

Parishes of Greystones & Kilquade

The Sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Communion

Pastoral Area Policy

Version 5.0

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First Reconciliation and First Communion

Introduction

The occasion of a child's First Holy Communion is a wonderful opportunity for parents and guardians of children to deepen and reinvigorate their own faith. It can also be a graced moment of renewal for the broader parish community.

Dublin Diocese introduced a policy designed to ensure that our celebrations of First Holy Communion are faith-filled celebrations for the child, the family and the wider community. This policy is designed to support parents and guardians as they try to live out the solemn promises they made at their child's baptism.

We, in the pastoral area of Greystones and Kilquade, are aware of many of the challenges facing these parents, guardians and families at the different stages of a child's development. We see moments of engagement with the sacraments as a means of touching into the faith elements in this development and therefore we offer programmes of preparation for such sacramental engagements.

While an amount of the preparation work with your child is carried out through the school the home remains the primary place of nurture for Faith development. In the parish we recognise the role we have in supporting you especially at these times of preparation for the Sacraments. We put in place a preparation programme for parents as a means of achieving this.

The intent is not just to prepare the children for First Reconciliation and First Communion but to engage with parents in exploring and articulating their own faith and in being confident enough to become involved in their child's faith formation, both in the year of preparation and in the years beyond that. It is a time for us to consider how we are part of the community that gathers at the weekend to celebrate our relationship with God. It is a time to develop further our own participation within that worshipping community, in the year of preparation and beyond that.

Only children of families whose parents have registered for and take part in the preparation programme will be enabled to receive these Sacraments.

This policy document is written to help you, the parent or guardian of a child presenting for the sacrament of First Reconciliation and First Communion, to detail the steps involved and the supports on offer for preparation and participation in these sacraments.

Registration

All children, regardless of which school they attend, who are intending to receive the sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Communion in the parish, should be registered with the parish by the end of the September previous to the First Communion. Typically this is the September the child enters 2nd class in primary school. It is not compulsory to receive these Sacraments at any specific stage and, indeed, some parents do wait until the child is older before bringing them forward for these sacraments. We encourage you to take time to think about whether you wish to go ahead or not.

The registration form can be filled in on-line, on the parish website, or a copy can be obtained from either of the parish offices.

Baptism

First Communion is the next step, after Baptism, for the full initiation¹ of children into the Roman Catholic Church. The sacrament of First Communion is available to children baptised in the Roman Catholic Rite. Evidence of Baptism is required as part of the registration process in order to include the family in the preparation programme for First Communion in the following year.

For any child baptised within the parishes of Greystones or Kilquade, the date of baptism and the name of the church in which they were baptised will be required, for those baptised outside of these parishes, a copy of the baptism certificate from the appropriate parish will be required.

Enrolment with Community

During the month of November an enrolment ceremony for the child, their family and the community takes place within the Mass on one weekend. The intention is to introduce the children and families who have registered for the sacraments to the wider community.

The parent(s) and child will be invited to hand in the enrolment certificate within the Mass. In completing the enrolment certificate the parent(s) or guardian(s) commit to

- building up and strengthening the Faith of the child in whatever way they can.

¹ The Sacraments of Initiation into the Roman Catholic Church are Baptism, Communion and Confirmation.

- co-operate joyfully with the school and parish in preparing for the sacraments.
- journey through the preparation together in order to come to a fuller understanding of God's blessings on them and God's support in their efforts to hand on the Faith to their children.

(A copy of the certificate will be made available at the information meeting, on the parish website or through the parish office).

Meetings

We endeavour to keep the number of meetings to a minimum and to provide as much information and support within each meeting as possible.

In October there will be an information meeting for all parents and guardians to help clarify the key role they play in preparing their child for these sacraments and to explain how the community as a whole is engaged within the process.

In late January or early February there is an information meeting, again for all parents and guardians, with respect to the sacrament of Reconciliation in order to help them to work with their child towards this sacrament.

At different times in the year, we offer a programme, open to all parents and guardians, over a number of evenings to engage with them in exploring and articulating their own faith. We see this as a means of building adults own confidence in their faith so as to enable them to become more fully involved in their child's faith formation both in the year of sacramental preparation and beyond that.

Catechesis

The religious education programme in Catholic schools is designed to support parents and guardians in helping their child to develop as Christians in line with the moral, religious and spiritual traditions of the Catholic Church. In situations where parents or guardians send their children to schools other than Catholic schools, they need to take responsibility for organising an ongoing catechetical programme for their children.

Children attending Church of Ireland schools:

The Church of Ireland schools follow a Christian based RE programme. The parish organises a program of catechesis, during the school year leading up to First Communion, for children who attend any of the Church

of Ireland schools and who have registered for the sacraments. It is designed to build on the education the children receive and help them to come to an understanding of the specifics of Reconciliation and Eucharist in a Catholic tradition. This takes place in a room in Kilian House Family Centre, Greystones on a Tuesday afternoon each week during the school year. The fee for this is determined each year based on the cost of the programme and the number of children taking part. It is payable directly to the catechist. An attendance record is maintained by the catechist. Attendance at these classes is expected as part of the preparation of the child for the Sacraments.

