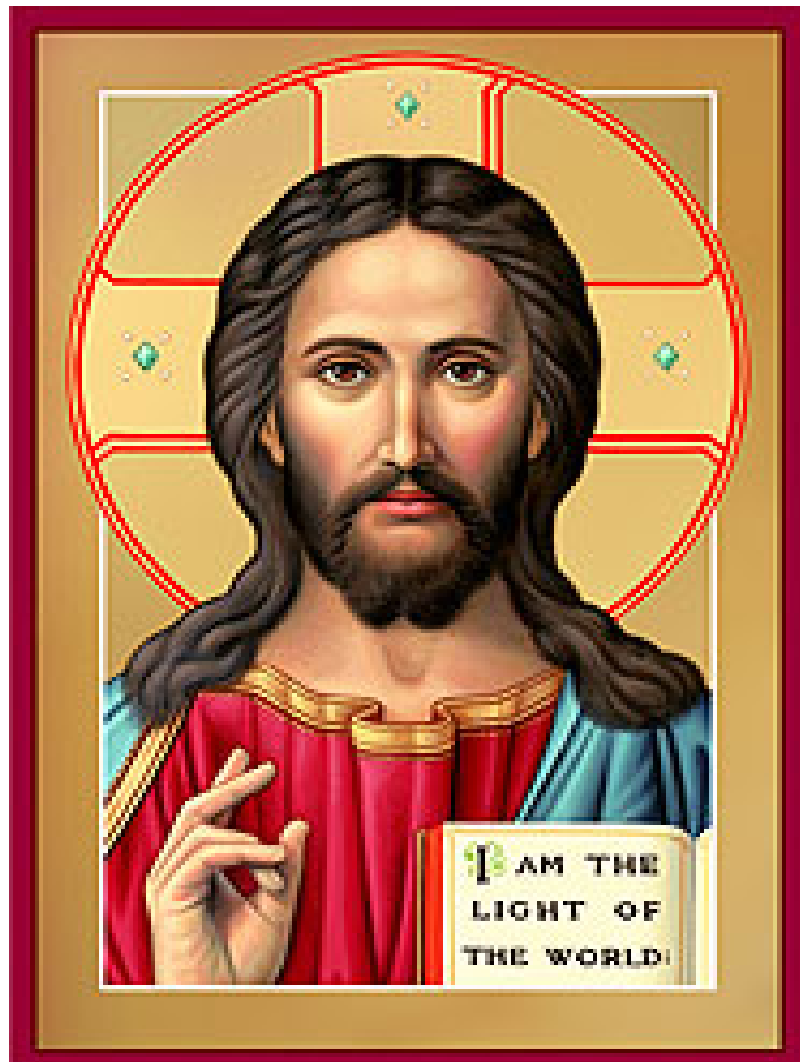
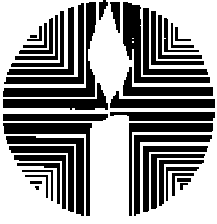


ARCHDIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK



Becoming More Like Christ

**Guidelines for the Sacraments of
Baptism, Reconciliation, Holy Communion
and Confirmation**



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Christian Education Centre wishes to acknowledge the important contribution of the many people who helped shape this document with their comments and suggestions. This document builds on previous Diocesan Guidelines for the sacraments issued in 1989, 1990, 1991 and 2001.

These Diocesan Guidelines are written:

- As a Pastoral Handbook for parish preparation for the sacraments with reference material for priests, deacons, catechists and parish teams
 -
 - As a resource for discussion, formation, reflection and implementation of parish programmes
 -
 - As support and with ideas for ongoing formation and parish life
 -
 - As an affirmation of existing parish practice
 -
 - As guidelines and resource material for teachers, Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCOs), RE Co-ordinators and Chaplains
 -
 - As a support and affirmation of the vital role of parents
 -
 - As a link with home, school and parish

Please feel free to photocopy from this document.

BECOMING MORE LIKE CHRIST

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ABBREVIATIONS

CIC	The Code of Canon Law
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CCCC	Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church
GDC	General Directory for Catechesis
CT	Catechesi Tradendae
CL	Christifideles Laici
EN	Evangelii Nuntiandi

Message from the Archbishop



April 2009

My dear people,

The celebration of the sacraments and preparation for them lie at the very heart of the life of the Church. As Archbishop, I am extremely grateful to all those who give their time, energy and talents to preparing and supporting people as they prepare to receive the sacraments of the Church. I think of parents, guardians, family and friends, catechists, teachers, God-parents and sponsors, priests, bishops deacons and religious.

The Church is sacramental by its very nature and it is in the worthy and joyful celebration of the sacraments that the Church is most fully itself and is indeed “a sign and instrument.... of communion with God and of unity among all people” (*Lumen Gentium*, 1).

I thank all those who have been involved in the preparation of this book, and I do hope and pray that it will be an encouragement, an inspiration and a resource for the whole Diocese.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads '+ Kevin'.

+ Kevin McDonald
Archbishop of Southwark

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

**Canon Michael Cooley,
Southwark Canon Theologian, Parish Priest,
Member of Diocesan Liturgy Commission**

Alive with God's Life

Jesus said: *I have come that they may have life and have it to the full (Jn 10:10)*. We tend quite naturally to focus most of our attention on our natural physical life – our food and drink, our work and our leisure, our thoughts and feelings for others. Jesus, on the other hand, tried to make us aware that there is a much deeper and lasting and more important dimension to our lives. *Surely life means more than food, and the body more than clothing! (Mt 6:26)* That is why He invites us to *Repent!* – to open our eyes, to take another look, to think again – the real meaning of *metanoia*. He tried to help us see that we are sons and daughters of our Father in heaven; that His Spirit has been given to us to make us a “new creation”; that *The Kingdom of God is very near to us (Mk 1:5)*. He used images of growth – seeds and yeast, vineyards and harvests – to help us become more aware of the mystery and power of our life on earth and how it develops.

Here is a thought from Saint Basil:

***Love towards God cannot be taught.
For neither have we learned from another
to rejoice in the light and to cling to life,
nor did anyone else teach us to love our parents
or those who brought us up.
In the same way, or much more so,
the learning of the divine love does not come from outside;
but when the creature was made
a certain Word was disseminated among us,
having within itself the tendency
towards the love of God.***

In one of the prayers when Communion is taken to the sick and housebound we are encouraged to say: *Through your Spirit may your life grow strong within us*. That is something wonderful to reflect on.

I Thank You for the Wonder of my Being

*It was you who created my inmost self,
and put me together in my mother's womb;
for all these mysteries I thank you:
for the wonder of myself, for the wonder of your works.*
Psalm 139

It is well worthwhile reading and reflecting on the whole of Psalm 139. The psalmist can teach us much about an attitude of prayer. Wonder and awe are said to be the beginning of any true knowledge and science. Jesus prefaced his most important actions with prayers of thanksgiving and praise. And so we are encouraged to adopt a similar frame of mind when we begin to think of God's life deep within ourselves and in others. We will then be helped to appreciate that it is hidden, mysterious and powerful. We might discover that it is like a delicate plant, to be tended lovingly, and full of delightful surprises. Our word *Sacrament* derives from the Latin word Saint Jerome chose to render Saint Paul's Greek word for *the Mysteries of God, kept hidden for ages, but now made known to us through Christ Jesus (Eph 3:9)*. Without such an attitude our approach to the Sacraments is in danger of being superficial, mechanical, ritualistic, lacking life and depth.

