

# GUIDELINES FOR SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION for the Diocese of Portsmouth

## BAPTISM CONFIRMATION FIRST HOLY COMMUNION

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION to all three sacraments

Following a recommendation of the pastoral plan *Go Out and Bear Fruit* (p. 15), the Department for Pastoral Formation has drawn up these guidelines. They are not prescriptive, but contain many examples of good practice, recommendations, and useful resource material.

The guidelines are intended to assist parishes and pastoral areas in preparing to celebrate the sacraments of initiation, and are primarily aimed at all those who help children and young people, their parents, and schools (where appropriate). They are not aimed at adults preparing for any of these sacraments.

Further help with these guidelines, and general support, is available from the Department for Pastoral Formation (contact details at the end of this document).

### 1. Sacraments of Initiation

*“The sacraments of Christian initiation — Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist — lay the foundations of every Christian life”.* (CCC 1212)

“... Every particular Church, especially in relation to Christian initiation, should offer at least two services:

a) a single, coherent, process of Christian initiation for children, adolescents and young people, intimately connected with the **sacraments of initiation** already received or about to be received and linked with educational pastoral care;

b) a catechetical programme for **adults**, addressed to those Christians who need to deepen their faith in order to complete the Christian initiation begun at Baptism.”

(GDC 274)

## 2. Role of the Parish — see also Pastoral Areas, section 4 below

### *Communion and Mission*

*"...Christian Initiation...should be the care of the entire Christian community." (GDC 91, cf. also 220)*

The preparation of our children and young people for these sacraments is an important time in the life of every parish. It presents a special opportunity for developing their relationship with God, each other, the Church and society.

Equally, it presents an opportunity for a parish or pastoral area to be a real sign of communion and mission within and beyond its own boundaries.

Each parish or pastoral area is responsible for developing and implementing a preparation process for those who want to receive the sacraments. It is also responsible for giving all its members opportunities to be involved in the preparation process, including support and prayer.

Opportunities should be available for those who have received the sacraments of initiation to continue to grow in their faith, share their faith with others and learn more about being a Catholic Christian.

## 3. Teams

The best model for preparation is to use a team, working on behalf of the parish community. As well as helping to spread the load, especially when busy clergy are hard-pressed, it also demonstrates a collaborative way of working and promotes a sense of community.

A team is made up of clergy (priest and/or deacon), catechists and helpers (who may also be parents and/or young people). Ideally the team includes those who relate well to children and young people, as well as those able to reach out to families with varying degrees of familiarity with the Church. Ongoing formation of the team will be needed, which can be provided by the DPF on request.

*"...Priests foster the vocation and work of catechists and assist them in carrying out a function which springs from Baptism..." (GDC 224)*

*"No methodology, no matter how well tested, can dispense with the person of the catechist in every phase of the catechetical process. The charism given to each catechist by the Spirit, a solid spirituality and transparent witness of life, constitute the soul of every method. Only the catechist's own human and Christian qualities guarantees a good use of texts and other resources." (GDC 156)*

#### 4. Pastoral Areas — see also Role of the Parish, section 2 above

As we move towards larger parishes covering several worshipping communities, we encourage the pooling of resources and experiences. This enables pastoral care and catechesis to function more effectively (cf. *Go Out and Bear Fruit*, p. 10) in a true spirit of service and stewardship. Ideally, each pastoral area should foster mutual co-operation between all the teams involved in sacramental preparation and encourage them to work more closely together in planning the celebrations as well as the content and length of the programmes. As co-operation increases, consideration should be given to a common approach to sacramental formation across a pastoral area.

#### 5. Role of Parents — First Educators in Faith

At their child's baptism, the parents undertook to bring their child up in the faith. This first happens in the family. Therefore, parents are encouraged to be actively involved at the heart of their children's sacramental preparation through:

- Continuing their own spiritual journey and faith development
- supporting their children's faith journeys
- praying with their children
- helping their adolescent children choose a sponsor, if for some reason it cannot be one of the baptismal godparents

Baptismal preparation is an opportunity for adult formation in Christian faith as well as specifically about baptism.

"Since parents have given children their life... [they] must be recognized as the primary and principal educators."

(Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimus Educationis* 3, Pope Paul VI, 1965)

"Parents receive in the sacrament of Matrimony 'the grace and the ministry of the Christian education of their children', to whom they transmit and bear witness to human and religious values. This educational activity which is both human and religious is 'a true ministry', through which the Gospel is transmitted and radiated so that family life is transformed into a journey of faith and the school of Christian life. As the children grow, exchange of faith becomes mutual and 'in a catechetical dialogue of this sort, each individual both receives and gives'. It is for this reason that the Christian community must give very special attention to parents."

(GDC 227)

#### 6. Parents' sessions

It is advisable to begin with a meeting for parents to explain the aim and approach proposed for the sessions. This could also be the moment when general expectations and requirements are outlined. It is also a time when parents can voice uncertainties about their own role and receive encouragement.

It is important that this first meeting has a social dimension with refreshments and time to talk as well as the giving of basic information. It also includes a time of prayer, even if very brief

(depending on the capabilities of the participants). The meetings that follow will enable parents gradually to explore their own experience of faith and sacraments.

Leaders will make it clear to parents that there is no pressure to “tick boxes”: the purpose of parents’ sessions is to help the children by helping their parents.

## **7. Irregular Unions**

Parents in irregular unions (i.e. who are not married in the eyes of the Church) are nevertheless encouraged to take a full part in the preparations. A warm welcome and ongoing hospitality may encourage them to take a more active part in the life of the Church.

In order to avoid disappointment later on, it needs to be made clear from the outset that persons in irregular unions cannot fulfil the role of godparent or sponsor of another couple’s child. The same would be true for Catholics who have not been confirmed.

