me, I am there. I wait even the smallest sign of your response, even the slightest hint of invitation that will allow me to enter.

I want you to know that whenever you invite me, I come. Always, without fail. Silent and unseen I come, but with infinite power and love, bringing the many gifts of my Father. I come with my mercy, with my desire to forgive and heal you, and with a love for you beyond your comprehension—a love every bit as great as the love I myself have received from the Father. “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you” (John 15: 9). I come longing to console you and give you strength, to lift you up and bind your wounds. I bring you my light, to dispel your darkness and all your doubts. I come with my power, that I might carry you and all of your burdens; with my grace, to touch your heart and transform your life; and my peace I give to still your soul.

I know you through and through. I know everything about you. The very hairs of your head I have numbered. Nothing in your life is unimportant to me. I have followed you through the years, and I have always loved you, even in your wanderings. I know every one of your problems; I know your needs, your fears, and your worries. I hear your every whispered prayer, always. Even when it seems I am silent, I am ever at work in your life to bless you and protect you.

Every movement of your heart I follow, and your every thought. I know all your pain, your struggles and trials, your failures and heartaches. And yes, I know all your sins. But I tell you again that I love you, and not for what you have or haven’t done. I love you for you; I love you because you are. I love you for the beauty and dignity my Father gave you, creating you in his own image. It is a dignity you have forgotten, a beauty you have tarnished by ego and sin. But I love you as you are, infinitely, completely, without reserve; and I have shed my blood to win you back. If you only ask me with faith, my grace will touch all that needs changing in your life, and I will give you the strength to free yourself from sin and from all that binds and burdens you, and from all that takes you away for me.

I know what is in your heart. I know your loneliness and all your hurts: the rejections, the judgments, the humiliations. I carried it all before you. And I carried all for you so that you might share my strength and my victory. I know especially your need for love, how you thirst to be accepted and appreciated, loved and cherished. But how often have you thirsted in vain, seeking that love outside of me who am its Source—striving to fill the emptiness inside you with passing pleasures, and often with the even greater emptiness of sin. Do you thirst for love? “If anyone thirst, let him come to me...” (John 7:37) I will satisfy your desires for love beyond your dreams. Do you thirst to be appreciated and cherished? I cherish you more than you can imagine, to the point of leaving heaven for you, and of dying on a cross to make you one with me.

Don't you realize that your thirst for love is a thirst for me, I who am Love? I am myself the answer to your deepest desires.

I THIRST FOR YOU...Yes, that is the only way to describe my love for you: I thirst to love you and to be loved by you—that is how precious you are to me.

- Come to me, and I will fill your heart and heal your wounds. I will make you a new creation, and give you peace in all your trials.
- You must never doubt my mercy, my acceptance of you, my desire to forgive, my longing to bless you and live my life in you.
- If you feel unimportant in the eyes of the world, that matters not at all. For me, there is no one more important than you.
- Open to me, come to me, thirst for me, give me your life—and I will prove to you how important you are to my heart.

Don't you realize that my Father already has a perfect plan to transform your life, beginning from this moment? Trust in me. Ask me every day to enter and take charge of your life—and I will. I promise you before my Father in heaven that I will work miracles in your life. Why would I do this? Because I thirst for you. All I ask is that you entrust yourself to me completely. I will do all the rest.

Even now I behold the place my Father has prepared for you in my kingdom. Remember that you are a pilgrim in this life, on a journey home. Things of this world can never satisfy you, nor bring the peace you seek. All that you have sought outside of me has only left you more empty, so do not cling to material things. Above all, do not run from me when you fall. Come to me without delay. When you give me your sins, you give me the joy of being your Savior. There is nothing I cannot forgive and heal. So come now, and unburden your soul.