Moments of Focus

Gradually over the centuries within the Catholic Church certain **outward signs of God's inner hidden life in us** have evolved. They take the form of ritual actions and words which indicate depths that are mysterious and beyond words. They are there to help us focus our minds at special significant moments in the growth of God's love within us. There is always much more to them than meets the eye. Those who understand can see a deeper reality beyond the photographs.

There are three **Sacraments of Initiation** which help to answer the question: What is this hidden life of God within us? How can we imagine it?

First, the **Waters of New Birth**: the River Jordan, not a bowl to wash in; launched into the powerful river of life, unavoidable, frightening, challenging – but with utter trust in the Father who gives life, the Son who showed us the way, and the Spirit who dwells in our hearts.

Then **Dedication**: chosen and anointed – filled with the Spirit – led by the Spirit – sent on a mission – a unique mission revealed by our unique God-given talents and opportunities – called to become in real and actual fact “more like Christ”.

Finally **Nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ** - His life, His word, His sacrifice; our gifts transformed – our lives transformed – to become the Real Presence of Christ for the salvation of the world.

It is very helpful and important to bear in mind, although it is difficult since we are used to young people celebrating these three sacraments separately at different stages of their development, that they are inextricably united, as is seen in the Rites of the Christian Initiation of Adults and in the practice of the Orthodox Christian Churches. They celebrate in practical ways what it means to be a Christian.

Then there are two **Sacraments of Healing** because the way to become more like Christ is naturally rocky, winding, tortuous – the natural signs of growth and growing pains.

After all, the Christian is learning to love, learning to be like Christ, assessing the situation, invited to repentance in the sense of seeing the wider view, **being reconciled to God's way of thinking**, knowing that we are not yet perfect, knowing the truth and therefore knowing forgiveness.

All life and health are gifts of God and we need to be **reconciled to the reality of God's life in us**, especially at times of physical and spiritual weakness. This is the realm of Christian faith: *May the Lord who frees you from sin, save you and raise you up.*

And there are two **Sacraments of Commitment** - signs of the reality of God's presence and God's activity in our human lives. Leadership and service are common in all societies but in the light of Christ they can give us a glimpse into a deeper reality: not just life as the human eye can see but a revelation of God's life – that fullness of life which Christ came to bring.

The Catholic Priesthood helps us focus our attention on the reality of Christ's life in all the baptized – a life of service, dedication, prayer, offering, listening to God, sent on a mission: Christ's active presence in the world, an outward sign of something much more profound: God's love for us and for our salvation.

Christian Marriage is a visible sign of God's love, self-giving, creative, the effort to learn at the school of love, the long and ever-opening curriculum of love and dedication to the welfare of others.

To have and to hold from this day forward.

Wherever there is love and loving-kindness, that is where God is.

Keeping the Vision

The life of God in us is our deepest reality. It is ongoing and sustaining. It is hidden, as the seed in the earth or the developing child in the womb. It is mainly beyond our perception and grasp. But we do have the Sacraments to help us focus our attention at special times and remember and stand in awe and give thanks and praise for what is happening. We have a chance to stop and celebrate that hidden life of God which is going on all the time. The sacraments are not an end in themselves – they are an outward sign of that hidden, mysterious, freely-given life. As with everything else in the church – parishes, buildings, books and bishops – they are there to help us appreciate and nourish God's life in ourselves and in each other.

Canon Michael Cooley

INTRODUCTION - The Sacraments

The sacraments, instituted by Christ
and entrusted to the Church,
are efficacious signs of grace
perceptible to the senses.
Through them divine life is bestowed upon us.
CCCC 224

1. These guidelines are offered to assist all those who are involved in preparing people of all abilities for the sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, Communion and Confirmation. While providing a framework which indicates the principles, attitudes and approaches that are suggested by good practice, we hope that these guidelines are flexible enough to suit the varying situations, needs and resources of parishes and deaneries
2. The aim of this document is to give some indication of the scriptural and doctrinal essentials which are elements that should form part of the catechesis for the sacraments and to link these to both the liturgical celebration and the living out of the sacraments in daily life. The sacraments are sacraments of faith; therefore we have an obligation to educate people *to* and *in* faith, and not necessarily simply to presume faith in those being prepared for sacraments.
3. Faith formation and preparation for sacraments takes place in various settings, principally the home, the parish, the Catholic school (where there is one) and in the wider Christian community.
4. Preparation for sacraments is an opportunity not only for evangelisation and catechesis for children and young people, but for their parents too and indeed for all members of the Christian community. Parents need to be affirmed and supported in their role as the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith.

Ideally we are in the process of maturing existing faith, but we
“must allow for the fact that the initial evangelisation has often
not taken place.”
CT 19

**All the baptised are called by God
to mature faith and have the right
to sufficient catechesis.**

GDC 167

5. The Code of Canon Law itself does not lay down any set programmes or courses for catechesis, recognising that families and parishes vary, as do the resources available to them. However, it establishes an important principle that parishes should provide an **adequate catechesis** for the sacraments and that those seeking to receive sacraments should be **suitably disposed**.

CIC 843

6. The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us of the four pillars of our faith; namely that it is something which is **believed, celebrated, lived and prayed**. These pillars stand together, supporting and complementing each other.

CCC 13

7. We have the rich resources of scripture, doctrine, liturgy and life experience as expressions of the four pillars on which our faith is built.

8. Recognising that we are all on a journey of faith, our task is to respect the different stages where people are and to help them as they take the next steps on their faith journey. In this way we are hopefully providing 'helpful courses' rather than 'obstacle courses' for people.

9. Catechesis needs to be **adapted** to the age, ability, language, culture and condition of the people to whom it is addressed.

GDC 170

10. Support with adapting catechesis in this way, particularly for people with disabilities, is available from the Advisers on the Disability Project Team at the Christian Education Centre. Copies of ***Guidelines for Sharing the Sacraments with a Person who has a Disability*** as well as ***Adapted Sacramental Programmes*** are available from the Centre.

"Adaptation is realized in accordance with the diverse circumstances in which the word of God is transmitted. These are determined by "differences of culture, age, spiritual maturity and social and ecclesial conditions amongst all of those to whom it is addressed."

GDC 170, CCC 24

**'The definitive aim of catechesis is
to put people not only in touch,
but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ.'**
CT 5, GDC 80

11. Many will be familiar with the Penny Catechism definition of a sacrament that: "A sacrament is an outward sign of inward grace, ordained by Jesus Christ, by which grace is given to our souls." In the gift of grace we encounter God's love freely offered to us.

12. A sacrament is indeed a sacred sign by which we worship God, his love is revealed to us and his saving work accomplished in us. In the sacraments God shows us what He does and does what He shows us.

13. A sacrament always celebrates the presence of Christ our Risen Lord - with us and for us. In the sacraments of the Church we are offered a personal encounter with Christ himself. Through the sacraments we are put not only in mind of Christ but in living touch with Christ, indeed in intimacy with Christ and formed as his disciples.

14. The sacraments are always God's loving initiative and God's gift to us. They invite our free and loving response. They are gifts to celebrate, to be unwrapped, and to be lived out. Sacraments reveal but they also conceal. Human words, even human signs, can never exhaust the mystery of God. There is always more than meets the eye, always more for us to discover.