## **8. Catholic Schools**

The Catholic school’s role is to support and complement the parish and home preparation, through its ethos and general RE curriculum. There will often be a connection with a particular Year Group. It might be that a list of pupils who are preparing for the sacraments is sent to the school to be prayed for by the school community. The staff, including the Headteacher, Chaplain and RE Co-ordinator, could be invited to the various celebrations.

## **9. Ongoing support**

### *Baptism*

It is important to keep in touch with the families of those who have been baptised, especially in the case of those who do not attend Mass regularly. Anniversary parties, etc, are good ways of doing this, as are invitations to parents to coffee mornings, etc. Photos of baptisms on display boards in the church or parish centre can be both a reminder of the event and an encouragement to the people of the parish to hold the families in their prayers. (Please see the **Safeguarding** section in the Appendix for advice on displaying photographs.)

The parish or pastoral area could hold a special Mass followed by a party each year, inviting all families who have been involved in baptisms during the previous twelve months to attend as special guests.

Ongoing formation may also be undertaken.

## *Confirmation*

Confirmation opens the door to greater participation in the life of the Church. Parishes are therefore encouraged to offer opportunities for the newly-confirmed to continue to grow in their faith, share their faith and learn more about being Catholic. As part of their preparation, candidates should be encouraged to participate in a ministry (e.g. reader, minister of Communion, minister of welcome, etc) in the life of the local parish after they are confirmed.

“Christ gives varied gifts to his Church and distributes them among the members of Christ’s body to build up the holy people of God in unity and love. Be active members of the Church, alive in Jesus Christ.”  
(Sample homily, paras 5-6, *Rite of Confirmation*)

Also, they can be encouraged to share their time and talents in serving their local community.

## *First Holy Communion*

As with Baptism, keeping in touch with families is important, whether in continuing meetings from time to time (with a social dimension) when people can share their experiences or in anniversary celebrations and parties.

Parents and children can be invited to help with the following year’s preparation. Even if only a few respond, it is still worth doing, and gives people a chance to share their own gifts and experiences.

## **10. Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age (CICCA)**

This is where children or young people aged 6/7 or over are being baptised or received into the Church, making their First Holy Communion and receiving the sacrament of Confirmation. National guidelines are currently nearing completion, and these will address some of the practical issues that arise in these cases. When these are published, they will be available as a separate document.

## THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

### Preparation

#### 1. *First inquiry*

When an inquiry is made about having a child baptised, the first thing to happen is that a member of the preparation team makes contact with the parents with a view to meeting them – ideally in their home, where they will normally feel more comfortable, but any suitable location may be used. Visitors do not need to be members of the clergy. The first visit should take place as soon as possible after the inquiry has been received. (For Safeguarding information, see the Appendix.)

Some parishes ask parents to complete an application form. This would include family details, e.g. address, as well as details about the child to be baptised. Note: No payment is required for the administration of this sacrament. If parents choose to make a donation to the priest or deacon, that is entirely up to them.

#### 2. *This initial visit has three main purposes—*

- To establish contact with the parents at a human level.
- To make the parents feel comfortable with what is happening, and to ascertain their expectations, hopes and fears.
- To clarify for the parents (especially if they are not regular churchgoers) what the procedure is for baptising their child, and the paperwork that will be required.

The visitor explains to the parents that they will be expected to join a preparation group, which will meet twice or three times before the baptism itself. (Recommendation for all parishes)

There may be safeguarding issues in those place where preparation does not take place in a group context but during the course of home visits or sessions in catechists' homes, and this is not recommended.

#### 3. *Group sessions*

Parents who are unable to commit to attending the preparation group sessions may be asked to postpone the baptism of their child until they are able to attend the group sessions. Exceptions to this can be made if parents or guardians have already attended preparation sessions for the baptism of an older child, but it is generally helpful for 'old hands' to be present to assist first-timers. Where possible, both parents attend the sessions together. The parish or pastoral area should try to make provision for babysitting services when these are needed. (For Safeguarding information, see the Appendix.) If possible, it is also very useful for the godparents to be present.

#### 4. *Content of preparation sessions*

These sessions will be run by the preparation team, and can take place at any convenient time. Weekdays evenings, Saturday mornings or Sunday afternoons tend to be the most usual.

Ideally the priest or deacon who will be the minister of baptism will be present at least for the final session, but he does not need to be present for all of them.

##### The preparation sessions

- explore the Church's view of Baptism:
  - The first of the sacraments of initiation, laying the foundation for a Christian life.
  - Baptism frees from sin and punishment and produces a new spiritual birth as a child of God "through water and the word". We "become members of Christ, are incorporated in the Church and made sharers in her mission" (CCC 1213).
  - Symbolism of water as essential for life, as cleansing, as refreshing, etc. Old Testament references: Genesis, Exodus, etc.
  - Christ's own baptism in the Jordan.
  - Baptism comes from a Greek word meaning "to plunge" or "to immerse".
  - Baptism is a once-only sacrament, but it does not end there: the Church recommends life-long mystagogia ['exploring the mystery of faith'] including 'post-baptismal catechumenate' (CCC 1231). This means that Baptism is the start of an ongoing journey which is life-long; we never stop learning and deepening our faith.
  - Baptism is a celebration of the whole community, not a private family affair.
  - Symbolism of water
  - Significance of the anointing with the Oil of Catechumens and the Oil of Chrism.
  - Symbolism of the white garment and the baptismal candle
  
- unpack the responsibilities of families and the expectations on them:
  - Because Baptism is a sacrament of faith, the parents undertake to bring up the child in the faith in which it is being baptised. They make a profession of faith during the ceremony. (If a parent is unable to make that profession, they stay silent.)
  - If they are unable to commit to bringing up the child in the Catholic faith and enabling the child's preparation for Confirmation and First Communion, then the baptism must be postponed (cf. CCL 868 §1, 2<sup>o</sup>).
  - There must be at least one godparent (CCL 873); many children have two, one of each gender. Some have had more than two, but there is no provision for this in Canon Law and it may lead to a dilution of the relationship if there are too many. Godparents must be at least 16 years of age, have been

confirmed and made their First Holy Communion in the Catholic Church, and be practising their faith regularly (cf. CCL 874).

