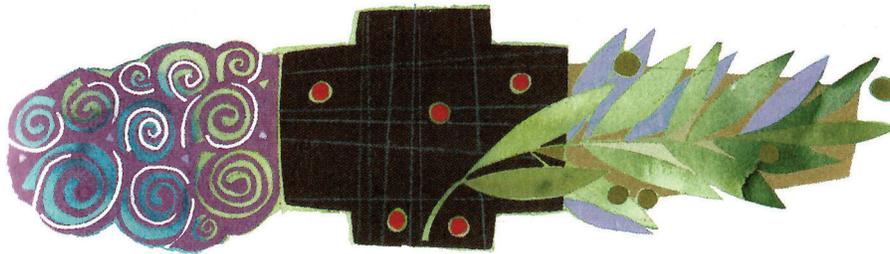


Spirit of Forgiveness

**1**

Before you begin, please read the introduction on the right to yourself.

2

With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

Then begin with a prayer.

3

Getting started. Discuss together: When was the last time you had to say "I'm sorry"? When was the last time you were asked to forgive someone?

Along with "please" and "thank you," "I'm sorry" is one of the first things we learn to say as children. The ability to be forgiven and to forgive others is important to relationships and families. It is important to our relationship with God as well. We believe that God is always ready to forgive us when we ask.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is an opportunity for us to recognize when we have hurt others, to confess our failings to a priest, and to receive God's forgiveness. Our sins result in broken relationships, especially between us and God and our neighbors. This sacrament helps us to receive God's grace and mend these gaps, lifting a weight from us in the process. We encourage you to take advantage of this gift, both for your own benefit and to serve as an example to your child.



1

Read the story below out loud. If your child is old enough, he or she can read it to you. Otherwise, read it to your child. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.

Nobody is perfect. Everybody makes mistakes. Sometimes we even hurt other people. And sometimes we are hurt by others. The important thing about making mistakes and doing hurtful things is how we behave afterwards. Do we run and hide? Do we make things worse by telling a lie? Do we say, “It wasn’t me”? It takes a lot of courage to say “I did it. I am sorry.”

Sometimes when people hurt us with mean and angry words, we want to yell back with even meaner words. We want to get even. We want to make them hurt. When people hurt us, it is hard to forgive them. It is hard to say, “It’s OK. Let’s start over.”

When we hurt others or others hurt us, we need to take a deep breath, count to ten and ask God for help. With the help of the Holy Spirit we can find the words to say, “I’m sorry” or “I forgive you.” It is not easy, but with God’s help we can do it.

In our Church we have a special sacrament of forgiveness. It is called the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we confess our sins to a priest and tell God we are sorry for what we have done. We promise to try our best not to do it again. And we ask God’s help in changing our ways. What a blessing to know that when we receive this sacrament our sins are not only forgiven by God but also forgotten by him.



2

Now discuss the reading with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. How do you feel when you have made a mistake that has hurt someone? What if you have hurt someone on purpose?
2. How do you make up to the person you hurt?

1

Get your child started on the activity on the next page, making sure they understand the instructions. (The answers are: A-4, B-3, C-1, D-2.) Then continue to read below.

2

Just for you: When we hurt others, we have to take active steps to make things right.

First we have to admit we have done something wrong. Then we have to apologize to those we hurt. Finally, we have to change our ways to avoid doing the same wrong again. If we are the ones receiving the apology, we need to risk forgiving that person. The two stories in this section both talk about how we ask for forgiveness and how we give forgiveness to others.

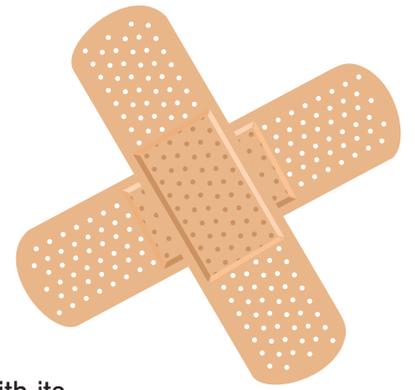
3

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is the Church's celebration of God's mercy and forgiveness which helps us when we have done wrong:

- We prepare for the sacrament with an **examination of conscience**, to help us realize how we have failed.
- We **confess** our sins to a priest, and then **apologize** to God (and the rest of the Church).
- We commit to changing our ways, often with an **Act of Contrition**.
- The priest gives us a **penance** as a way to make amends for our sin.
- The priest gives us God's forgiveness through **absolution**.

