

St Anne's Catholic Parish Wappenbury

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

First Holy Communion, Confirmation and Reconciliation

'We cannot overlook the fact that in recent decades there has been a breakdown in the way Catholics pass down the Christian faith to the young' (Pope Francis in 'Evangelii Gaudium par 70)

This quotation, from a letter of Pope Francis in November 2013, underpins the motivation for the continued approach to sacramental preparation in the Parish of St Anne's Wappenbury. The approach has been consistent since 2005.

Children are prepared for the sacraments of First Holy Communion, Confirmation and Reconciliation within the context of the family and parish with the support of the local primary school. While they will learn **about** the sacraments within the normal school curriculum, assuming it is a Catholic school, it is within the home and the parish that they come to **experience** the real meaning of these sacraments for themselves and for their family and parish community. For Catholic children attending non-Catholic schools, additional training will be required.

Sacraments and Prayer and Family Life

Together with attendance at church weekly, parents will have taught their children, at home, how to pray and the children will be familiar with a variety of traditional prayers including Our Father, a morning and evening prayer and some prayer before and after meals. Again children learn by example which emphasises the importance of parents praying **with** their children regularly.

Once weekly church attendance is established, parents and children will meet in the parish with the parish priest and others and, through sharing their own faith journey, encourage the children to see faith, and the lived practice of faith, as a **normal** part of life rather than an add-on adopted only on specific occasions or as only belonging in school.

Sacraments and children's age

Reconciliation, First Holy Communion and Confirmation are neither age nor class related. Children do not receive the sacraments just because they have reached a specific age or because they belong to a certain class in school. As in other areas of their lives, children's development (and, indeed, adult faith development) varies from person to person. It is when the child is seen by the parents, catechists and parish priest to be ready for a sacrament that they will be presented for a particular sacrament. Of course, if the child is old enough, they too will have a say in this.

Children learn more by doing than in any other way.

Children presenting for these sacraments will have been attending Mass weekly with their family over a period of more than one year where they will have experienced a sense of belonging to a Catholic community, either in St Anne's Parish or in their parish of residence. This will, if you like, be the spiritual home of the child's family and it is within this community that greatest meaning is derived from the sacraments. Here they will learn how to participate in Mass and how to behave in a prayerful environment.

January 2016

When these sacraments are received

While receiving any of these three sacraments is very important to the child and to the family, it is also very important for the church community. It is easier to see First Holy Communion and Confirmation as having an important place in the life of the parish community. However, Reconciliation is equally important to the community.

Reconciliation (Confession)

In receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time, it is important that the child understands the notion of "reconciliation". This can be difficult even for informed adults, for which reason this sacrament is received within the church community where the child can *experience* hurt and forgiveness in practice. As with the other sacraments, the school can teach **about** the sacrament and in school, also, there will be occasions for the child to experience reconciliation, though they will not use this word. It is primarily for parents to demonstrate to the child, in real life situations, just what reconciliation really means in practice.

The child's introduction to Reconciliation will be at a family service at St Anne's Church so that the children can experience that Reconciliation is not just for children but for adults as well.

First Holy Communion

Receiving Holy Communion for the first time is a significant and an important milestone in the faith growth of the child and, through the weekly reception of Holy Communion thereafter, the child grows in faith and their sense of being a part of the parish community deepens. Too often and unfortunately, the child's First Holy Communion becomes their last for a long time afterwards. No one wants this for their children and so there is really no substitute for this weekly Mass in preparing the child for each step in their faith journey.

For First Holy Communion, when the child receives Communion for the first time, families will be offered a choice of dates for their child's First Holy Communion within St Anne's Parish. However, they may prefer their child to receive this sacrament within the community of their normal weekend Mass. In this case, there will be a group celebration offered within this parish once a number of children have received the sacrament and the parish community here will celebrate that with them. Should your child be receiving First Holy Communion in a parish other than St Anne's, it is good to inform St Anne's Parish Priest so that he can be present (if not on a Sunday) and celebrate with the family.

Confirmation

For the **Sacrament of Confirmation**, parish children will usually join together with others, either from Princethorpe College or from a neighbouring parish. As with FHC, preparation is conducted within the family setting where children can hear others (including adults) sharing their faith stories and seeing faith as a 'normal' part of life. Preparing with others for this sacrament in this way is a way of seeing a young church in action and, in this way, the idea of a youth church community becomes more visible and authentic.

Baptism

The preparation for this sacrament is really very simple. Usually, the child's family will be members of the parish community into which their child will be baptised. 'Being members of' means gathering with the parish community on weekends and, in this way, coming to understand the promises they will make at the baptism ceremony. Occasionally parents who have been married in this parish present their child for Baptism in which case they will need written permission from their own parish priest for this to happen. This normally does not present any problem since the family will usually be members of their local parish community.

Children of school age presenting for Baptism will participate actively in their preparation so that they will understand just what being baptised means in their lives. This preparation will usually take some months and, for children over 7 years of age, a more lengthy family preparation will be required.

For Baptism of any child, a minimum of **three months** notice is required during which time the parish priest will visit the home of the child and meet the parents there. He will also explain the meaning of the sacrament and what is required of the family.

What now?

For each of these sacraments, the initial step is for parents to contact the Parish Priest to talk further about this. The Parish Priest will usually visit the family in the home at a time suitable to the family.

Our Lady's School is a busy place. The school secretary has much to do. Please, therefore, contact me directly and not through the school and I will, likewise, communicate with you directly. If you have not already done so and if you want me to communicate with you at home, please write to me or e mail me giving me permission to contact you directly. Data Protection regulations rightly prevent the school from releasing your details to me.

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