

# Preparing for the Sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion



***“The message in SIGNS OF GRACE is that God created us because he wanted a relationship with us. We mess up. Jesus is there—like a superhero—to save the day.”***

**Stacey Pinder**

Former DRE, Christ the King Parish, Milwaukie, OR

As a director of Religious Education with a decade of experience, Stacey Pinder already knew that she wanted to shift from a classroom-only instruction model to family catechesis when she ordered a preview kit for SIGNS OF GRACE from the Augustine Institute.

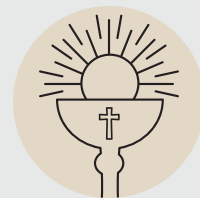
Now a senior evangelization specialist with the Augustine Institute, Pinder recalls her reaction to the materials she received.

“I was blown away,” she said. “It was the Holy Spirit.”

Pinder adopted SIGNS OF GRACE for the twenty-five second graders who would be making their First Reconciliations and First Holy Communion that year. She switched the class time from Wednesday evening for children-only to a forty-minute meeting time for children and their parents between two of the Sunday Masses.

When the group met each week, Pinder delivered the first part of the lesson and then guided parents through how to use the material with their children during the coming week: “Here’s a story you can read at bedtime; here’s something you can do in the car; here’s something your child can do at the kitchen counter while you cook dinner.”

She also invited parents to watch *Forgiven: The Transforming Power of Confession* on [formed.org](http://formed.org).



**“In the videos, Miss Mary shows what it looks like to be a catechist at home—sitting in a chair, relaxing.”**



**Stacey Pinder**

Still, looking out at the families assembled on that first Sunday, Pinder had a familiar feeling. Of the twenty-five families, she recognized only three who regularly attended Sunday Mass. She wondered, for many of them, if First Communion was more a rite of passage with dress-up clothes and a party than the sacrament of receiving Jesus—Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity.

Then, something happened.

“It felt very different from the first lesson,” Pinder said.

As she taught on Sunday, Pinder would see a parent look up over the child’s head and mouth the words: “I didn’t know that.”

“That’s the golden moment,” Pinder said.

Pinder encouraged her families to purchase a Bible and gave them each a chart that divided the four Gospels into manageable chunks for reading over a ninety-day period.

One mother told Pinder that late one afternoon her seven-year-old was not answering the call to come to dinner. She finally discovered him, holed up in his room, settled in a chair, reading.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“I’m reading the Gospels with Mrs. Pinder,” was the reply.

On top of the children’s enthusiasm, Pinder heard from parents whose lives were being transformed. One couple called to say that they had scheduled a time for them both to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation after a long absence; another couple arranged to have their marriage blessed; and three couples enrolled in RCIA to complete their sacraments.

“All of my families started going to Mass,” Pinder said.

In her years in religious education, Pinder used series that were “dry” and others that were “full of fluff.”

“SIGNS OF GRACE,” Pinder said, “is how Catholics tell stories. It begins with the Bible, relates tradition, and gives testimony, while closely following the catechism.”

“I went ten years without seeing the fruits of my labors,” Pinder said.

The unfamiliar faces at the first class meeting have become her friends.

“I love these families,” Pinder said.



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