No matter how far you may wander, no matter how often you forget me, no matter how many crosses you may bear in this life, there is one thing I want you to always remember, one thing that will never change: I thirst for you—just as you are. You don't need to change to believe in my love, for it will be your belief in my love that will change you. You forget me, and yet I am seeking you every moment of the day, standing at the door of your heart and knocking, Do you find this hard to believe? Then look at the cross—look at my heart that was pierced for you. Have you not understood my cross? Then listen again to the words I spoke there, for they tell you clearly why I endured all this for you: "I thirst," (John 19:28). Yes, I thirst for you—as the rest of the psalm-verse I was reciting says of me, "I looked for pity, but there was none" (Psalm 69:20) All your life I have been looking for your love—I have never stopped seeking to love you and to be loved by you. You have tried many other things in your search for happiness. Why not try opening your heart to me, right now, more than you ever have before?

Whenever you do open the door of your heart, whenever you come close enough, you will hear me say to you again and again, not in mere human words but in spirit:

No matter what you have done, I love you for your own sake. Come to me with your misery and your sins, with your troubles and needs, and with all your longing to be loved. I stand at the door of your heart and knock. Open to me, for I thirst for you.

From *Mother Teresa's Secret Fire: The Encounter that Changed Her Life and How It Can Transform Your Own* by Joseph Langford. Our Sunday Visitor Press, 2008, p 297-300.

## **Session Two:**

### **The Treasure of Creed: What Catholics Believe and Why It Matters**

#### **I. Reconnect, Review, and Respond**

- A. Greetings and Opening Prayer (Merton)**
- B. Welcoming anyone new**
- C. Thoughts and Reflections from last week**
- D. Overview of Evening's plan**
- E. Discussion: What is Faith? What difference does what I believe make?**

#### **II. Play: Same and Different**

- A. Fifteen beliefs of the Church—same or different from other faiths?**

Participants use sign language cues for “same” and “different” (same, index fingers on both hands side by side; different, index fingers crossed). Leader reads 15 beliefs of the Catholic faith. Participants give the sign for same or different. As participants discuss the beliefs, leader gives additional information about Church teaching.

- B. Faith for Catholics: Revelation from Scripture and Tradition**

#### **III. The Bible**

- A. Catholic belief about Scripture—Role of the The Word.**
- B. Brief “Tour” of the Bible.**

#### **IV. The Creed**

- A. Why a Creed?**
  - 1. When knowing the Creed meant you might be a martyr tomorrow**

**2. Councils-working out the Creed**

*a) Apostles Creed*

*b) Nicene Creed*

**3. New phrasing: Not changes in what we believe, but changes in how we say it. Include general description of liturgical changes and why--brief**

**B. Walk through the Creed**

**1. Relate to information from last week about “Who is God?”**

**2. Point out key concepts**

**V. The Catechism**

**A. Brief description of the Catechism**

**1. Have copies for participants to page through—Look at numbered and general versions**

**2. Practice using the Table of Contents and indexes to find answers to questions—practice with 2 or 3 questions**

**B. Responding to a Church that seems to have an answer for everything**

**VI. Closing**

**A. What was your biggest surprise tonight?**

**B. What would you like to know more about?**

**C. Current study opportunities in the parish**

## General Directions for Week 2

You may have new members to the group. Give brief introductions all around and work on welcoming. Same or Different is a way to help people who have attended other churches begin to sort out what is Catholic Church, what is catholic Christian (universal), and what is teaching of a particular non-Catholic group. It tends to generate a lot of discussion and questions. People tend to be surprised how much is the same. Usually one or two people will begin to talk about what is appealingly different. Eucharist and Real Presence are most often named, but many other “draws” are also expressed. Usually, people are surprised to learn what the Church teaches and what she doesn’t. Leader needs to be sure of what the Catholic Church teaches. If you have limited exposure to other faiths, your team and participants will quickly educate you—though sometimes someone has to find something out, returning with information next week. Because so many Protestant churches teach that Catholicism isn’t based on the Bible, it is good to talk about that directly. Bring a variety of Bibles—Protestant and Catholic. Talk about what differences there are and why.

