

Using *Forgiven* as Adult Faith Formation

“Using a protocol in which parishioners watch the *Forgiven* sessions at home prior to a parish-wide Reconciliation service means that ‘all of us are taking this journey together.’”

Tina Gregory

Coordinator of Communication and Adult Enrichment
St. Michael Catholic Church, Livermore, CA

After its scheduled speaker for the parish-wide Lenten mission canceled several years ago, the staff at St. Michael Catholic Church chose to make *Forgiven: The Transforming Power of Confession* available to its parishioners as Plan B.

The parish sent its members a weekly text, inviting them to watch that week’s session of *Forgiven* with their family or small group, leading up to the parish’s Lenten Reconciliation service. The leader’s guide that accompanies *Forgiven* includes questions for discussion. At each weekend Mass, the St. Michael’s pastor centered his Lenten homilies on those questions.

The watch-at-home format was ideal for the 3500-family parish, located in an inland valley forty-five miles east of San Francisco. The diversity of the parish’s members, 40 percent of whom are Spanish speaking, meant that *Forgiven*’s availability in English and Spanish was key to allowing everyone to participate. The church building, a century-old, gleaming white Spanish-mission style with red tile roof, has little meeting space. Additionally, the average commute time for people in the area is ninety minutes, each way.



“We tell people, ‘Watch the last episode of *Forgiven* on a day that you know Reconciliation is available. You won’t want to wait.’”



Tina Gregory

“It’s difficult for us to get any excitement around gathering in a physical space after work,” said Tina Baugh Gregory, St. Michael’s coordinator of Communication and Adult Enrichment.

When the day of the parish Reconciliation service arrived, Gregory said that the change was “huge.”

The service began at 7:00 p.m., with six to eight priests available to hear confessions.

“It was standing room only,” Gregory said.

Staff members finally had to close the church at 11:00 p.m.

“We ran out of tissue boxes,” Gregory said.

Since then, St. Michael’s has incorporated *Forgiven* into an additional parish-wide Lenten study, RCIA, marriage and baptismal preparation, and to help parents whose children are readying for their First Reconciliation.

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced the closing of church buildings, St. Michael’s offered drive-up Confession. As restrictions eased, the parish set up an outdoor adoration area that was open from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, and from 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m., on Saturday. The Sacrament of Reconciliation was available throughout the adoration time. When the church could reopen, adoration and Reconciliation moved inside.

“Regardless of the format, we always have adorers, and the Confession line is always several people deep,” Gregory said.



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