○ Parents, godparents and parish priests are to take care that a name is not given which is foreign to Christian sentiment (CCL 855). Investigation may be required — for example, there is a St Elvis! As long as one of the child's given names is Christian, the requirement is fulfilled.

- The final session prepares for the rites themselves by going through them with the parents. This session will be the time when the parents can be involved in choosing together the readings for the ceremony (if this does not take place at Mass).

## The rite itself

### 1. *When*

It is possible for the entire rite to take place on a single occasion, but these guidelines recommend a two-stage model as a better practice. This separates the welcome and pre-baptismal anointing from the remainder of the rite.

The two-stage model has proved its worth in parishes, both as a way of drawing parents into the life of the community and of helping familiarise the community with the family or families. Baptism should be a celebration of the entire community, not just the family or families involved.

It is strongly recommended that, as in a number of parishes already (including the Cathedral), baptisms take place no more than once a month, in order (a) to encourage a sense of community and (b) not to provide clergy with unnecessary duplication of effort. The families of all the children to be baptised in any given month normally share in the same celebration (see section 2 below).

Except in cases of emergency, it is recommended that baptisms do not take place during Lent (which is traditionally a time of preparation for baptism, not a time for baptism itself), nor during the month of August (when many in the community are away).

NB: Baptism may be given at any time **in case of genuine emergency** — see CCL 867 §2

## 2. *The two-stage celebration*

A common practice in parishes is that on the **first** Sunday of the month parents present their children for the ceremony of welcoming and pre-baptismal anointing, normally at the back of the church (another appropriate location in the building may be used, but there is something symbolic about children being presented on the threshold of the church building). If godparents can be present, so much the better. Parents who are regular churchgoers will present their children at the Mass they normally attend. In other cases, the baptism preparation team may need to discuss with the parents which of the weekend Masses would be the most suitable for them to come to for this purpose.

In this model, the actual baptisms will take place on the **last** Sunday of the month:

- either at the weekend Mass that the parents normally attend, if that is the normal practice,
- or on Sunday afternoon, together with the families of all other children to be baptised that month. In the latter case, there should be an open invitation to all members of the church community also to be present.

In the case of a Sunday afternoon celebration, all members of the baptismal preparation team are present if possible. In addition, it is extremely helpful to the celebration if music is used – at least a cantor and an instrumentalist are highly recommended. In addition to joyful and well-known hymns, there can be sung alleluias or other acclamations after each individual child has been baptised. The aim is to give the families not only a sense of church community but also a meaningful and joyful experience which may encourage the return of those who are not regular churchgoers.

## 3. *Symbols in the rite*

*Oil of Catechumens*, used in the pre-baptismal anointing as a symbol of strengthening and preparation.

*Water*, a symbol of cleansing and of life.

*Oil of Chrism*, used in the post-baptismal anointing, announcing the anointing with Chrism which will take place at Confirmation (CCC 1242)

*Clothing with a White Garment*, a symbol of new life in Christ. Traditionally this is a white shawl which is placed around the child at the relevant point in the ceremony.

*Baptismal Candle*, to symbolise the flame of faith in Christ. It is very appropriate that this candle should be preserved for subsequent use at the child's First Holy Communion.

## THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

### Preparation

#### 1. *Who can be confirmed?*

Every baptized Catholic can and should receive the sacrament of Confirmation. The candidates may request the sacrament if they:

- are baptized and able to renew baptismal promises. (See also the section on disability issues in the Appendix for those with learning difficulties.)
- are open to being enriched by further gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- are participating in the Sunday Mass and in the sacramental life of the Church.
- are willing to commit to active involvement in the parish/pastoral area Confirmation preparation process.
- are willing to continue to grow in faith following Confirmation and throughout their lifetime.

"Persons who are to receive Confirmation must have already received Baptism. Moreover, those possessing the use of reason must be in the state of grace, properly instructed, and capable of renewing the baptismal promises."  
(*The Rite of Confirmation* 12, cf. CCL 889)

There is no specific age at which Confirmation can be conferred, once the age of reason has been reached (cf. Canon 891). Pastorally, there are different views as to which is the best age. The readiness of the person to receive the sacrament is ultimately more important than the age, and any preparation needs to be adapted to the age and maturity of the candidates. It is for each pastoral area to decide upon their policy regarding age. Most pastoral areas choose to confirm in the 13-15 age-range.

"Although Confirmation is sometimes called the 'sacrament of Christian maturity', we must not confuse adult faith with the adult age of natural growth, nor forget that the baptismal grace is a grace of free, unmerited election and does not need 'ratification' to become effective. St. Thomas reminds us of this:  
'Age of body does not determine age of soul. Even in childhood man can attain spiritual maturity: as the book of Wisdom says: For old age is not honoured for length of time, or measured by number of years. Many children, through the strength of the Holy Spirit they have received, have bravely fought for Christ even to the shedding of their blood.' " (St Thomas Aquinas, *STh* III, 72, 8, ad 2; cf. Wis 4:8)

(CCC 1308)

## 2. Background

Maturing in Christian faith is a life-long journey. Confirmation preparation is a process in Christian growth based on the belief that candidates are at a significant point in their faith journey where they are beginning to establish a personal faith identity. Through sharing their own journey and interaction with others, the candidates are assisted in identifying and understanding how God is working in their lives, and come to a new realization of faith within the context of the parish community.