The Same or Different Discussion tends to take about 45 minutes, so you do not have a long time to go through the Creed. Besides, you have covered most of it in the Same-Different Discussion. Talk 2-3 minutes about the history of the Creed and its meaning to us. You might especially focus on words that are new since last year’s changed phrasing, or you might want to discuss what a few key phrases mean. Suggest that as people attend mass and recite the Creed that they focus on a phrase each time to ask themselves, “What rings especially in my heart as I recite this Creed today?” Have copies of the Catechism available and let participants look up 2-3 relevant questions they have about the faith. I tend to pick matters that were discussed in the Same-Different activity.

Handouts:

Outline of the Evening

Topics for Reflection

## Topics for Reflection

1. When I think of following a Credo, a statement of belief, what is my response—emotionally, mentally, practically?
2. What statements in the Creed do I easily embrace?
3. What statements in the Creed do I not understand?
4. What statements in the Creed do I take issue with?
5. If I lived by the Creed, what difference would it make in my life?
6. What does having a Creed have to do with my personal relationship with Jesus Christ? With living with the Holy Spirit within me?
7. How important is reading the Bible to me?
8. How might I use a copy of the catechism?
9. If I committed to ongoing study of my Catholic faith, what might I most want to know about?
10. How much of my faith is “blind”—because the Church or someone says so? How much of my faith is informed? How much of my struggle with faith is related to not knowing—or knowing at a child’s level?

## **Same or Different**

- 1. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit**
- 2. Divine Providence: God takes a personal interest in us**
- 3. Personal relationship with Jesus Christ**
- 4. Personal sin**
- 5. Original sin**
- 6. Virgin Birth**
- 7. Incarnation**
- 8. Necessity of baptism**
- 9. Jesus is present in Communion**
- 10. Resurrection**
- 11. One, holy, and apostolic church**
- 12. Priesthood of all believers**
- 13. Forgiveness of sins**
- 14. Resurrection of the body**
- 15. Seven sacraments**

## **Session Three:**

### **Treasure of Mass and Eucharist: Center of Worship, Center of Life**

#### **VII. Reconnect, Review, and Respond**

- A. Greetings and Opening Prayer (Merton)**
- B. Questions or comments from last session**
- C. Overview of Evening's plan**
- D. Discussion: What is worship? What does Eucharist mean? What makes mass and Eucharist special worship?**
- E. Full communion: What does it mean to be in "full communion" with the Catholic Church? What is required to be in full communion?**
- F. List: What questions do you have about mass or full communion?**

#### **VIII. Overview of the mass, with video clips**

- A. Introductory Rites**
- B. Liturgy of the Word**
- C. Offertory**
- D. Eucharistic Prayer**
- E. Communion**
- F. Sending Forth**

#### **IX. Tour of the Church**

- A. Gathering area**
- B. Vesting sacristy**
- C. Confessional**

- D. Eucharistic Chapel**
- E. Worship Area**
- F. Altar and sanctuary**
- G. Working sacristy**

## **X. Feeling at home in church**

- A. What feels awkward at mass?**
- B. Manners at Mass**
  - 1. Greeters, Holy Water, Placing Communion in the dish**
  - 2. Using worship aids, kneeling, sitting, standing**
  - 3. Quiet in the Worship Space, bowing, genuflecting, singing,**
  - 4. Handling communion issues**

## **XI. Worship opportunities in our parish**

## General Directions for Session Three

Session Three could be two weeks. There is a lot of content here. Keep it moving. If you have people in your group who have had very little religious instruction, you may want to supplement the class with attending mass together and talking afterwards 2-3 times. Use a video to show parts of the mass. Some videos just show the mass; others give explanation. Give basic explanations: what is happening? Why is it part of the liturgy. Let your own enthusiasm for worship show. It is also good to use a book for additional reading. If the mass is in your song books, show participants where it is and suggest they might want to read along for a few weeks. People like the church tour. Don't just show where things are; talk about how worship space, vestments, gathering areas, Eucharistic chapels, vesting sacristies, baptismal fonts—everything fits together to help a community of people gather, worship, and disperse. Fit the “Manners at Mass” to what you do in your parish. Think of times when people might feel awkward. Talk about them. Face the communion issue directly. Let people know they can participate by walking forward with their arms crossed for a blessing.