15. There are seven sacraments which strengthen and sustain us on our lifelong journey of faith. The Catechism of the Catholic Church groups them as the three **Sacraments of Initiation** (Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion), two **Sacraments of Healing** (Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick) and two **Sacraments at the Service of the Community** (Holy Orders and Matrimony).

RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

16. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (**RCIA**) is the normative way for **adults** to be welcomed into the Catholic Church through Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Communion. It has also been adapted to welcome those already baptised as Christians into the **full communion** of the Catholic Church.

17. Becoming and being a Christian is a journey that takes place within the pilgrim community of the faithful. Indeed, this process of welcome, evangelisation and catechesis, is sometimes usefully called 'Journey in Faith' rather than RCIA.

18. The Rite of Christian Initiation reminds us that faith is a journey which takes place in four distinct stages marked by liturgical rites and celebrations along the way. The four stages in this process are known as:

- 1) Pre-Catechumenate *(which is seeking God's will)*
- 2) Catechumenate *(hearing God's word)*
- 3) Purification and Enlightenment *(pondering God's word)*
- 4) Mystagogia *(doing God's will)*

19. The baptismal catechumenate is "the inspiration for catechesis in the Church" and "the model of its catechising activity" (*EN44, GDC 90*) For some people (e.g. adults) the catechising happens before the baptism and for others (e.g. children) after the baptism. In all cases catechesis is a gradual activity, since "good catechesis is always done in steps" (*RCIA 19*)

20. The model for adults can be used and adapted for all ages and abilities. So even where children and young people receive the three sacraments of initiation of Baptism, Confirmation and Communion separately (or in a different order) it is important that these three sacraments of initiation are seen to be linked and interrelated.

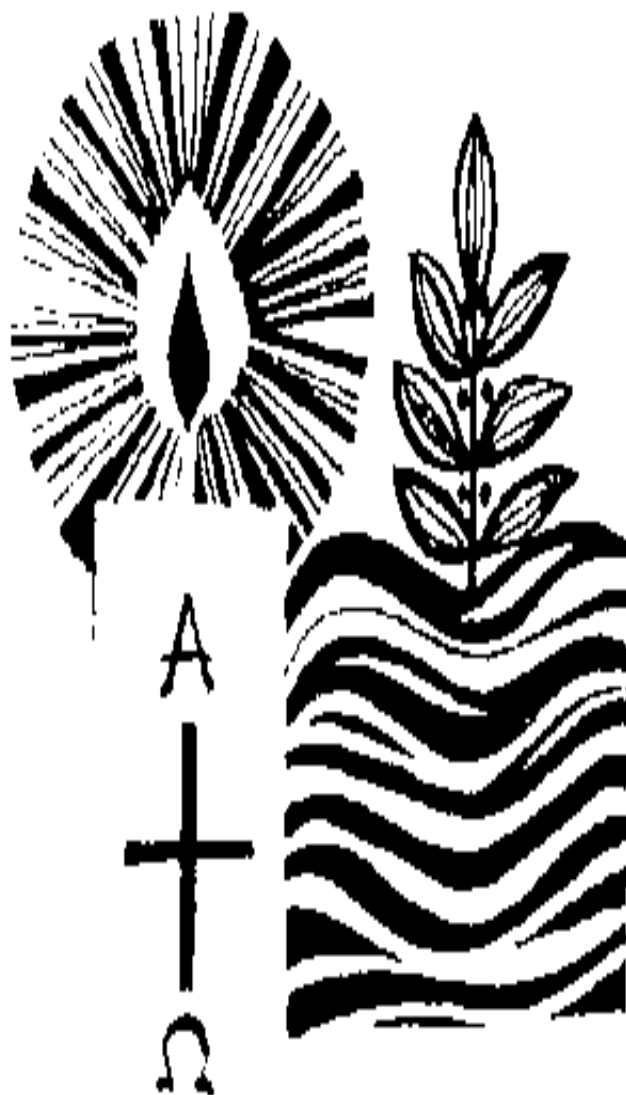
- The Southwark Diocesan guidelines for implementing the RCIA are available from the Christian Education Centre in the booklet entitled: ***'RCIA IN PRACTICE: implementing the Rite'*** (2000).

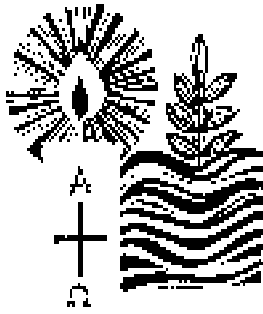
Christian initiation is accomplished by means of the sacraments which establish the foundations of Christian life. The faithful born anew in Baptism are strengthened by Confirmation and are then nourished by the Eucharist.

CCCC 251



BAPTISM





BAPTISM of Infants and Children

“As soon as Jesus was baptised he came up from the water, and suddenly the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. And a voice spoke from heaven, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on him.’ ”

Mt 3:16-17

THE GIFT OF BAPTISM

21. The importance of Baptism should be clearly understood according to the Church’s teaching:

“Baptism, the gateway to the sacraments, is necessary for salvation, either by actual reception or at least by desire. By it people are freed from sins, are born again as children of God and, made like to Christ by an indelible character, are incorporated into the Church. It is validly conferred only by washing in real water with the proper form of words.”

CIC 849

PRINCIPLES OF BAPTISM

22. From earliest times, the Church has practised the baptism of all those in a household, including infants. The Code of Canon Law (*CIC 867*) encourages parents to take care that their children are baptised as soon as possible, preferably in the first weeks after birth.

23. For an infant to be baptised the Catholic Church requires there to be a well founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic faith. This must always be judged with pastoral sensitivity. If such a hope is truly lacking the baptism is to be deferred.

CIC 868

24. Any decision to defer should always be one of pastoral delay rather than refusal, and the purpose of the deferral is to help the parents to become more prepared to fulfil the promises they will make.

25. It is also good to affirm the positive role that non-catholic parents can and do play in supporting the baptism and Catholic upbringing of their child.

“Baptism creates a sacramental bond of unity linking all who have been reborn by means of it. But Baptism, of itself is only a beginning, a point of departure, for it is wholly directed towards the fullness of life in Christ.”

John Paul II, May 1982 (cf UR, n22)

BAPTISM - PREPARATION



26. The Code of Canon Law presumes and requires preparation for baptism but does not lay down any specific courses or programmes. Baptism preparation should be presented as a positive opportunity for all concerned and approached with pastoral sensitivity and love.

“The Celebration of Baptism should be properly prepared. Accordingly the parents of a child who is to be baptised and those who are to undertake the office of sponsors, are to be suitably instructed on the meaning of this sacrament and the obligations attaching to it. The parish priest is to see to it that either he or others duly prepare the parents, by means of pastoral advice and indeed by prayer together.” CIC 851, 2°

27. Parents who request baptism for their child will themselves be at different stages of faith. We need to meet people where they are while at the same time helping them to move on in their faith. Tensions can arise for clergy and catechists when parents are diffident or weak in the practice of their faith. At the same time this can be a valuable pastoral opportunity to fan into a flame any spark of faith that exists.

28. It may be helpful for the priest to ask for a copy of the Catholic parent’s baptismal certificate so as to be clear who is undertaking the responsibility for the Catholic upbringing of the child.