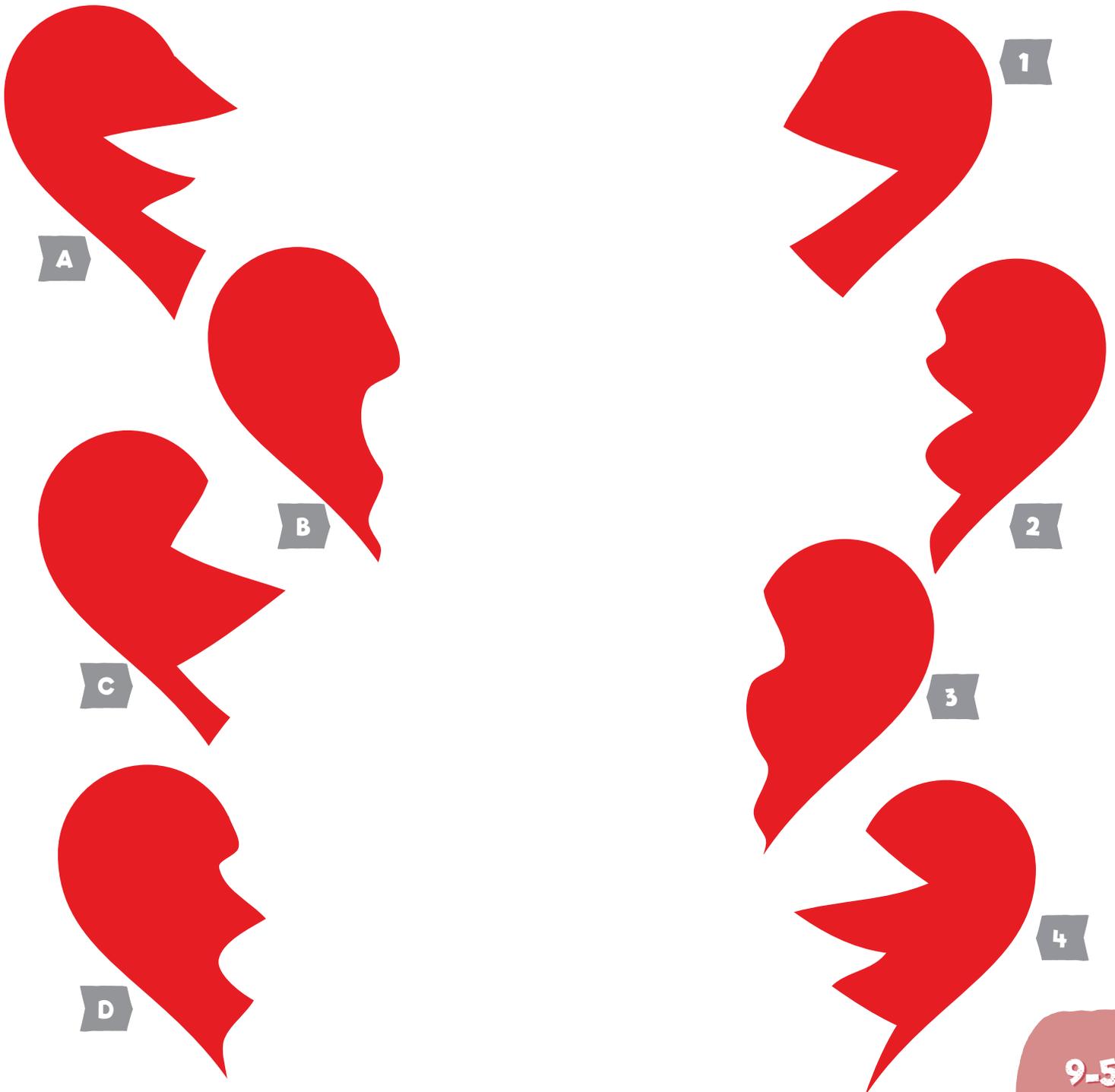
If your child has received the Sacrament of Reconciliation, make sure they remember these steps and encourage them to receive the sacrament again soon.