Confirmation is one of the three Sacraments of Initiation.

CCC 1303 tells us that

- Confirmation makes us more fully a child of God;
- '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' (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 11)
- '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'

## 3. Content of sessions

The sessions will focus on:

- the link with Baptism and Eucharist
- the Rite of Confirmation, especially the Homily and prayers.
- use of Scripture (especially the suggested passages)
- the symbols used
  - the Renewal of Baptismal Promises
  - the Laying-on of Hands
  - the Anointing with Chrism
  - the Sign of Peace
- the Person of Christ
- prayer
- the Gifts of the Holy Spirit
- living as a Christian today
- vocation (single life, married life, religious life, priesthood, permanent diaconate, etc)

There is a variety of resources available. Catechists are encouraged to be creative in choosing what is best suited to the needs and age/s of their own particular group. Creative methods of catechesis which engage young people on many levels should be encouraged; including use of symbols, current media and visuals, small group discussion and acts of service to and within the wider community.

The whole process should be rooted in prayer.

At least ten 2-hour sessions are required to do justice to this process. A significant time of preparation for parents is strongly recommended.

#### 4. *Sponsors*

Candidates need to be guided as to the choice of their sponsor, if for some reason it is not possible for the sponsor to be one of the baptismal godparents (as the rite strongly suggests, so as to strengthen the link with Baptism). The role of the sponsor is to support the candidate as they prepare to celebrate the sacrament and to help the newly confirmed to live as a true witness of Christ, and to be a friend to the candidate.

##### *Role of the Sponsor*

- Companion on the journey, however long it lasts
- Model of lived faith
- Guide, Listener and Confidant
- Dedicated to the candidate's personal and spiritual growth, including praying for the candidate
- Serves on behalf of the church

See the Appendix for canonical regulations regarding who may be a sponsor.

#### 5. *Retreats*

As part of the programme it is good to take the candidates away to help them reflect on the whole process of preparation and on their faith.

The Department for Pastoral Formation and the Advisor for Youth Ministry are able to give practical help and advice on the content and organization of retreats.

"A retreat is a sacred time for taking a long hard look at ourselves and the world around us. It is a time for sharing stories. It is a time for putting things in order. It is also a time to be with good people to make good memories.

"This retreat is a special time in your life, part of your preparation for Confirmation. We will be doing a lot of thinking about many things. We hope that you will learn about yourself and about the step you are going to take in your life."

*Diocesan Youth Advisor*

## **The rite itself**

The Sacrament of Confirmation is normally celebrated during the Easter Season. However, there is also time in the autumn when the Bishop will celebrate Confirmation. To book the Bishop for Confirmation, contact his PA for a date.

The Bishop is the ordinary minister of Confirmation (CCL 882). The Bishop will normally celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation in each of the pastoral areas on an annual basis. If parishes want to have their own celebration outside this pattern then they are to ask their designated Vicar General to celebrate.

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 this aspect, and includes prayers for the candidates, that they may play their part in building up the communion of the Church and furthering Christ's mission in the world.

### *Symbols in the rite*

#### *1. Renewal of Baptismal Promises*

The renewal of baptismal promises in the Rite of Confirmation reminds us that Confirmation is intimately connected with the other sacraments of initiation. This clearly shows that Confirmation is directly related to Baptism and completes its grace (cf. CCC 1285, 1321). Further, the renewal of baptismal promises expresses not only what the candidate and the community believe but also their relationship to the paschal mystery and the call to discipleship. Finally, Confirmation as a rite takes place within Mass to further connect Confirmation with the other sacraments of initiation (SC 71).

#### *2. Laying-on of Hands*

Just as Jesus healed the sick and blessed little children with this gesture, the apostles did the same through the laying-on of hands. The laying-on of hands signifies the calling-forth of the gifts of the Spirit. During the Rite of Confirmation, the laying-on of hands by the Bishop (and other priests present) invokes the Spirit to come upon the candidates and bring them the gifts of wisdom and understanding, right judgment and courage, knowledge and reverence, and wonder and awe.

#### *3. Seal of the Holy Spirit*

In the anointing with oil, candidates are marked as belonging to Christ and in service to Christ for ever. This mark or seal has been given by God who has given us his Spirit in our hearts to be one in Christ's body. Jesus identifies himself in the New Testament as carrying the seal of God the Father (John 6:27) which identifies him with his Father's mission.

#### *4. Anointing with Chrism*

In biblical times, anointing was a sign of abundance and joy, cleansing and healing, able to bring about a radiance of beauty, health and strength. In the Rite of Confirmation, anointing is the sign of the Spirit. It reminds each person that we all belong to Christ, that we share in the

mission of Christ through the Spirit. Just as Jesus was anointed by the Spirit and experienced his humanity transformed by that anointing, our own humanity is transformed by the anointing through the Spirit. (Cf. CCC 1293)

For many candidates, the choosing of a Confirmation name has become common practice. Whilst this may help the candidate focus on the life of a particular saint or holy person, it is not actually required and the baptismal name can be used.

##### 5. *The Assembly*

The sign of peace that concludes the rite of the sacrament signifies and demonstrates ecclesial communion with the bishop and with all the faithful (CCC 1301, cf. St Hippolytus, *Trad. Ap.* 21: Sch 11, 80-95). By celebrating the Eucharist, the newly-confirmed are now full members of the community, having completed all three sacraments of initiation.

## THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST FIRST HOLY COMMUNION

### Preparation

#### 1. *Background*

First Holy Communion is a sacrament of a deeper initiation into the mystery of the Church.

Every baptised child needs to be catechised for reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and First Holy Communion upon coming to the age of reason. This is normally from about seven—eight years of age (Year 3), but it is important to bear in mind that people develop in different ways on their faith journey.

In many parishes it is customary for preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation to take place before preparation for First Holy Communion. While the preparation sessions may run concurrently, it is important to avoid giving the impression that Reconciliation is merely a step to be taken on the journey to First Holy Communion and not a separate sacrament.

(Separate diocesan guidelines for the sacraments of healing and reconciliation will be available in due course.)

#### 2. *Period of preparation*

Ideally, this period of preparation is a shared responsibility between parents, schools and parish communities. All have a vital role to play in the spiritual development of children:

- Parents/guardians have the key responsibility in helping their children grow in faith and Catholic lifestyle. They can do so by their own example of regular participation in the sacraments, as well as by their life of prayer and service. Sacramental preparation can support and encourage them in their role if it offers space for mature faith exploration and formation.
- In most places, catechesis takes place in the parish or pastoral area, independently of the religious education curriculum in Catholic schools. This will depend on local circumstances, but good liaison between home, school and parish is to be encouraged.

"It is the responsibility, in the first place of parents and those who take the place of parents, as well as of the Pastor, to see that children who have reached the use of reason are correctly prepared and are nourished by the Divine Food as early as possible, preceded by Sacramental Confession; it is also for the Pastor to be diligent lest any children come to the Holy Banquet who have not reached the use of reason or whom he judges are not sufficiently disposed." (CCL 914)

While children learn about sacraments in school, more comprehensive preparation is often needed in the parish context, focusing on the meaning and experience of the sacrament. Furthermore, this is absolutely vital for those children who do not attend Catholic schools.

- At the parish level, sacramental preparation is the responsibility of the whole parish, assisting the parents in the formation of their children. This therefore implies a number of public celebrations at Sunday Mass (e.g., Rite of Enrolment, etc) so that the group does not become disconnected from the wider community. Each parish/pastoral area is encouraged to have a First Holy Communion preparation team, formed of catechists (for children and adults), and helpers. It is good to encourage parishioners to pray for the First Holy Communion families, and the families to actively participate at the Sunday Masses. Ideally, First Holy Communion should be received at a weekend liturgy because it is a celebration of initiation into the community that gathers to celebrate every Sunday.

It is important that the preparation feel different from being at school. In addition to getting to know God, oneself and each other, it will be important for catechesis to draw on the structure of each particular rite, not only the Mass on the day itself but any other rites that may be used during the course of the months of preparation (e.g. a Rite of Enrolment).

It is not a good idea to schedule sessions during school holidays or half-term breaks, though this could be the occasion for a mini-retreat.

Where possible, each parish in a pastoral area uses a similar approach to sacramental preparation, based on local needs and circumstances, allowing enough time for appropriate engagement not only with the faith of the children but also that of the adults, as well as the entire faith community.

### 3. *Content of sessions*

- a) It is advisable that the children, and especially parents, are introduced on their own level to the *Sacrament of Reconciliation* before participating in the First Holy Communion celebration.

Together with the Anointing of the Sick, the sacrament of Reconciliation is one of the sacraments of healing, and it must be treated as a separate sacrament with its own depth and value. To prevent making it appear as just one of the 'hurdles to jump' before getting to the First Holy Communion, sufficient time and dignity within the process of sacramental preparation needs to be allocated so that the children adequately explore the themes of forgiveness and reconciliation within their preparation for First Holy Communion. This is also a good opportunity to (re)introduce parents to the Rite of Penance.

- b) *Catechesis for children* celebrating the First Holy Communion will ideally promote:

- awareness that everything is a gift from a loving God

- relationship with God through various forms of prayer
- Scripture-based understanding of the person of Jesus through the main events in his life, death and resurrection as portrayed in the Gospels
- acquaintance with the Church's liturgical seasons and their symbols
- familiarity with the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist as the principal parts of Mass
- active participation at Mass appropriate to the child's age
- ability to distinguish Holy Communion as the real Body and Blood of Christ, different from ordinary bread and wine
- attitude of healthy devotion and reverence as well as desire to receive Holy Communion
- practical preparation for receiving First Holy Communion

c) *Catechesis for the parents of children* celebrating First Holy Communion will ideally help them:

- grow in awareness that everything is a gift from loving God, including their children
- reflect on their experience, including their parental rights and privileges as well as duties and responsibilities
- appreciate more fully their role as the primary educators of their children in faith
- foster their mature relationship with God through various forms of prayer
- deepen their Scripture-based understanding of the person of Jesus through the use of Scripture, Tradition and the Church's own formulations of the faith
- grasp elements of sacramental theology and spirituality, including the life of grace and service
- deepen their understanding of the Sacraments of Initiation and of the importance of Mass as the heart of Catholic life
- understand the Church's liturgical seasons and their symbols
- understand the basic history, structure and elements of Mass
- grow in awareness of the presence of Christ in Word, Sacrament, Assembly and Presider
- recognise their own gifts and be willing to offer them in service or ministry
- model Eucharistic living for their children and community
- prepare practically for the First Holy Communion celebration

Adequate content needs to be presented in an age-appropriate and engaging manner.

At least twelve 1-1½ hour sessions for children are advised, and a substantial amount of time for parents (and godparents, if available) is strongly recommended. Parents who have already been through the process with older children will have a valuable contribution to make, if they are available.

