

PARENTING

Parents teach children how to forgive

Last Friday evening after my husband, Joe, finished putting our two children to bed, he said to me, "For some reason, Bobby really doesn't want to go to the first reconciliation retreat tomorrow morning. I told him that this is a way to have God become special in your life. And Bobby told me, 'He already is.' So then I told him it's a way that you can talk to God like a friend and ask him to forgive you and Bobby said, 'I already do that.'"

This weekend, Bobby and many other second graders of our parish, will receive first reconciliation. At first I thought that Bobby's reconciliation reluctance had more to do with the fact that he was missing his second game in our town's basketball league. But there seemed to be more.

"Are you concerned that you won't have anything to tell the priest when you talk to him," I asked.

"Oh no; I've got things," Bobby answered, "I just don't feel like going and I don't know why I have to talk to a priest."

Bobby dribbled his basketball and eyed it longingly as his dad said it was time to go. Joe and Bobby stopped to pick up Ryan and Dan, two of his teammates, who were experiencing a similar reluctance to a morning of sacrament rather than sport.

Later that day, as we watched a college player receive a technical foul for shouting at a referee, I told Bobby that the player might have benefited from a reconciliation retreat when he was 7. Now a young man, the player's behavior seemed to be a part of who he was on and off the court.

One of the first observations a child makes while watching a sport, is that a player receives a penalty when he or she breaks a rule of the game. When we break the rules of our faith by hurting God and others, there is also a penance.

But that's where the similarities end. Rather than relying on referees or officials



BY EILEEN MARX

family matters

to let us know we've broken the rules, we're asked to examine our own consciences and confess our sins. Most of the time, we don't need a rule book to let us know when we've come up short. The penance we're given for our sins is a reminder that we need to take responsibility for our actions. When we receive the sacrament we promise to change and become more caring. By following all of these steps we are brought back together, or reconciled, with a loving and forgiving God.

We live in a world that is uncomfortable with the mention of words like sin, penance, confession and conscience. In her book, *The Cloister Walk*, Kathleen Norris wrote, "Repentance is not a popular word these days, but I believe that any of us recognize it when it strikes us in the gut. Repentance is coming to our senses, seeing suddenly, what we've done that we might not have done, or recognizing, as Oscar Wilde says in his great religious meditation 'De Profundis,' that the problem is not in what we do but in what we become."

It's hard to imagine that a 7-year-old would have much to repent, but as parents we're laying the foundation for our children. We're teaching our children that it's important to tell God you're sorry, to take responsibility for hurting others and to receive the gift of God's forgiveness. We see the results all around us of children and

adults who never received that teaching. It's essential to a child's emotional and spiritual development to learn that there are consequences for words and actions that hurt others. But even more important is to teach children the importance of forgiveness.

During our parent meeting about the sacrament of reconciliation, we discussed how forgiveness and reconciliation should be an ongoing process in all families. It's almost impossible for a child to learn how to apologize if that child has never seen his or her parents say "I'm sorry." We were also asked how we express forgiveness in our families and how do we teach our kids the meaning of the words, "I'm sorry," and "I forgive you." Too many lives have been torn apart because people have never learned what it feels like to forgive and to be forgiven.

The sacrament of reconciliation shines as a bright reminder that God's forgiveness is always there; we simply need to turn to him. When we hold on to past hurts and resentment with family members, friends and co-workers, we forget God's words, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you." (Eph.3 4:32). What if God held back his forgiveness and expected perfection in each of us the way we do with one another?

At the end of the practice session for first reconciliation, the parents received a notice about the date of our child's first Communion. I realize that in just a few months Bobby's world of sacraments and sports will intersect once more. And I wonder how I'll let him know that his first Communion will be held on the first Saturday of May — opening day of his Little League season.

Marx lives in Lawrenceville, N.J., with her husband and two children.



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Kangaroo Hop

Debbie Petersen and daughter Michelle, 3, do the Kangaroo Hop to the music of The Boomerang Club, which performed Jan. 13 at Strong Museum, Rochester. The museum has entertainment for preschoolers on alternating Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

Events

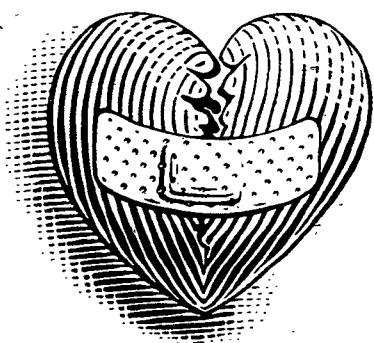
● JAN. 23, 30 — **The Eleventh Hour Children's Storytime**: *Alligator Baby* by Robert Munsch (Jan. 23); *Slim and Miss Grim* by Robert Kinert (Jan. 30); 11 a.m., Borders Books, 1000 Hylan Dr., Henrietta; free; call 716/292-5900.

● JAN. 23 and 30, FEB. 6 and 13 — **Science Saturdays**: Rochester Museum & Science Center, 657 East Ave., Rochester; free with museum admission of \$3 for students in grades K through 12, \$5 for seniors, \$6 for adults, free for pre-schoolers; call 716/271-4552.

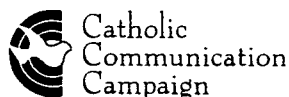
● WED, JAN. 27 — **Tiny Tots Story Time**: *A Day With Wilbur Robinson* by William Joyce; Borders Books, 1000 Hylan Dr., Rochester; 11 a.m.; call 716/292-5900.

● JAN. 30, 31, FEB. 6, 7, 13, 14 — **"Tempest in a Teapot"**: Children's production of William Shakespeare's "The Tempest"; Rochester Shakespeare Players, New Life Presbyterian Community Center, corner of Monroe Avenue and Rosedale Street, Rochester; for times, tickets, call 716/234-7840.

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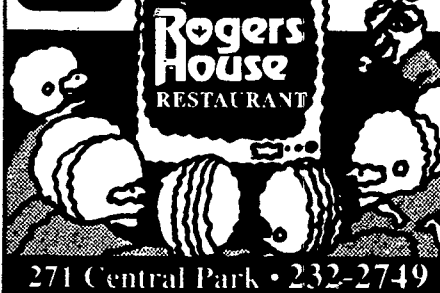
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