Handouts:

Outline of Session

Reflection Questions

Perhaps a handout or book on the Mass

## **II. Questions for Reflection**

- 1. What does bowing or genuflecting when I go into church mean to me?**
- 2. As I participate in the mass, where do I feel the pull to worship, to be close to God?**
- 3. How is mass in this parish at this time different from my memories of mass in the past?**
- 4. How do I experience community during mass?**
- 5. How do I recognize and experience sacrifice during mass?**
- 6. What does the phrase, "Body of Christ" mean to me?**

## **Session Four:**

### **Treasure of Teaching Authority: Not Just Knowing What to Do, But Why**

#### **I. Reconnect, Review, and Respond**

- A. Greetings and Opening Prayer (Merton)**
- B. Questions or comments from last session**
- C. Overview of Evening's plan**
- D. Why objective standards?**

#### **II. Life in Christ**

- A. Review of made in the image of God, freedom to choose, conscience**
- B. God: Love, Truth, Fidelity**
- C. Standards of Fully Developed 10 Commandments: Living in Christ**
- D. Moral acts: action, intention, circumstances & consequences**
- E. Virtues & Beatitudes: "Make your home in My Word, and you will learn the truth, and the truth will make you free."**

#### **III. Standards for Loving God**

- A. 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment: Believe in the True God**
- B. 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment: Reverence God's Name**
- C. 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment: Love the Lord's Day**
- D. Precepts of the Church**

#### **IV. Standards for family life**

- A. 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Strengthen your family**
- B. 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Promote the culture of life**
- C. 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Marital fidelity**

#### **V. Standards for justice**

- A. 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Do not steal**
- B. 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Tell the truth**

#### **VI. Standards for our hearts**

- A. 9<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Practice purity of heart**
- B. 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Embrace poverty of spirit**

#### **VII. Journeying toward these Gold Standards**

- A. Church always begins with the ideal—like God, like Christ, like saints**
- B. In relationship with God, with the Church—always**
- C. Accepting where I am, deciding where I want to be, and what is the next step**

## General Directions for Session Four

Tonight's session is heavy on content. Probably a better way to do it would be to have a Scavenger Hunt through the catechism, having people find answers to questions on morality. That might happen soon! For the present, when you present the content of the 10 Commandments, talk about 3-4 key concepts from each one, pulling them together through standards for living real lives in today's real world. People tend to ask a lot of questions and make comments about surprises. At present we use a numbered catechism, paging through the moral teachings given under the commandments, noting major points. While this session focuses on the "gold standard," rather than sin, it is also a preparation for talking about sin and confession in the next session. The goal is to separate out the standard from personal wrong-doing. Nonetheless, most people in the class will be surprised to find out the Church's standard on one thing or another. That can be a difficult moment for them. It is good to preface the study of a story of your own about realizing something was wrong that you had not questioned before and talking about how to come to terms with such a discovery: it is natural to feel defensive, confused, or angry. Those are feelings, to acknowledge, but not to be the end of the story. Focus on your own way of describing the wonders of Catholic objective Truth. While that has been a theme throughout Treasures, tonight it is likely to be especially manifest.

Handouts:

Outline of Session

Reflection Questions

List of the 10 Commandments

## Questions for Reflection

1. When I hear and read Church teaching on how people live day-to-day, what impresses me?
2. The Church has “Gold Standard,” high standards for moral behavior—for my moral behavior. What is comforting about that?
3. What is troubling about it?
4. As we reviewed those standards, what is new? What have I not known before?
5. How do I experience the Church’s standards for loving God? Is God first in my life?
6. The Church sees the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> commandments as being about happy family life. Its standards are significantly different from the world around us. How do I live by those standards now? What difference would it make if I matched them in each area of my life? If our culture matched them?
7. Standards for justice focus around honesty. How important is honesty to me?
8. What does that word “covet” mean to me? Living in a consumer culture, how do I struggle around the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> commandments?