### **The rite itself**

Many parishes celebrate First Holy Communion in the summer, around the time of the feast of Corpus Christi (two Sundays after Pentecost), but there is no obligation to choose this time of

year. Every Mass that weekend (or whichever weekend is chosen) will include First Holy Communion for the children who normally attend that Mass. The practice whereby the church is so full that the Mass-goers who normally attend that Mass are excluded is not recommended. Similarly, holding Masses exclusively for the giving of First Holy Communion, at which the regular community is not invited to be present, could be seen not only to be divisive but making a statement that the sacrament is primarily about those who are receiving it; however, sacraments are always about the entire community. For this reason, too, the holding of separate "First Communion Masses" on Saturdays is discouraged.

It is therefore better, as many parishes already do, to split the First Holy Communion over two or more weekends if this is required to accommodate all the families and their guests along with the regular celebrating community. Godparents should be encouraged to be present whenever possible.

### *Symbols in the rite*

All children making their First Holy Communion should receive under both forms, bread and wine. It is important that their preparation include both catechetical formation and actual practice in receiving the host and receiving from the chalice.

"The essential signs of the Eucharistic sacrament are wheat bread and grape wine, on which the blessing of the Holy Spirit is invoked and the priest pronounces the words of consecration spoken by Jesus during the Last Supper: *This is my body which will be given up for you. . . . This is the cup of my blood. . . .*"  
(CCC 1412)

### *Coeliac disease and gluten intolerance*

There is a wide spectrum of intolerance. Some can tolerate low-gluten bread, for others even this can be lethal. Low-gluten hosts are permitted by the Church, but non-gluten hosts are forbidden. (*Gluten Allergies/Alcohol Intolerance and the Bread and Wine used at Mass*, CDF 2003 — <http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Documents/Coeliacs/CDF.html>)

If a child with Coeliac-Sprue Syndrome is making his/her First Holy Communion, the celebrant must be notified so that, in the case of complete intolerance, the child may be offered Holy Communion only from the chalice. Note that for this purpose a special chalice should be reserved which has not had a particle of consecrated host dropped into it, which can be a life-threatening 'contamination'. (CCL 925 permits the reception of Holy Communion under the form of wine alone in cases of necessity.)

### *Baptismal Candle*

If the family still has the baptismal candle which was held on the child's behalf by the godparents at the Baptism, it is a good idea to bring this to the Mass. A special lighting ceremony is encouraged, perhaps at the Profession of Faith (the dialogue form is recommended).

## APPENDIX

### 1. Disability issues

Disability should not be perceived as an obstacle to the journey in faith which we all travel and which is nourished and deepened by catechesis. Disability is not a barrier to receiving the sacraments. As members of the Church, people with disabilities are entitled to receive – and indeed, where suitably qualified, give – catechesis within the Christian community. People with disabilities who do not yet belong to the Church are also among those whom the Church seeks to call to faith. (*GDC 189 and CCL 777*).

#### *Special needs*

Candidates with learning difficulties may need special provision in the case of such things as the renewal of baptismal promises – e.g. using the dialogue form. A useful resource is *Valuing Difference: People with Disabilities in the Life and Mission of the Church* (Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 1998).

Often, parents do not disclose their child's disability (e.g. dyslexia), assuming that it's common knowledge!

Every Christian community considers those who suffer...forms of disability... 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 baptized, have this right and, if not baptized, because they are called to salvation. (*GDC 189*)

"The spiritual life of people with learning difficulties is nourished in a special way by their receiving Holy Communion within the loving, praying family of the Church. The Church needs to welcome this union, for 'how can she contribute to the integration of the handicapped into modern society, if she does not endeavour to have them recognised as full members of her own?' (Pope Paul VI, Pastoral Care of Handicapped and Maladjusted Youth, October 1973)."

Wherever possible, people with disabilities should be included in the ordinary catechetical and social activities of each parish. For those with physical or sensory disabilities, this will require attention to how they can have access and participate as fully as possible. The inclusion of people with disabilities in those activities underlines the vocation of us all to belong to the body of Christ, each of us bringing our individual gifts and insights into the mystery of Christ to be shared with other members of that body. It also usually adds to the quality of the catechesis for other people, because catechists have to plan carefully and use a wider range of methods, images and resources.

One of the possible ways in which special attention and care can be given to children and young people with learning difficulties is the **MEET** Process.

**Meet:** the person and their family to get to know them and make a list of their gifts and needs. If possible, become familiar with the methods used to teach them at school (talk to the teacher and learning support assistant).

**Explore:** be creative in making the formation process accessible. Each session should have only one clear message for the person with learning difficulties.

**Explain:** by transforming the message into symbolic activity (song, picture, symbol cards, drama, story bag, etc — contact the Department for Pastoral Formation for help in this area) .

**Transcend:** engage with the whole group in a liturgical activity so that each person moves on in their faith, not alone but as a part of a bigger community.

Parents with learning difficulties may also need special help and support. The Department's Advisor for Marriage and Family Life can assist, and there is much material available online.

## 2. Safeguarding

*(Much of the material in this section is taken from or based on the Diocesan Safeguarding Resource Pack)*

“The Catholic Church of England and Wales, the Bishops and Congregational Leaders are committed to safeguarding as an integral part of the life and ministry of the Church.” (National Safeguarding resource pack)

In the following section, for “leader” read “catechist” as appropriate.