29. It is worth noting that when parents who are not parishioners ask for baptism for their child Canon 857, §2 says: “as a rule and unless a just reason suggests otherwise, an adult is to be baptised in his or her proper parish church, and an infant in the proper parish church of the parents.”

30. A team of parents and other suitable adults could be formed who will undertake the important ministry of preparation for baptism, along with the priest, deacon or religious. Parents, as part of a baptismal team, are a powerful witness and support to other parents during this time and can share their practical experiences of bringing up children in the Catholic faith.



BAPTISM - PREPARATION

31. This team might look at the present practice in relation to the preparation and celebration of baptism in their parish reflecting on the following two questions:

- What is it that you do well?
- What would you wish to develop?

32. Formation for Baptism Preparation teams can take place within the parish, or possibly between a cluster of parishes or in the deanery as a whole.

33. It is important to recognise and affirm parents in their role and assure them of the support of the whole parish community.

34. It is a good pastoral opportunity for the priest and/or deacon to meet the family (ideally in their own home) both to establish personal contact and to complete any necessary paperwork.

35. Couples or individuals who are expecting a baby should be encouraged to come forward for a blessing of the pregnancy. At this time they could also be enrolled for the parish's next baptism preparation programme.

36. Baptismal preparation is required for the baptism of the first child and then suggested as an opportunity of renewal before the baptism of subsequent children. Parents who have experienced the preparation course themselves could be invited to be part of the parish preparation team.

37. Parents who know they are carrying a child with a disability should be supported by the parish community and given reassurance that their child is a welcome child of God and of value to the community. The parish celebrates the birth of this child with the same joy and hope shared with all new parents.

Flowing from their rebirth in Christ, there is a genuine equality of dignity and action among all of Christ's faithful. Because of this equality they all contribute, each according to his or her own condition and office, to the building up of the Body of Christ.

CIC 208



BAPTISM - CELEBRATION

'That very day about three thousand were added to their number.'

Acts 2.41

38. The community aspect of baptism should be highlighted, especially as the Rite of Baptism itself says *"The Christian community welcomes you with great joy."*

39. Baptism should be celebrated during the Sunday Mass, at least occasionally. Parents could be made aware of this option during the preparation sessions, and told why it is encouraged. Well prepared, a Baptism during Mass adds to the richness of the liturgy without unduly lengthening the Mass itself. It also recalls the baptismal grace and responsibility of each member of the parish community.

40. Celebrating the baptism can itself be an eloquent homily, with the symbols of the Rite (e.g. sign of the cross, oil, water, white garment, light) speaking to people's minds and hearts.

41. Where baptism takes place outside of Mass, members of the parish might be invited to be present to join the family, participate in the liturgy, and represent the community the child is joining.

42. When a child has been baptised in an emergency a Liturgy of Welcome should follow later where the rest of the baptismal rites can be celebrated. An invitation could be extended to members of the community to be present to welcome the child and the family into the community of the Church.



43. The names of those to be baptised can be announced in the parish newsletter as well as included in the intercessions at Mass.

44. The role of a Godparent is to assist the parent(s) in the Catholic upbringing of their child. Godparents should be chosen carefully and their role clearly understood.

45. Godparents themselves must be confirmed and practising Catholics, usually aged 16 or above, and not a parent of the child. (CIC 874) Only one godparent (of either sex) is required. Other Christians may be invited to be a "witness" at a baptism and to be a "witness" of Christian living for the whole family.

**Baptism plants a seed which needs to be watered,
nurtured, and encouraged to grow.**

**The grace of God's love is celebrated at the font
but will be nourished in the community.**



BAPTISM - FOLLOW UP

The whole ecclesial community bears some responsibility for the development and safeguarding of the grace given at Baptism.

CCC 1255

46. Follow up is intended to support the parents in living out their faith in the home, in the parish and in the world.

47. Parishes which are welcoming and family-friendly will be attractive to parents and offer them a wider circle of support beyond their own immediate or extended family and friends.

We are faced with people who stand on our threshold requiring an honest loving response from us. What we do and say will either create a positive or negative response.

On the Threshold, 2000

48. Many young parents may appreciate the provision of parenting sessions which look at the joys and concerns of bringing up children in the world today. These can also provide an opportunity for relating faith to life and life to faith in a relaxed and informal atmosphere.

49. Anniversary cards, at least on the 1st Anniversary of the baptism, could be prepared by the parish and sent to families.

50. Families might be invited to an annual remembrance celebration of the baptism of their child until the child goes to school.

51. Post-baptism home visits by members of the parish, where possible, continues the pastoral connection and support of families.

52. Letting the parents know what is available in the parish community to support the faith formation of their children and indeed for them as adults, is necessary. For example: Mass times, Parish newsletter, Liturgy of the Word for Children, local Catholic schools, parent support groups, playgroups, scripture study, justice and peace activities, adult faith sharing, provision for children with special needs, etc.

53. Resources for Baptism preparation are available at the Christian Education Centre Bookshop.

“With Baptism we become children of God in his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Rising from the waters of the baptismal font, every Christian hears again the voice that was once heard on the banks of the Jordan River. “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.” Lk 3:22

Christifideles Laici, #11

RECONCILIATION





RECONCILIATION

“(Jesus said) Tell me. Suppose a man has a hundred sheep and one of them strays; will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go in search of the stray? I tell you solemnly, if he finds it, it gives him more joy than do the ninety-nine that did not stray at all. Similarly it is never the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.” Mt 18:12-14

THE GIFT OF RECONCILIATION

54. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a sacrament of healing. The new life of Christ given to us in the gift of baptism can be weakened and even lost through sin. Because of this Christ himself, our Good Shepherd, always looks for us when we wander away and brings us safely home. As with the loving father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, God our Father always welcomes back his prodigal sons and daughters with an embrace of love, placing the cloak of holiness around them, putting a ring on their finger and celebrating their return with joy.

PRINCIPLES FOR THE FIRST CELEBRATION OF RECONCILIATION

55. Christ wills that his Church should continue his work of healing and gives us the gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in which we celebrate the joy of being forgiven.

56. The Sacrament has many names which reveal its *various* aspects such as conversion, penance, confession, forgiveness and reconciliation.
CCC 1423-24

57. The Catechism speaks of Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick as the two Sacraments of Healing, so that when weakened through sin or suffering Christ draws close with his healing touch.

58. The Catechism entitles its section on this sacrament in terms of Penance and Reconciliation in order to highlight the gift of God in reconciling us to Himself and our loving response through conversion and penance. Accordingly, the word ‘reconciliation’ reminds us of the great gift of reconciliation/at-one-ment between God and all the world which Christ has achieved by his death and resurrection.

59. Calling the sacrament ‘Reconciliation’ also reminds us that sin and holiness, although always deeply personal, are never simply a private affair. Sin impairs our relationship with others as well as with God; forgiveness reconciles us to one another as well as to the Lord.



RECONCILIATION - PREPARATION

“If you are bringing your gift to the altar and there remember that you have something against your brother, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first and then come back and present your offering.”

Mt 5:23-25

60. The home is our first school in which, by being loved and forgiven, we in turn learn gradually how to love and forgive. There is no ‘perfect’ home. If there were, there would be no need for forgiveness! It is important to be pastorally sensitive to those who may have poor or bad experiences of childhood - while being positive about goodness wherever it is to be found.