## **Session Five:**

### **Treasure of Understanding Sin, of Grace and Reconciliation**

#### **I. Reconnect, Review, and Respond**

- D. Greetings and Opening Prayer (Merton)**
- E. Questions or comments from last session**
- F. Overview of Evening's plan**

#### **II. Dramatization of the Prodigal Son**

**Dramatic reading of the story of the Prodigal Son set in contemporary issues. The dramatization will be used to give a context for discussion and presentation of Church teaching around grace, sin, and reconciliation.**

#### **III. Church teaching on grace, sin, and reconciliation.**

- A. What is grace?**
- B. What is sin?**
- C. Why be reconciled?**
- D. Confession**
- E. Conversion as a way of life**

#### **IV. Preparing to return to confession**

- A. Examining your conscience**
- B. Example of a confession**
- C. Acts of Contrition**
- D. Worries, questions, and what next?**

## Prodigal Son Play for Returning Catholics

### Characters:

Prodigal Son

Older Brother (Sister)

Father

Mother

Narrator

There are several goals for this rendition of the Prodigal Son: (1) to help people see that the story is relevant for our times, our lives; (2) to identify various ways we all need and can receive God's mercy; (3) by having Fr. Charles play the role of the Prodigal Son, to subtly help people get past fear of his judging them in the confessional; (4) to serve as a springboard for discussion of sin and reconciliation that follows; (5) by using drama, to touch people's "right brain" that perceives and processes images and emotions, to counter any tendency toward stereo-typical or rigid thinking about sinfulness, conversion, mercy, and reconciliation.

Rather than use a script, we will let conversation develop as it may—within the parameters of the story, of course. Each scene should be 2-3 minutes.

### Scene One

#### Dinner Table

Family is sitting around the dinner table on Sunday. The whole family except Prodigal Son is enthusiastically talking about church events—homilies, activities, beliefs. Prodigal Son has doubts, questions—which are answered superficially or ignored.

Prodigal Son expresses boredom, frustration, anger—with both Church and moral standards. Ends with "I'm done. I'll take the faith you've given me and live it the way I choose."

### Scene Two

Family is again around the table. Prodigal Son is across the room. He calls home.

Father answers the phone. "Hi, Son, GREAT to hear from you. How are you? What have you been up to?"

Prodigal Son answers that life is great. He's found real faith and a sweetheart. He's getting married in two weeks. Father asks about her. Prodigal Son answers that all is good.

Father wishes him well. He sadly shakes his head as he hangs up. "We'll miss you, son. We love you, son."

### Scene Three

Prodigal Son (still across the room) tries to call home again. Nobody answers.

Prodigal Son talks to audience about how life is now: doubts, confusion, life and lifestyle not what he thought it would be. His thoughts turn to home. He remembers good times—including times at church. He expresses regret at choices he's made. He wonders what will happen if he returns.

### Scene Four

Father is checking his email. There's an email from his son. He's coming home today! Father yells, "Quick, Carol, go fix all of Charles' favorite foods. Ready the guest room. Call all his old friends to come over. Buy champagne! Charles is coming home." Carol scurries off to make preparations. Father starts looking toward Prodigal Son. Sue stands by—shaking her head, muttering something like "Isn't anybody going to the Stations or the Fish Fry with me now?" She stomps out. (Goes to a different corner of the room).

Prodigal Son begins to make his way toward home, wondering how he will be received.

