

Dear Father, Headteacher, Catechist,

Preparation for First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion 2020-2021

It is something of an understatement that this coming year's Sacramental Programme presents some new challenges. At this stage we do not know when parish meetings will be able to take place. Nor do we know when we will be able to welcome larger congregations in our churches. Neither of the two, however, seem imminent.

However, there are some steps that we can take now to start this stage of the journey of families towards the First Communion of their children.

This coming year our starting point has to be enabling parents who are 'active participants in catechesis', to overcome the mentality of delegation that is so common, according to which the faith is set aside for specialists in religious education.'

The new Directory for Catechesis, from which all quotations are drawn, also speaks of valuing the role of grandparents as catechists.

Our schools will continue to support children's parents as 'first educators', but they will also fulfil a vital role in educating the children about these sacraments through Curriculum RE and collective worship.

RESOURCES

Some of these are available online. All are suitable for our First Communion candidates to work through with the support of their parents:

The Liverpool scheme 'With You Always'. These materials are already being used in a number of our parishes, including my own in Heywood. They are designed for parents and children to work together on during a session in the parish hall. However they are suitable for home-based catechesis. The one exception is the first session which focuses on the children completing their worksheet as they explore the church. One way of delivering this might be to record a walk-round church video which families can watch at home. The materials are not available online and would have to be distributed to families via post or the school. <http://www.withyoualways.org.uk/>

Online and free is **Blessed**, a programme for First Reconciliation and one for First Eucharist, from the United States. You can get a flavour of it here: <https://dynamiccatholic.com/blessed/program-view> I think this is a programme that is worth considering.

The long-standing **Salford materials**, formerly published by Gemini, are available on the diocesan website. The link is: <https://www.dioceseofsalford.org.uk/faith/sacraments/first-communication/>

The Pastoral Center, in the USA (as the spelling suggests), has a good program for both sacraments, available on a license which is \$3.68 per child. The link is <https://pastoral.center/reconciliation>

Diocese of Leeds ‘Heart Speaks to Heart – The Gift of Reconciliation & Holy Communion’

Online resources for home learning are available for free from here

<https://www.dioceseofleeds.org.uk/education/first-sacraments/>. Please contact the Department for Formation for the password to access these resources or to purchase printed copies of the resource.

There are other resources available but these are a good starting point in these challenging times.

Praying together as a Family

We will make available, from next month, monthly prayer rituals for families. The first three will be:

Bearing the Light: a ritual of parents handing to the child their baptismal candle (safely) and starting on this stage of their journey as a family

Sharing the Story: a ritual for receiving the Gospel (Mark’s) and reading it as a family

Waiting for Jesus: prayers around the crib as we wait for the Lord’s coming at First Holy Communion

Engaging parents

Examples of good, imaginative and safe practise are already emerging.

Obviously our schools, once again, play a pivotal role in contacting parents of children in Year 3 and inviting them to contact the parish. (Please note that parents should only be invited to contact the parish on an official diocesan email address i.e. not a catechist’s or priest’s or parish secretary’s private email).

The Diocesan website has a good range of short video talks for parents, and for catechists, as well as presentations on the Mass and other resources. Experience has shown that taking the links for particular videos from the website and posting them on parish websites, school websites, parish and school social media platforms significantly increases the numbers engaging with them.

These are available here <https://www.dioceseofsalford.org.uk/faith/sacraments/parents-videos/> and <https://www.dioceseofsalford.org.uk/faith/sacraments/catechist-videos/>

It would be helpful if schools could send a link a month to families.

One parish has allocated to each catechist a small number of families with whom the catechist has been keeping in touch via the telephone. Once smaller parish gatherings are allowed (and we don’t know at the moment when that will be) each catechist can gather their families for a catch-up.

Some parishes have become confident in arranging parent meetings via zoom. (Please note children’s sessions should not take place via zoom or any other platform). Further guidance/training is available from the Department for Formation.

My apologies for the length of this letter but I hope it demonstrates that, after the experience of lockdown, we can begin this year’s sacramental preparation for our First Communion families, albeit in a somewhat different way. There will be difficulties but I am confident there will be blessings too.

DIOCESE OF SALFORD

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Finally I would like to invite you to a gathering with David Wells and colleagues, via zoom, for First Communion catechists, priests, Year 3 staff/RE coordinators on Wednesday 14th October, 7pm until 8.30pm, to explore these opportunities in greater detail. To indicate your wish to take part, please email formation@dioceseofsalford.org.uk and we will send you a link the day before the meeting.

With appreciation for all that you do to hand on the Faith,

Yours sincerely

Rev. Paul J. Daly
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