61. The experiences of being loved, of having failed someone, of “saying sorry”, and of being forgiven (whether experienced in the home, the school or the parish) lay the foundation on which the Sacrament of Reconciliation builds.

62. It can be very powerful for children when an adult is prepared to say ‘sorry’ to them and teaches forgiveness by example as well as by word. More positive teaching and preaching is to be encouraged on reconciliation in general and on the sacrament in particular.

63. Catechesis for reconciliation should focus on God’s love and forgiveness inviting us to express sorrow for our sins, a resolve to try not to sin again and to offer forgiveness to those who have sinned against us.

64. Children should be prepared for the sacrament so that they understand both **what** is being celebrated and **why** it is being celebrated.

65. Sacraments are effective signs of Christ’s presence. For this reason careful attention should be paid to emphasising that the sacrament brings about both a reconciliation with God and with the Church.

“I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these, you did it to me.”

Mt 25:45

66. Although First Reconciliation both precedes and is linked to a child’s preparation for First Communion it is important that preparation for First Reconciliation should not lose its distinctive identity but clearly be recognised and celebrated as a sacrament in its own right.

67. It is customary, and good practice, for children to be prepared for their First Reconciliation around the age of 8 years old while recognising that it is the readiness of a child for such preparation rather than simply their age which needs to be considered.



RECONCILIATION - CELEBRATION

“God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen”

Prayer of Absolution from the Rite of Penance

RITE 1 & RITE 2

Many parishes find that celebrating **Rite 2** (Rite of Reconciliation with several penitents and individual confession) gives a positive and joyful experience of the sacrament for those celebrating their First Reconciliation. This Rite emphasises the communal nature of sin and reconciliation while at the same time recognising that every sacrament is a personal encounter with Christ.

Children should also be prepared to celebrate **Rite 1** (Rite of Reconciliation with individual penitents) since both Rite 1 and 2 are complementary, not competing, ways of celebrating the one sacrament.

68. Where Rite 1 is being used, parishes are encouraged to provide an inviting Reconciliation Room (which the children could see beforehand) with the choices for the penitent of either ‘face to face’ or anonymous confession being explained to them.

69. An atmosphere of welcome, an inviting ‘Reconciliation Room’ and a celebration afterwards are visible signs of God’s forgiving love and the joy of being forgiven.

70. The liturgy speaks to us on many levels, using signs and symbols as well as word, music, silence, imagery, lighting. Using these we can creatively invite people to prepare for the sacrament. For example, stones might represent our hardness of heart, candles the light of hope and joy of forgiveness, water as that which refreshes and cleanses, incense as a sign of mystery. Through these signs and symbols we can express our own prayer of confession, ‘that is our acknowledgment and praise of the holiness of God and of his mercy towards us.’

CCC 1424

In order to implement the Church’s provision for child protection during the celebration of Reconciliation, the Southwark Diocesan Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (2005) need to be followed.



RECONCILIATION - FOLLOW UP

71. Reconciliation Services should be encouraged regularly both in the parish and in school. On-going catechesis on reconciliation, adapted to particular life stages, is needed throughout our lives.

72. Services using Rite 2 could be encouraged both in the parish and in school, particularly during the seasons of Lent and Advent.

73. The Diocesan policy Religious Education and Collective Worship available from the Commission for Schools and Colleges suggests:

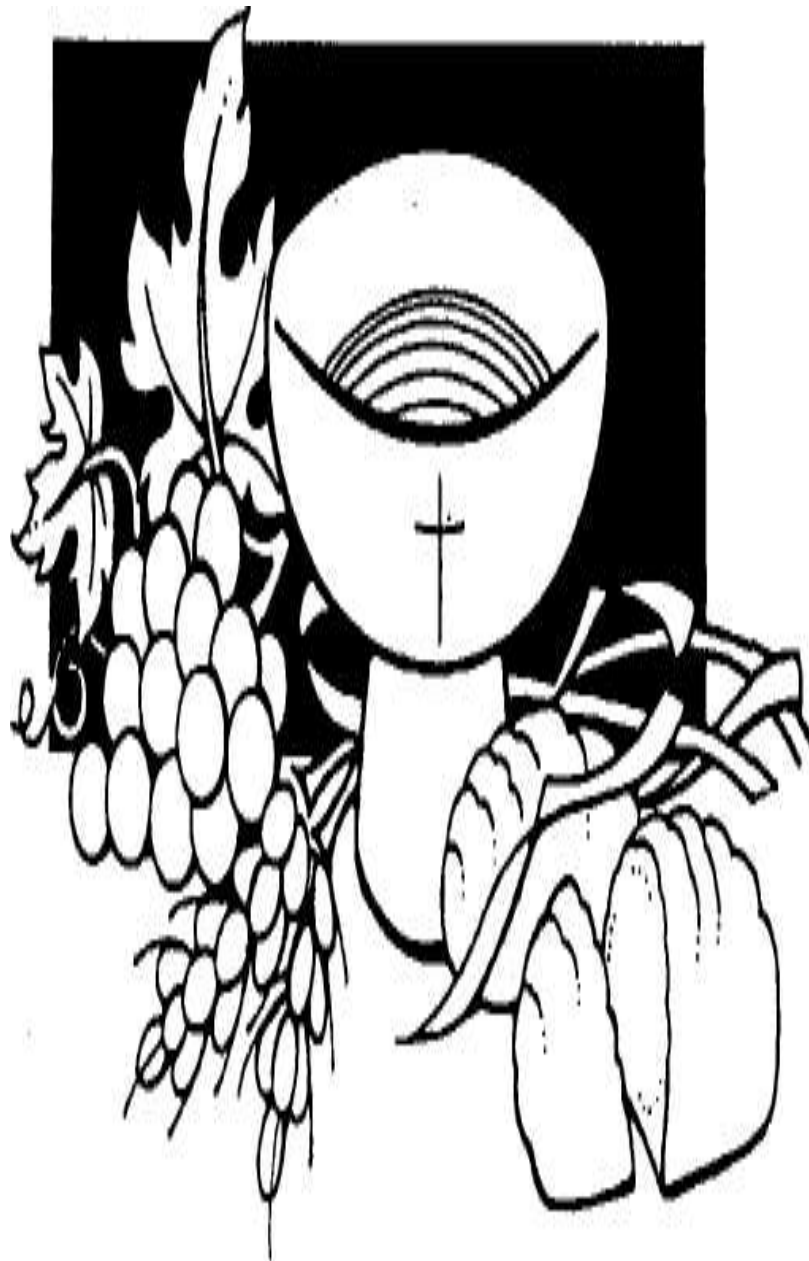
“A variety of opportunities for worship should be provided, including individual prayer, group prayer in both formal and informal styles and settings, and the celebration of the Eucharist which is the centre of worship for the Catholic community. Opportunities for worship should be linked with Feast Days and with the liturgical seasons of Advent, Lent, Christmastide and Easter.” September 2007

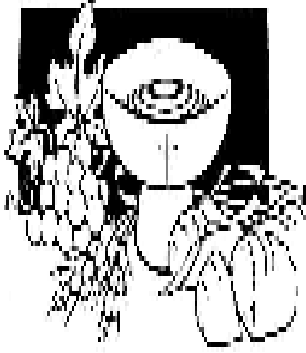
74. Deanery Reconciliation Services can help to broaden the sense of community and Church while providing a witness of the priests united in the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance.