### Scene Five

Father is at the door and embraces his son. Prodigal Son says something like, "Father, I have hurt you and Mom and Mary Jane and Sue and our whole family. I have sinned. I have turned away from what you taught me, what our Church teaches. I've pretty much messed up my life. I don't deserve to be your son, but I'm looking at a house down the street and I've interviewed for a job with the state. I won't be much trouble, but I just want to be back kind of near you. I won't embarrass you by going to church with you all the time, but do you think I could maybe sneak in the crowds on Christmas and Easter? I'm still confused, but I so very much want to be back home." (or similar)

Father welcomes him back, saying something like, "You ARE my son, I love you. No, don't live down the street. Live here. Yes, come to church with us. I don't care WHAT you've done, where you've been. Here, come in, come in..." Mother also welcomes him.

## Scene Six

(Party music in the background.) Father is looking for Older Sister. He goes searching across the room until he can find her. He says something like, "Why aren't you celebrating with the rest of us?" Older sister expresses unhappiness with the attention paid her brother and the family's attitude of forgiveness... "You know what burns MY onions, Dad....."

Father responds, " I love you. You've always been here. Everything I have is yours. But your brother was lost, and is now found. I thought he was dead. He's back! He's home! I have to celebrate. I have to celebrate!!!

Father embraces Older Sister, who at first stays stiff, but then lets herself be embraced. They move toward the celebration with the Prodigal (off to the side).

The End

### **Props:**

Set up like dinner table.

2 cell phones

Computer

### **Discussion Questions afterwards**

To each character: How was it for you to play this part? How did being "in the story" make a difference?

To class members: Which characters did you identify with? Which not?

For discussion among us all:

How are we all like the Prodigal Son? The Older Sister? The Father and Mother?

What did it take for the Prodigal Son to return? To be welcomed?

What is hard about saying, "I have sinned. Please forgive me."?

What does the story tell us about how God sees sin...and forgiveness? How is what our Church teaches about the Sacrament of Reconciliation a living out of the story of the Prodigal Son and the need of all of us to say "I'm sorry. I sinned. Please forgive me. Please take me back."

## General Directions for Session Five:

This is the session when we have our priest come. He plays the part of the Prodigal Son. If your priest is not into impromptu acting, that part can be played by another member of your team, but it is good for him to be present for this session. If the particular evening doesn't match his schedule, you might want to reorder your sessions. People returning are consistently scared to go to confession. Having your priest there to answer questions and talk about it is profoundly reassuring.

The script for the Prodigal Son story is general. We have members of our team play the parts. This is not a stage production. We use the role of Narrator who reads the directions out loud to remind the actors of what to do. Generally, there are funny moments, and that is part of what you want. Telling the story of the Prodigal Son in terms of journeying away from the Church hits home with your participants. A little comic relief of mistakes or awkward moments is welcomed. The key to the play is the discussion afterwards. It is important to relate what it is like to play a part with personal journeys. This is a time to let yourselves be open and vulnerable. We tend to turn over the discussion of Confession to Father. It often includes a mock confession of one of the team members. Our priest always concludes with invitations for class members to call him to set up an individual time for confession and gives his cell phone number.

## Handouts:

Overview of session

Reflection Questions

Examination of Conscience brochure

How to Go to Confession brochure

## Reflection Questions

1. **What does conversion mean to me?**
2. **What does being “in my father’s house” mean to me?**
3. **What does the word “sin” mean to me?**
4. **What does “grace” mean?**
5. **What is my response when I hear the term “mortal sin”?**
6. **How does thinking of giving God “the joy of being my Savior” affect my perspective on confession?**
7. **What worries or frightens me about confession?**
8. **What attracts me about confession?**
9. **How might I begin to go through an Examination of Conscience?**

## **Session Six:**

### **Treasure of Sacraments and Prayer: Touched by God Again and Again**

#### **I. Reconnect, Review, and Respond**

- A. Greetings and Opening Prayer (Merton)**
- B. Questions or comments from last session**
- C. Overview of Evening's plan**

#### **II. Sharing pictures and memories of Sacraments received**

- A. Share pictures of sacramental milestones**
- B. Talk about understanding of sacraments as children**
- C. Beyond hoopla, ceremony—what really happens when we receive a sacrament**