Broken Hearts



When we hurt others or others hurt us, it breaks our relationship with them. The person who was hurt may feel angry, scared, upset, or all three. Forgiveness and reconciliation are about healing our relationships and bringing us back closer together.

Below, find some broken hearts. Draw lines to connect each half heart on the left with its matching half on the right side.



Circles of Hurt, Ripples of Sin

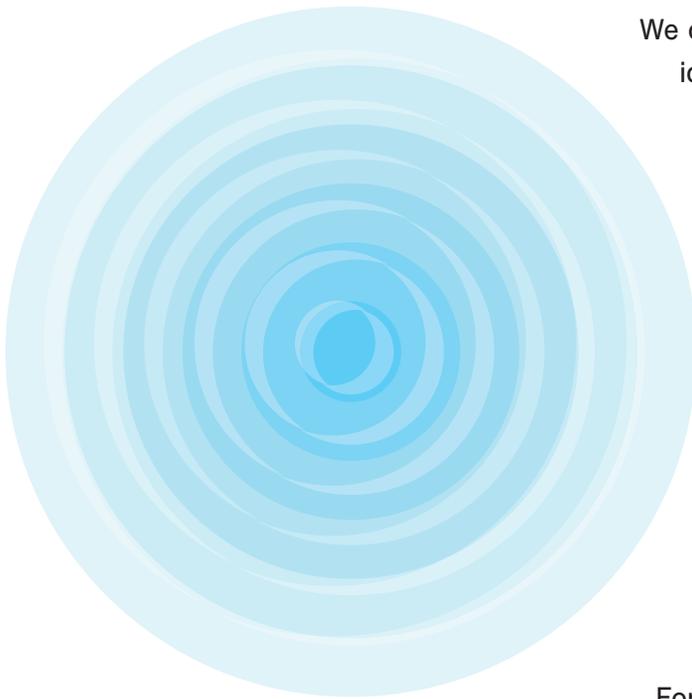
1

Work on this activity together with your child. Begin by reading the text below together.

2

On the next page are three circles, one for family and friends, one for our community and one for our world. List in each circle the hurts that happen, on purpose or unintentionally. (You'll notice at the end how each one can "ripple" into the other!)

Before we can talk about forgiveness, we have to recognize the reality of sin. We all make mistakes, and when we deliberately are selfish or hurt others, these mistakes become sin.