“Forgive and you will be forgiven.” Lk 6:38

HOLY COMMUNION





HOLY COMMUNION

'Then he took some bread, and when he had given thanks, broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body which will be given for you; do this as a memorial of me'. He did the same with the cup after supper, and said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood which will be poured out for you.'

Luke 22: 19-20

THE GIFT OF HOLY COMMUNION

"God our Father,
we are gathered here to share in the supper
which your only Son left to his Church to reveal his love.
He gave it to us when he was about to die
and commanded us to celebrate it as the new and eternal sacrifice.
We pray that in this eucharist
we may find the fullness of love and life."

Opening Prayer - Mass of the Lord's Supper

PRINCIPLES FOR THE FIRST CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION

75. The Eucharist is a stage on the journey when a baptised child is introduced, by specific formation and celebration, to a deeper relationship with Christ and the Church.

76. A fundamental catechetical requirement (as set out by Pope Pius X when he lowered the age for First Holy Communion for children) is that a child should be able to recognise that there is a distinction between the Eucharist and ordinary bread.

77. Celebrating the Eucharist with children invites them to recognise this as **Eucharistia = *Thanksgiving*** - an opportunity to thank God for all the blessings in our lives, ***Acknowledging*** - the memory of Christ's gift to us, not as something which happened in the past, but which is both present and real for the people of God today, ***Appreciating*** - Christ as present in the Word and Sacrament, and in the clergy and people, wherever we are gathered.

78. While generally children in our Diocese are prepared for First Communion around the age of eight years old, it is important to remember that the readiness of the child and "**their capacity to understand what the mystery of Christ means, and that they are able to receive the body and blood of Christ with faith and devotion**" (CIC 913) are ultimately more important than the age of the child.



HOLY COMMUNION - PRINCIPLES

79. Canon law presumes that children will understand sufficiently at the age of seven, but accepts that sufficient understanding may come at different ages in individual cases. It is important that the readiness of the child is best decided by parent(s), catechists and clergy discerning together.

80. It is important to note that signs of faith in the child may not always be expressed in an intellectual form, but can nonetheless express a desire of the heart.

81. On the principle that 'faith is caught not taught', the example of faith life in the home is crucial, and therefore parents need to be encouraged and supported as "the first teachers of their child in the ways of faith".

Rite of Baptism

82. As families prepare their children for the Eucharist, they are to be supported by the parish community and reminded that they are continuing the initiation process which began at baptism and which will be sustained through to confirmation and beyond.

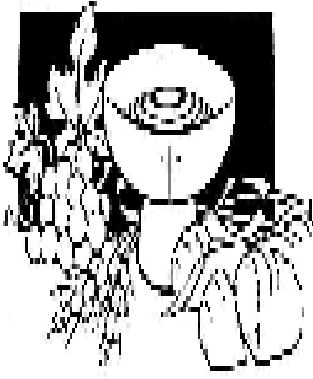
83. Careful preparation for the sacrament should respect the need to adapt to the age, ability, language and culture of the children. It is also the duty of catechesis to speak in terms suited to today's children and young people.

GDC 208

84. Preparation for First Holy Communion is a shared responsibility between home and parish. Where there is a Catholic school involved its role is to support the work of the family and parish in deepening the child's faith life.

**'The Eucharist is the source and summit
of the Christian life'.**

CCC 1324 cf Lumen Gentium 11



HOLY COMMUNION - PREPARATION

85. The home, parish and school each have distinctive tasks but they should work closely together since the children belong to all of these groups though in different ways.

86. Preparation for the sacrament of First Holy Communion should begin with the faith experience of the home and be continued in the parish community bearing in mind that not all children go to Catholic schools.

HOME:

87. Home life varies considerably, and priests and catechists will need to meet people where they are.

88. The first meeting in preparation for First Communion can be an opportunity to outline what the parish programme will be covering and the parents' role in their child's First Communion, as well as to deal with any questions or concerns of parents.

89. This time of preparation is also an invitation to help parents reflect on their own faith development and practice.

90. It is important to ensure that parents who have a disability have adapted resources in order to meet their needs. You may need to enquire at the initial invitation to the parent's meeting as to whether there are any special requirements.

91. Parishes can offer ongoing adult formation which will support the faith life within families. See the Bishops' Conference of England & Wales Marriage & Family Life resources on www.homeisaholyplace.org.uk

.....
: **There are innumerable**
: **reasons why people**
: **develop at different**
: **speeds on their faith**
: **journey and it is**
: **important that when they**
: **come to us we do not**
: **judge them regarding**
: **this... What is important**
: **is that we recognise**
: **these varying speeds.**
.....

.....
: *On the Threshold,*
: *A Report to the Bishops' Conference,*
: *2000*
.....



HOLY COMMUNION - PREPARATION

PARISH:

"At the heart of the life of the Catholic Church is the celebration of the Eucharist."

One Bread One Body

- 92.** Parents and children need to be reminded and encouraged to join in the weekly Sunday Mass celebration.
- 93.** Experience shows that active involvement in the liturgy deepens understanding of the Mass, which is the "privileged place for catechesis".
CCC 1074
- 94.** In addition to the family we belong to by birth, parish life celebrates the extended family of faith we belong to by baptism.
- 95.** The parish role is to assist (but not replace) parents in the formation of their children for this sacrament by providing catechists who complement the work of parents by offering a programme of immediate preparation for First Communion.
- 96.** A parish programme of preparation for First Communion can include many diverse elements. It is essential that children and young people are taught about the real presence of Jesus Christ in Holy Communion and that they know how to receive Holy Communion with reverence. This formation should include preparation for reception of Holy Communion under both kinds.
- 97.** Parish First Communion programmes usually go well beyond the minimum. Nevertheless, having a *basic requirement* is a helpful indicator in cases where a child has learning difficulties or where parents have prepared a child with little assistance.
- 98.** The parish programme should be positively encouraged but not imposed as a "requirement" in itself. The parish priest must be satisfied that any child presented for First Communion is adequately catechised and suitably disposed.
CIC 843
- 99.** Ideally, parish preparation should include, in one programme, the children from both parish and other local schools.



HOLY COMMUNION - PREPARATION

PARISH:

100. Many parishes already provide sessions for parents to help them link parish and home, to highlight the importance of their role and to keep them fully informed and involved. These sessions could also provide an opportunity for them as adults to reflect on, to value and to grow in their own faith, by the use of suitable resources for adult formation.

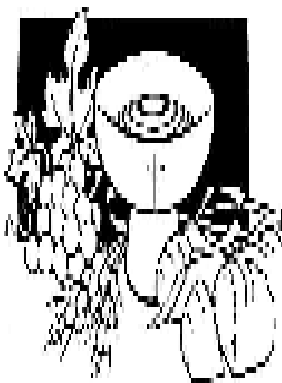
101. Parish preparation for First Communion provides a good opportunity for the young people and their parents to build friendships with other members of the parish family.

102. It is good to encourage parishioners to pray for those preparing for First Communion; for example, by having prayer partners who pray for the children, by mention in the Bidding Prayers, and through the children's involvement at some Sunday Masses (perhaps bringing up the gifts or visual displays of their work).