Children attending Educate Together schools:

Parents in Greystones Educate Together School organise catechesis classes during the school year for each of the school class groups from first to sixth class. A minimum of two years of preparation is needed in order to prepare the child appropriately to receive any of the sacraments. An attendance record is maintained by the catechist. Attendance at these classes is expected as part of the preparation of the child for the Sacraments.

Families living outside of Ireland

Where a family from the parish is living outside of Ireland when the child is at an age to receive their First Communion, the family can register their child as normal. They can take part, remotely, within the preparation programme by contacting the parish office where arrangements will be made to keep them in touch with the programme. The child can receive their First Communion along with the children in one of the schools or within the Sunday Mass at a date agreed with the family. A letter from a priest in the parish in which the family live will be required indicating the following:

- That he knows of the family and that they participate in church there.
- That he will support the family in their preparation for the Sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Communion.

Participation

We, as a parish, are acutely aware of the riches available through full participation by all peoples in the sacraments. We extend a warm welcome to all and encourage active participation within all elements of the preparation programme.

Masses

The Sunday Mass is the place where the parish community come to gather in community in order to celebrate their common understanding of what it is to be Christian, to share in Eucharist together.

We invite all families, especially during this preparation year, to Come, Gather and Celebrate as often as they can at our weekend Masses. We have a number of Masses in different styles in the various churches within our pastoral area.

Over the year we will provide resources at different times to help the entire family to prepare in advance and to engage more fully with the weekend Mass. We will, at specific times, have Masses aimed specially at the preparation. Families will be notified by eMail and Text well in advance of these.

Through the Mass we focus on different aspects of the faith journey that the families are engaged in in preparing for the sacraments. We afford opportunities to assist in the planning and preparation of the different Masses of the programme. We invite as many families as possible to engage within this as it is through such participation that all grow in understanding of the significance of what it is we are undertaking.

Resource Sheets

In each church in the pastoral area, we will have a dedicated space for resources for the support of families. These include

- A child oriented work sheet, LOOK, which will focus on the Gospel of that Sunday.
- The Bridge Bulletin, a monthly resource sheet, which offer:
 - An explanation of a part of the Mass with activities for children.
 - An overview of the month's theme for parents.
 - Things to do during the month at home, in parish and in school.
 - An activity for children that brings an aspect of faith into focus.
- Other resource sheets at specific times of the year.
- Notices relating to upcoming events pertinent to the preparation for these Sacraments.

We encourage all parents and guardians to use these resources as a way of exploring within the family what is taking place as part of the preparation for the sacraments.

Candle and Prayer Space

Each child will receive a blessed candle at the enrolment Mass. We encourage use of this candle at home, under adult supervision, as part of a prayer routine during the year. Simple guidelines for creating a prayer space and praying with children will be given at the information meeting. Additional resources for prayer are available on the parish website.

Reconciliation Service

As a parish community, trusting in a loving and forgiving God, we invite all families to take part in the communal sacrament of Reconciliation that takes place before Easter. Taking part helps to reaffirm the pattern of participation for the young person, enables them to see the Sacrament as a community activity and allows the family to avail of this Sacrament as part of their final preparation for Communion.

School Visits

The priests and pastoral worker will visit the children in their classrooms regularly and especially in advance of each of the programme Masses so as to help them to see the significance of the journey they are undertaking over the school year.

Child Safeguarding

All peoples working with children in the parish have been taken through the safeguarding process in line with the diocesan safeguarding policy which is available on the parish website.

Conclusion

Finally, the time of preparation for sacraments is an opportunity for all to be renewed and nourished in their own faith journey. The priests of the parish, the parish pastoral worker, the secretaries, the pastoral council and members of the various ministries in the parish are committed to supporting all peoples on this journey.

Support is available to all those who are preparing for the reception of sacraments and to their families, it is there for the asking.

References

Dublin diocesan policies	First Communion and First Reconciliation Published: September 2012
	Provision of Religious Education for Catholic Pupils attending schools other than Catholic schools. Published: June 2008
Child Safeguarding	Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland (2008)
Catechesis guidelines	Share The Good News Published: 2010

Version control

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Version	Item changed
1.1	Change to classes covered by Greystones Educate Together catechist.
1.2	Inclusion of footnote relating to children baptised into a Christian community other than Roman Catholic
1.3	Added section for families of the parish living outside of Ireland
2	Inclusion of Table of Contents
3	Changes to reflect steps towards Family Catechesis as opposed to preparation of the child.
4	Removed reference to process for non Catholic baptised children to apply to parish.
4.1	Checked for consistency of terminology and some minor changes made as a result.
5	Changes to reflect emphasis on participation in Sacraments being an engagement within the worshipping community and not an 'standalone' occasion.