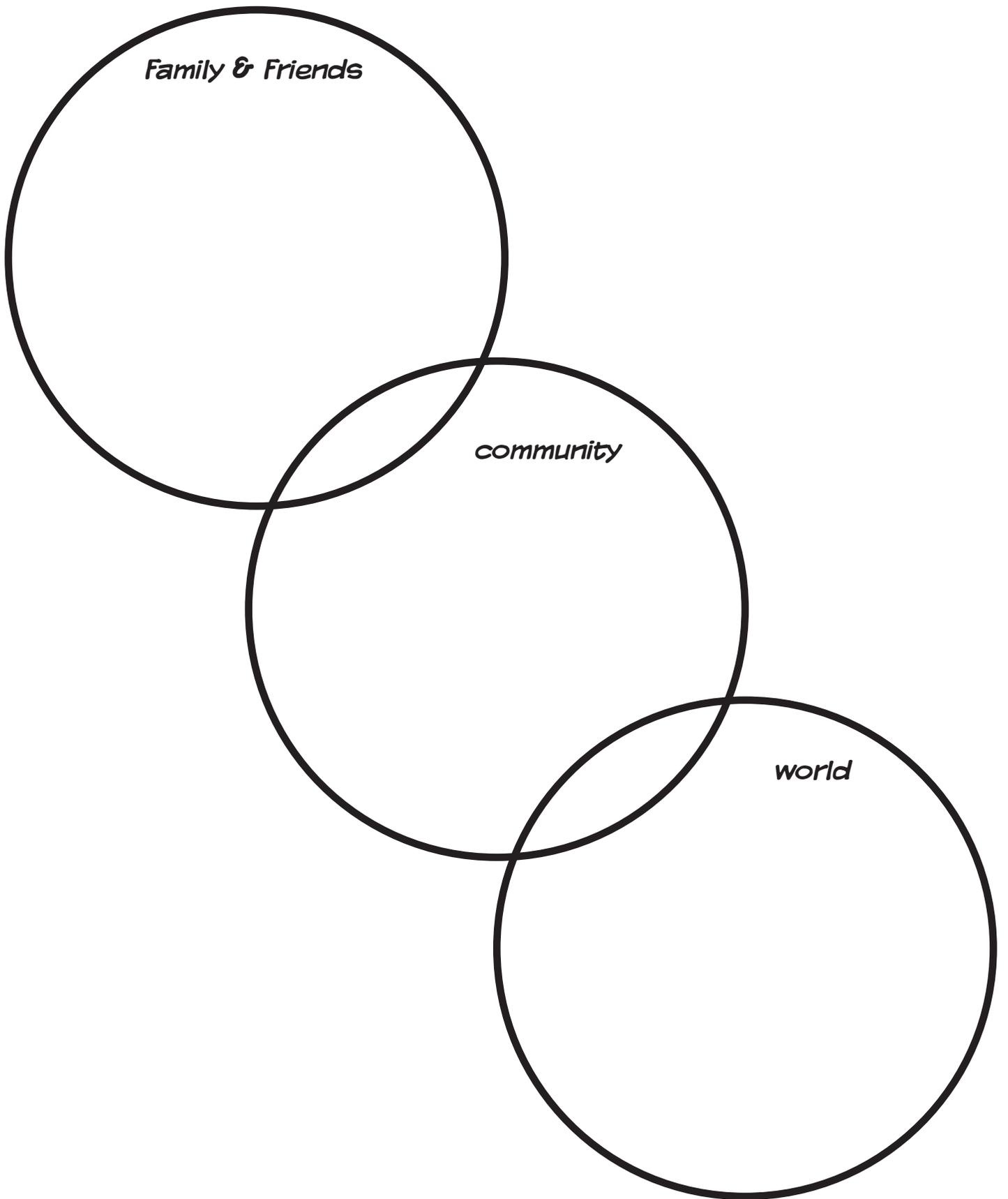


We call the time when we look at our lives to identify sinful actions an "examination of conscience." That means we examine, or look at closely, the inner voice and thoughts that tell us when we have done something wrong.

Hurtful things have a way of "rippling out" to others. We hurt someone in our family circle, and they may take their anger to work or school. Then they hurt someone there! So, just like a pebble dropped in a lake, one sin can spread out to hurt many, many other people.

It happens in the other direction as well!

For example, a government may cut funding for school breakfasts, so a particular school has to stop offering help to its children. Then a child in that school may go hungry all day because there is no food at home



Forgiveness

1

Many family-appropriate videos and movies deal with forgiveness. Find one you would like to see with your young person. (*Beauty and the Beast*, *Mighty Ducks*, *Field of Dreams*, and *Clara's Heart* are just a few.)

Also notice what your friends and family members do when they want to be forgiven. Do you have any personal rituals of reconciliation like a hug or a special phrase you say?



Closing Ritual

2

Say the closing prayer on the right together.

God of mercy,
we ask for your forgiveness.

Teach us how to forgive others.

We ask this through Jesus, in Jesus, and with Jesus,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
forever and ever. Amen.