### *Checklist for good practice*

- Ensure that there are a minimum of two leaders always present. In groups of more than 20 there should be one additional leader for every 10 (or part of 10) young people, maintaining the balance of gender.
- For First Holy Communion preparation, the same ratio of adults to children is required as for Liturgy of the Word with Children — i.e. there must always be at least two leaders over the age of 18, but with more than 8 children there needs to be an additional adult helper for every 8 children.
- Leaders of the same gender as the young people need to be present. All volunteers should have completed the necessary CRB checks and have clearly defined roles.
- Leaders need to think and act carefully to avoid situations which could lead to difficulties of embarrassment, accusations or temptations. For example, a leader should never be alone with a young person.
- All leaders should be familiar with safeguarding guidelines and procedures and know what to do in the case of suspected or alleged abuse. If in any doubt, contact the parish Safeguarding Representative or the diocesan Safeguarding Office.
- The leader should ensure that there is adequate insurance cover, in particular for activities away from the normal meeting place.
- Keep a register of young people attending, keep session records and complete any incident forms if necessary.

- Ensure that for each young person, a consent form has been completed and if it is an activity away from the normal meeting place — e.g. a Confirmation retreat — that a separate parental consent form has been received. The consent forms should always be readily available in case contact information for parents and/or doctor is needed.
- For advice on babysitting provided by a parish or pastoral area, contact the Diocesan Safeguarding Co-ordinator (details on the diocesan website).

#### *Key Issues*

- Safe recruitment
- CRB Checks
- Approval for events
- Parental Consent
- Use of images
- Risk assessments
- Code of Conduct
- Regular evaluation

#### *Guidance on the use of images of children and young people involved in church activities*

The Catholic Church is committed to providing a safe environment for children and young people. Implicit in this is the commitment to ensure that all published images represent participants appropriately, and with due respect, and are taken and displayed in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

The key concerns regarding the use of images of children and young people relate to:

- The possible identification of a child when a photograph is accompanied by personal information.
- The inappropriate use, adaptation or copying of images for use in child pornography websites.
- The taking of inappropriate photographs or recorded images of children and young people.

#### *Recording images of children / young people*

When planning community celebrations, etc, e.g. First Holy Communion, at which many parents will wish to take photographs and/or professional photographers may be present, those attending should be advised of this in advance, and of the existence of this policy. If they decide to participate in the event, their consent to photographs being taken will be assumed. They will be advised of their responsibility for deciding how their children are photographed/filmed, and for removing them from the immediate area if they are concerned about any aspects of the recording.

- The consent of parents and children (who are of an age to give informed consent) will always be sought in writing for the display of images, and these images should not be retained.
- A general consent to group & activity photos is contained within the Parental Consent Form for Activities (available on the diocesan Youth website).
- Recording of images will take place within the context of the group/activity/event and those employed to record images of children and young people will not have unsupervised contact with children or young people.
- All children and young people featured in recordings must be appropriately dressed.
- The photograph/recording should focus on the activity. Wherever possible images of children and young people will be recorded in small groups.
- Any instances of the use of inappropriate images should be reported to the Safeguarding Co-ordinator/Officer/Adviser who will consider contacting the Internet Watch Foundation and/or the Police.
- Children, young people and parents will be informed that if any of them have concerns about inappropriate or intrusive photography, these should be reported to the event leader and recorded and managed in the same manner as other child protection concerns.
- All concerns regarding inappropriate or intrusive photography should be reported to the appropriate individual within the Church and any relevant external agency.

#### *Guidelines for publishing images*

- Always ask for parental/carer permission to use an image of a child/young person. This ensures that parents/carers are aware of the way the image of their child is representing the Church. A Parent/Carer and Child Permission Form is the best way of achieving this and can be done at the beginning of the session (available on the diocesan Youth website).
- Ask for the child/young person's permission to use their image, where they are of an age to give informed consent. This ensures that they are aware of the way the image is to be used to represent the Church. A Parent/Carer and Child Permission Form is the best way of achieving this and can be done when the child first becomes involved in the event/activity group.
- A general consent to group & activity photos is contained within the Parental Consent Form for activities.
- Think about the level of consideration you give to the use of images of children and young people, for example, the processes involved in choosing appropriate images for the newsletter or magazine. Apply an increased level of consideration to the images of children and young people used on websites.
- If a child/young person is named, avoid using their photograph.
- If a photograph is used, avoid naming the person. Personal details should never be revealed.

- The event leader must ensure that delayed streaming of images onto a website takes place. This provides an opportunity for the editing of inappropriate clips (e.g. disarranged clothing).

### 3. Health and Safety

#### *Risk Assessment*

#### *General guidance (particularly relevant to Confirmation preparation)*

1. Risk assessments should be completed well before the event/activity and approved by the event leader and a suitably qualified individual. If in doubt, seek advice from the respective diocesan Advisor.
2. A risk assessment should not be complex but simply comprehensive.
3. A formal assessment of any anticipated risks has the aim of identifying any risks and reducing them to an acceptable level. Safety is always the prime consideration. If the risks cannot be managed safely, then the event/activity should not take place.
4. The risk assessment should be based on the following considerations:
  - a) What are the hazards?
  - b) Who might be affected by them?
  - c) What safety measures need to be in place to reduce risks to an acceptable level?
  - d) Can the event leader put the safety measures in place?
  - e) What steps will be taken in an emergency?
5. The following factors should be taken into consideration when assessing the risks:
  - a) The type of event/activity and the level at which it is being undertaken.
  - b) The location, routes and modes of transport
  - c) The competence, experience and qualifications of adult helpers.
  - d) The ratio and gender of adults to children
  - e) The group members' ages, competence, fitness, temperament and the suitability of the activity.
  - f) The specific or medical needs of the children/young people.
  - g) Seasonal conditions, weather and timing.
  - h) How to cope when a child/young person becomes unable or unwilling to continue.
  - i) The need to monitor the risks throughout the event/activity.
6. The person carrying out the risk assessment should record and give copies to all leaders prior to the event/activity with details of the measures they should take to avoid or reduce the risks. Parish priests or leaders of the organisation should also be given a copy so that approval, as necessary, can be given with a clear understanding that effective planning has taken place.