103. The catechists of First Communion from within a Deanery could meet to exchange ideas, experiences and resources as well as to offer and receive support and ongoing formation in their important ministry.

**Our catechesis really happens
when our journey as a faith community
stands on the threshold with those
who have journeyed towards us,
and we truly meet one another
not only physically, but in dialogue.**

On the Threshold, A Report to the Bishops' Conference, 2000



HOLY COMMUNION - PREPARATION

SCHOOL:

104. There are currently 136 Catholic Primary schools in the Archdiocese of Southwark. These schools are at the 'cutting edge' of the Church's role in evangelisation and catechesis.

105. Most schools draw pupils from various parishes, and most parishes draw children from various schools, both Catholic and non-Catholic.

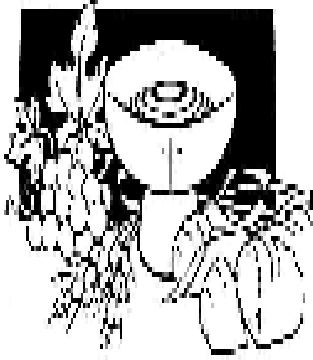
106. Where there is a Catholic school, one of its roles is to provide a broad programme of religious education from the Catholic perspective. In this it complements the work of the parish which has a specific role to provide the sacramental preparation. If the sacramental preparation is undertaken by the school alone, the importance of the family and parish community is obscured and the sense of community impoverished. The home, school and parish partnership recognises the unique contribution of each working together in close harmony.

107. Good communication between the home, school and parish is vital. Noticeboards in both parish and school could be used to create a link using themes common to the curriculum and the sacramental preparation. Hymns used in parish preparation could be used in school assemblies.

108. When a member of the school staff is also a catechist in a local parish they can provide a useful liaison between school and parish. A school representative on the parish council can also be a good link.

Sacramental preparation has its rightful place within the parish catechesis programme. It is good practice for schools to liaise as closely as possible with local parishes in order to ensure appropriate support and connections between parish sacramental preparation and school religious education programmes.

Diocesan Policy on Religious Education and Collective Worship
Archdiocese of Southwark Commission for Schools & Colleges,
September 2007



HOLY COMMUNION - PREPARATION

SCHOOL:

Every Christian community considers those who suffer handicaps, physical or mental, as well as other forms of disability - especially children - as persons particularly beloved of the Lord.

A growth in social and ecclesial consciousness, together with undeniable progress in specialized pedagogy, makes it possible for the family and other formative centres to provide adequate catechesis for these people, who, as baptised, have this right and, if non-baptised, because they are called to salvation. *GDC 189*

109. Children who are outside of the Catholic school system and within Special Education, must not be forgotten or excluded. Their families are to be sought out and warmly invited to participate in the parish First Communion preparation. The children should be provided with suitable and adapted catechesis.

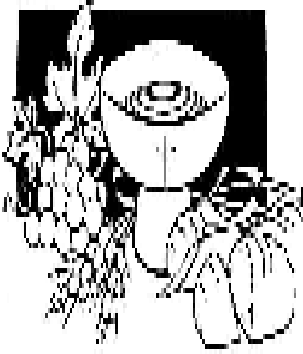
110. A tried and tested method for catechising people, especially those with disabilities, is the **MEET Process**®:

Meet: the person and their family, get to know them and make a list of the gifts and needs of the child. Visit them in school if possible and become familiar with methods that are used to teach them. Their teacher and learning support assistant will be vital in this.

Explore: and become familiar with the First Communion programme and begin to be creative in making it accessible. Each session should have one clear message for the disabled person, according to their understanding. You will need to discern what is the main message of the session you wish to present.

Explain: by transforming the message into a symbolic activity. This could be through sharing a song, making a picture book, sharing symbol cards as a form of communication, dramatising scripture, using a story book and a story bag, creating a symbolic activity that mediates a message. This could happen as a whole group activity or in small groups with appropriate activities.

Transcend: at the end of a session, with the whole group, engage in a mutual (liturgical) symbolic, activity together... this means that each person has an opportunity to move on together in faith as one community, one body of Christ. They have the opportunity to express what they take from this story/session into their everyday life.



HOLY COMMUNION - CELEBRATION

“The blessing cup that we bless is a communion with the blood of Christ, and the bread that we break is a communion with the body of Christ. The fact that there is only one loaf means that, though there are many of us, we form a single body because we all have a share in this one loaf.” 1 Cor 10:15-18

111. The celebration of First Holy Communion should take place within the community where the children and their families worship.

112. The celebration of this sacrament should focus on the person of Christ and his loving gift. This requires careful liturgical preparation with the families to enhance their appreciation of this great mystery.

113. It is good to encourage the First Communicants and their families to be actively involved in the liturgy; eg. Preparation of the Gifts, Readers, Bidding Prayers.

114. The celebration should be well prepared, accessible to the children, prayerful and joyful, expressing a noble simplicity.

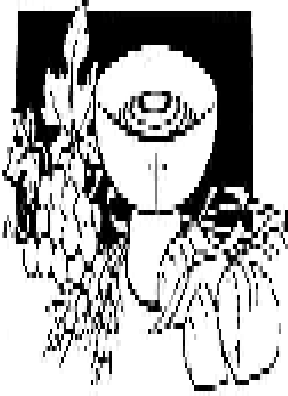
115. Many members of the extended family, and friends, who join the celebration may not be entirely familiar with the liturgy. This celebration offers an opportunity for welcome, evangelisation and an experience of the praying and celebrating Christian community.

116. Celebration of First Communion should not be seen as a one-off event. Every Sunday is a celebration of this wonderful gift.

117. Parishes might celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving some weeks after the First Communion with the children and their families thereby reinforcing the importance of the sacrament.

118. Where there is a Catholic primary school, they may also celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving for children from local parishes who have recently made their First Communion.

119. A teacher or representative from the local schools could attend the celebration of First Communion in order to provide a link between the school and parish for the communicants and their families.



HOLY COMMUNION - FOLLOW UP

*“These remained faithful
to the teaching of the apostles,
to the fellowship,
to the breaking of the bread
and to the prayers.”*

Acts 2:42

120. The Church is the sacrament of God’s love for the world. By its life and witness the Church *points towards*, by its sharing and worship it *anticipates*, and through its mission it is *an instrument of* the ultimate reality of the Kingdom of God actualised in Jesus Christ.

121. The Eucharist gives us the strength we need both as individuals and as a community to witness to God’s love in the world.

122. The parish provides on-going support by balancing the ministries of Word, Worship, Welfare and Witness.

123. The Prayer after Communion is often an invitation and a reminder to all people that the Eucharist is to have its effect in their lives as they are strengthened in working towards making God’s Kingdom come more fully. We are then sent out to go and witness to the Kingdom through our good works, service to each other and the community, and our praise of the Lord.