#### **III. How God touches us in each Sacrament**

- A. Baptism**
- B. Confirmation**
- C. Penance**
- D. Eucharist**
- E. Anointing of the Sick**
- F. Holy Orders**
- G. Marriage**

#### **IV. Touched in Prayer**

- A. Sacramentals, Devotions, and Vocal Prayer**

- B. Liturgical Prayer**
- C. Mental Prayer**
- D. Prayer opportunities in our parish**
- E. Closing Prayer—Often a rosary**

### General Directions for Session Six

Using sharing of pictures or mementoes from sacraments in the past has multiple purposes. It is an informal, comfortable way to talk about sacraments. It gets people involved. It also is a way to make the point that adult understanding of faith and faith life is more than the understanding of children. We have a fair amount of people who stopped going to church as teens. Others didn't stop going until adulthood, but they little religious instruction after 8<sup>th</sup> grade. It takes a high school or college education to live and work in the world today. But our faith formation too often stops before we can really understand our faith. Getting that concept across is easy as people look at pictures and talk about what each sacrament meant at the age of 7 or 13—or at the time of marriage. Sometimes this conversation opens vistas of interest in ongoing Bible study or religious education, especially as team members and participants talk about what their faith has come to mean.

If there is a prayer chain, charismatic prayer group, rosary group, or regular Adoration in your parish, this is the time to talk about it. Then we have come to close with saying a rosary together. Our participants requested it.

Handouts:

Session Overview

Questions for Reflection

How to Say a Rosary

## **Questions for Reflection**

- 1. What do I remember of my First Communion? First Penance? Confirmation?**
- 2. Did I have a sense at the time of God “touching” me with grace?**
- 3. What is my understanding now of grace within sacraments?**
- 4. What am I seeking in sacraments now?**
- 5. What am I seeking now from prayer?**
- 6. What opportunities to grow in prayer within the parish sound appealing to me?**

## **Session Seven:**

### **Treasure of Community: Sharing, Serving, Caring, Celebrating**

- I. Reconnect, Review, and Respond**
  - A. Opening Prayer**
  - B. Review of questions or comments from last session**
  - C. Overview of Evening**
  - D. Introduction of Guests**
- II. Shared meal, with previous graduates of Treasures program and with representatives of various parish communities**
  - A. Potluck meal with both graduates of the Treasures program, as well as 4-8 invited guests, each active in one or more ministries or groups in the parish.**
- III. Sharing stories, answering questions.**
  - A. During the meal, guests talk about some aspect of their faith journey and their relationship to the parish community.**
  - B. With participants, guests discuss: Why be part of a faith community? How does sharing, serving, caring, and celebrating happen in the context of community? What difference does that make?**
- IV. Becoming an active member of the parish**
  - A. Registering in the parish**
  - B. Overview of various groups, activities, and ministries, focusing on those not discussed at other sessions. Contact information.**
  - C. Stewardship**

## **V. Review of Treasures Program**

**A. What people liked best, suggestions for future programs.**

**B. Joining the Treasures newslist, participating in Returning Catholics ministry.**

## **VI. Closing Prayer Circle**

### **General Directions for Session Seven**

We invite previous graduates of our Returning Catholics process to attend this session each time. Everyone brings a dish. We celebrate a meal together. While we eat, both previous returnees who have not been part of the team and guests who represent active parish life share their stories of commitment and evolving ministry. It is all informal. After the meal we pass out parish registration forms, talk about stewardship, including commitments of Time, Talent, and Treasure. Our Time and Talent sign up comes with a booklet listing all our parish organizations. Organizations get information on sign-ups and have responsibility to contact Treasures graduates. Often members of our team will also help make connections. We really like it if every participant has a parish group to go to when our sessions end. Even those who are not ready to return can continue their journey as part of a parish group. We end with a prayer circle, with each person expressing first a gratitude, then a request. We end with hugs and an Our Father.