

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

Introduction to the Sacraments

The Latin word "Sacramentum" means a sign of the sacred.

The seven Sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Reconciliation, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony touch all stages and all important moments of Christian life.

Each Sacrament is both salvific because it carries on the saving work of Christ when he was on earth, and also sanctifying because of the special graces each confers. They are special occasions for experiencing God's saving presence. The Sacraments strengthen faith and also express it.

Each of the Sacraments has its own "outward sign". For example with Baptism there is the pouring of water, with Confirmation there is the laying on of hands and anointing with holy oil, and with the Eucharist the bread and wine which will be consecrated. Whatever the signs and symbols each Sacrament confers special sacramental grace.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that the Sacraments are "powers that comes forth" from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church."

In the Archdiocese of Birmingham preparation for First Holy Communion is undertaken in School within the RE curriculum. In Year 3 children are prepared for both the Sacrament of Reconciliation and for the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. Children in Year 6 are prepared to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Although the children are prepared in Year 3 and Year 6 for the Sacraments, we build on the knowledge and understanding gained in the earlier years as well as the child's faith from home.

The Parish of St George and St Teresa and St George and St Teresa Primary School enjoy a close working partnership which ensures children are able to grow steadily in their faith.

It is key that there is a family commitment to this programme and regularly attending Sunday Mass will be an important part of the child's journey. Preparation for these Sacraments will be a special time in their spiritual development.

Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist

Children will make their first confession and receive their First Holy Communion in St George and St Teresa Church.

The children will have learnt that Catholics believe that the Holy Eucharist is Christ's Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, truly present in the Blessed Sacrament (the consecrated host and wine). It is the source and summit of our Faith; there is no more precious gift than to receive Jesus himself in the Holy Eucharist.

Children receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion in Year Three. Most of the preparation takes part in the School, using a number of resources, particularly the Curriculum Strategy. Parental involvement is of great importance. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is received by baptised Catholic children during Year 3. The children are involved in the presentation service in February. This takes place in a weekend Mass at the Church and involves both parents and children. It is really a service of commitment. This is a special occasion where children are presented to the priest by a parent, who requests the Sacrament for their child.

The teaching of the programme centres around 'Our Church'. Examining celebrations and initiations, the children explore membership into the family of God. The children examine their own relationships and as they prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, learn the significance of forgiveness. The preparation takes place during Religious Education lessons and is supported at home. There are also meetings between school, parents and the parish priest. As part of the preparation, there is a special Enrolment Mass, which pupils and parents are expected to attend, alongside regular attendance at weekend Mass. At their Enrolment Mass, pupils and parents make promises which reflect their sincere commitment and dedication to the Sacramental programme.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is celebrated for the first time in February/March prior to the First Holy Communion.

The children are encouraged to explore why we as Catholics come together to celebrate Mass. Here the importance of the Eucharist is made evident to the children whilst they learn many of the key responses throughout the Mass. The children discover the joy of following Jesus and doing his work.

An important part of the preparation lies in the children's involvement in worship and prayer. A display of photographs is put up in the Church so that the parishioners may pray for the First Communicants.

The First Holy Communion usually takes place at St George and St Teresa Church in June. Following this, family Masses are celebrated in both parishes and the children are involved in the Parish Procession of the Blessed Sacrament.

Year 6 Confirmation programme

Confirmation is a Catholic Sacrament of mature Christian commitment and a deepening of baptismal gifts. It is one of the three Sacraments of Initiation for Catholics. It is most often associated with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The Sacrament of Confirmation confers special graces of the Holy Spirit upon the person being confirmed, just as such graces were granted to the Apostles on Pentecost. Like Baptism, therefore, it can only be performed once, and Confirmation increases and deepens all of the graces granted at Baptism.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church lists five effects of Confirmation:

- It roots us more deeply in the divine filiation [as sons of God] which makes us cry, "Abba! Father!";
- It unites us more firmly to Christ;
- It increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us;
- It renders our bond with the Church more perfect;
- It gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the cross.

In Year 6, the children are prepared for the Sacrament of Confirmation. The children are prepared, following a school based programme and have weekly lessons. The Curriculum Strategy 'Learning and Growing as the People of God' and 'Gifted in the Spirit' are used as the main focus for preparation. The reception of the Sacrament takes place within the Mass, which is celebrated at St George and St Teresa Church. Either the Archbishop, Auxiliary Bishop or Episcopal Vicar will administer the Sacrament.

As part of their work, children prepare a project on the saint of their choice. They are encouraged to select the name of a saint who has inspired them in some way. A sponsor is also chosen and has the role of supporting the child in their spiritual life.

Parents' evenings are held which provide opportunities for parents to reflect on their own Confirmation, its effect on their lives and their children's Confirmation.

The preparation takes place during Religious Education lessons and is supported at home. There are also meetings between school, parents and the parish priest. As part of the preparation, there is a special Enrolment Mass, which pupils and parents are expected to attend, alongside regular attendance at weekend Mass. At their Enrolment Mass, pupils and parents make promises which reflect their sincere commitment and dedication to the Sacramental programme.

A display of photographs and prayers is put up in the Church so that the Parishioners may pray for the Confirmandi.

As part of the preparation for Confirmation, the children have the opportunity of going to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Monsignor McHugh, with support, hears

Confessions and the children are taken to Church for practices for the Rite of Confirmation so that they feel confident, participating fully without anxiety.

The Mass is prepared so that the children can take a full part as readers, of the liturgy and presenting the prayers of the faithful and preparing and bringing the offerings as well as being conferred with the Sacrament. There is a social gathering in the Parish hall after the Mass to meet the celebrant of the Sacrament.

Following Confirmation, the Confirmandi celebrate a Mass. This is a Mass of the Holy Spirit and the liturgy is prepared by the class teacher and the Confirmandi.

During the term, as a practical act of Lenten charity, the children work together to organise a charity event for the less fortunate of the world. They are also involved in a residential retreat in the Summer Term after their Confirmation.