CONFIRMATION





CONFIRMATION

“There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them. The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose.” 1 Cor 12: 4-7

THE GIFT OF CONFIRMATION

124. Confirmation is so called because it *confirms* and strengthens baptismal grace. (CCCC 266) Confirmation celebrates the call of God and the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are given to us. ‘God never takes back his gifts nor revokes his choice.’ *Rm 11:29*

Confirmation perfects baptismal grace by:

- affirming that we are beloved sons and daughters of the Father
- uniting us more closely with Christ
- deepening the gifts of the Holy Spirit received in Baptism
- strengthening our bonds with the Church
- empowering us for our mission in the world
- helping us bear witness to our Christian faith in word and deed

CCC 1316

PRINCIPLES OF CONFIRMATION

125. Confirmation is one of the three Sacraments of Initiation. “Baptism, the Eucharist and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the ‘sacraments of Christian initiation,’ whose unity must be safeguarded.” *CCC1285* They “lay the foundations of every Christian life”. *CCC1212*

126. These guidelines are principally concerned with young people who have been baptised as infants or as young people, who have received the sacrament of the Eucharist and are now seeking the sacrament of Confirmation.

127. There may also be adult Catholics who have not been confirmed and this is a good opportunity to encourage and invite them to receive this sacrament and to offer them suitable adult preparation for it.



CONFIRMATION - PREPARATION

128. Every baptised person not yet confirmed can and should receive the sacrament of Confirmation. CCC 1306

129. Theologically there is no specific age required for Confirmation, and, in fact, the sacrament can be conferred at any age. Pastorally, there are different views as to which is the best age for Confirmation.

130. An earlier age for Confirmation makes a closer link with Baptism, while a later age has the potential for a greater understanding and maturity in the candidates.

131. Our present diocesan policy steers a middle line between these two positions.

132. The Code of Canon Law presumes that Confirmation is celebrated around the age of reason (unless the Bishops' Conference decides otherwise). Our Bishops' Conference of England & Wales has left the decision as to age to each diocesan bishop. In Southwark the Diocesan Policy on Confirmation, first established in 1980, is still in place.

The policy states that:

- Candidates should generally be a minimum age of 12 years;
- Remote preparation by the Catholic secondary school is to be provided in the first term of the second year;
- Proximate preparation is to be provided by the parish.

133. The readiness of the person for the sacrament is ultimately more important than their age and any preparation needs to be adapted to the age, ability and maturity of the candidates.

134. Experience shows that it is advisable to provide an introductory information evening for parents to outline the thinking, approach and programme proposed for Confirmation *before* the application forms are made available. Requirements for a sponsor could also be outlined at an information evening.

135. Candidates need to be guided as to their choice of Sponsor. The sponsor should be someone other than the young person's parent, at least sixteen years of age or older and be a confirmed, practising Catholic.



CONFIRMATION - PREPARATION

136. To make the link between baptism and confirmation it is recommended that, where possible, one of the young person's Godparents should act as Sponsor.

CIC 893 §2

137. As there are a variety of good Confirmation programmes available, catechists are encouraged to be creative in choosing what is best suited to the needs and age/s in their own particular group. The Disability Project has an adapted Confirmation programme called '*My Life with Jesus and His Community*' © which is available from the CEC.

138. There is a great variety in parishes as regards length of Confirmation preparation but a good principle is that quality is better than quantity.

139. Attending to the Rite of Confirmation itself, the gifts of the Spirit and the scripture readings of the Church's liturgy should provide the foundation on which other topics can be developed.

140. Creative methods of catechesis which engage young people on many levels should be encouraged; including use of symbols relating to Confirmation, current media and visuals, small group discussions and acts of service to and within the wider community. For a comprehensive Youth Ministry resource see www.revealedonline.co.uk

141. We are fortunate that our own diocesan Southwark Catholic Youth Service now provides residential retreat experiences for Confirmation groups and for young people in general at St Vincent's Centre at Whitstable, Kent. They also offer advice and resources for those working with Confirmation candidates and groups. *(See Contact details on page 41)*

142. Confirmation provides an opportunity to encourage parents in how they might support their child at this time and to respect the choice given to the young person about their decision to be confirmed.

143. The Catholic school's role is to support and complement the parish, and home preparation, through its ethos and general RE curriculum.



CONFIRMATION - CELEBRATION

'Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.'

Rite of Confirmation

144. The seal of the Holy Spirit marks our total belonging to Christ, our enrolment in His service for ever.

cf CCC 1296

145. When Confirmation is celebrated separately from Baptism, its connection with Baptism is expressed, among other ways, by the renewal of baptismal promises. The celebration of Confirmation during the Eucharist helps underline the unity of the sacraments of Christian initiation.

CCC 1321

146. The Confirmation Mass should be a joyful celebration in which to give thanks for the gifts of the Spirit given to those being confirmed. The liturgy highlights the gifts given to those being confirmed so that they may play their part in building up the communion of the church and furthering Christ's mission in the world.

147. Initiation into the community of Christ's faithful people through Confirmation, for adults and children alike, is a community event. It is initiation into a community of faith and into the faith of the community.

All powerful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by water and the Holy Spirit you freed your sons and daughters from sin and gave them new life. Send your Holy Spirit upon them to be their Helper and Guide. Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence. Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Rite of Confirmation

Baptism is God saying
'I have called you by your name, you are mine.'
Confirmation is God saying
'And now I have a job for you to do.'
The Eucharist is God saying
**'Do not be afraid, I am with you
to help you and to strengthen you.'**

Canon John McNamara



CONFIRMATION - CELEBRATION

149. Those who are involved in the celebration of Confirmation include:

Bishop - The Bishop is the ordinary minister of Confirmation. Priests may be delegated to confirm on behalf of the bishop. *CIC 882*

Clergy - It is recommended that the priest, and/or the deacon, be part of the Confirmation team, forming and supporting them. They are in a unique position to foster good relationships between all who are involved.

Candidates - Those who ideally have actively chosen to be prepared to receive the sacrament and who are being invited to take a fuller part in the building up of the Church and in the furthering of Christ's mission in the world.

Parents - To be supportive of the young people and become engaged in the preparation for the sacrament, allowing and respecting the fact that the choice to be confirmed is ultimately the candidate's alone.

Sponsors - Witnesses in faith and people to whom the candidate may turn to with questions of faith.

Catechists - Members of the parish community who assist with preparation sessions and witness to the Christian life.

Parish community - The people of the parish can offer prayerful support to the young people as well as witness for them.

From that time on the apostles, in fulfilment of Christ's wish, imparted the gift of the Spirit to the newly baptized by the laying on of hands to complete the grace of baptism.



CONFIRMATION - FOLLOW UP

150. The follow up for this sacrament should flow naturally from the preparation and celebration of Confirmation.

151. Young people of all abilities should continue to be affirmed and helped to discover, develop and use their personal gifts and talents in service of the community, recognising the needs of others.

152. Involvement in various parish ministries or social action groups enables the newly confirmed to live out the variety of gifts active within them, while giving a positive example to all of the parish community, particularly the younger members.

Preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit his actions, his gifts and his biddings – in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life.

To this end catechesis for Confirmation should strive to awaken a sense of belonging to the Church of Christ, the universal Church as well as the parish community.



CCC1309

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Child Protection Office, 59 Westminster Bridge Road, London, SE1 7JE

Southwark Catholic Youth Service, St Vincent's Centre, Castle Road, Whitstable, Kent, CT5 2ED

Commission for Schools and Colleges, St Paul's Wood Hill, Orpington, Kent, BR5 2SR

Marriage and Family Life Office, Rev Graham Preston, 72 Paradise St., London, SE16 4HT

Southwark Diocesan Liturgy Commission, Chair: Rev Mgr Richard Moth, Archbishop's House, 150 St George's Road, London, SE1 6HX