7. Frequent visits to local venues such as a leisure centre may not need a risk assessment every time. Nevertheless, it is essential not to become complacent. A generic assessment of the risks of such visits should be made at regular intervals and careful monitoring should take place.

The following points may be helpful:

- Ensure that all premises are safe and well maintained, reporting any problems to the person responsible.
- Ensure that there is a first aid kit that is checked regularly, and try to ensure that there is someone present who is trained in its use.
- Be aware of where the nearest telephone is for emergencies and know where fire alarms and extinguishers are kept as well as the location of emergency exits.
- Ensure that where minibuses and/or private cars are used there is adequate insurance and any necessary permits.
- Plan carefully
- Leaders need to clarify and agree objectives
- Young people with special needs may need further consideration.

#### **4. Practical issues**

##### *Appropriate dress and associated matters*

Children and young people should be dressed appropriately when receiving the sacraments. In terms of good stewardship, it might be possible either to 'recycle' more elaborate outfits within the parish/pastoral area, or use regular school uniforms with special sashes across them to mark the occasion.

Although some kind of white garment is needed for Baptism (often a white shawl is used), the colour of the clothes that children and young people wear for other sacramental celebrations can be decided within the parish/pastoral area. Young people who use hair styling products might find it useful to remember that the laying-on of hands is part of the Confirmation rite.

In this connection, the increasing use of limos and other manifestations of the 'prom' culture are to be discouraged at celebrations of First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

It can be useful to remember that the celebration of the sacrament itself is the 'occasion', not the party afterwards.

## *Godparents and Sponsors*

Persons fulfilling these roles need to be in good standing with the Church, and to have received the sacrament of Confirmation in the Catholic Church.

"To be permitted to take on the function of sponsor a person must:

- be designated by the one to be baptized, by the parents or the person who takes their place, or in their absence by the pastor or minister and have the aptitude and intention of fulfilling this function;
- have completed the sixteenth year of age, unless the diocesan bishop has established another age, or the pastor or minister has granted an exception for a just cause;
- be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist and who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on;
- not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared;
- not be the father or mother of the one to be confirmed."

(CCL 874, 893)

## **5. Administrative issues**

### *Baptism*

The priest or deacon will normally take charge of the baptismal register.

There are two kinds of baptismal certificates: the commercially-published card, which may be organised by a member of the preparation team but is not obligatory, and the "official" certificate of baptism, a Church document which needs to be produced as proof that the Baptism has taken place, e.g. for Confirmation and Marriage as well as for school enrolment.

### *Confirmation*

- At the parents' meeting, give out a list of dates. This allows for changes to familiar routines to be accommodated.
- Keep a register for each session. As well as being a Safeguarding requirement it will be helpful to monitor who is attending regularly.
- Keep the clergy informed about what is happening.

The parish is responsible for sending Confirmation documentation to the baptismal parish of each candidate.

## *First Holy Communion*

- At the parents' meeting, give out a list of dates. This allows for changes to familiar routines to be accommodated.
- Keep a register for each session. As well as being a Safeguarding requirement it will be helpful to monitor who is attending regularly.
- Keep the clergy informed about what is happening.

First Holy Communion certificates are customary but not obligatory.

## **6. Sample role descriptors for catechists**

The Department for Pastoral Formation are developing Role descriptors to help support catechists in their role. These will be added soon.

## **7. How to select resources**

*(This section derives its inspiration from Becoming Confident Catechists by Paddy Rylands [Kevin Mayhew, 2009])*

In selecting a resource, the following questions (not exhaustive) about a resource may be helpful:

- a) Who was it prepared for and is it appropriate or realistic for the intended audience in terms of:
  - location, age, ethnic group, gender, ministry, life state or situation, disabilities...
  - use of language and presentation (fonts, layout, slides, images, illustrations, sound quality...)
  - expectations (time commitment, equipment, cost, literacy level...)
- b) Would they enjoy using it? (It also helps if the catechists like the resource too!)
- c) What methodology does it use? Is it appropriate? Can it be easily adapted?
- d) What assumptions does it make?
  - about the local church community, families and relationships in general, the society...
  - experience, faith stage, prayer routine, participation in sacraments, maturity....
- e) How does it respect and nurture all elements of faith?
  - Is it Christ-centred? Does it promote growth in relationship with God? How?
  - Is it inspired by the Scriptures? Does it foster continuity with the Church's Tradition?
  - Is it rooted in prayer? Does it encourage opportunities for prayer?

- Does it help individuals gain more knowledge of themselves as persons and (baptised) believers?
- Does it enable deepening relationships and communion with others? In what way?
- Does it engage with the liturgy? Is there any space for rituals and symbols?
- Does it empower for mission? Does it nurture appropriate ecumenical sensitivity?
- Does it engage with the “signs of the times”? Does it aim to reach “beyond the pews”?

f) How flexible or taxing is it to use it?

- in terms of preparation, adaptations, additional resources...

## 8. List of abbreviations

CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> 1994 (revised edition 1999)
CCL	<i>Code of Canon Law</i> 1983
GDC	<i>General Directory for Catechesis</i> 1997
GOBF	<i>Go Out and Bear Fruit</i> , Diocese of Portsmouth, 2005
SC	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> (Vatican II: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 1963)

## 9. Contact details

Department for Pastoral Formation  
 Park Place Pastoral Centre,  
 Winchester Road, Wickham  
 Hants. PO17 5HA

Telephone: 01329 835583

Email: [catechesis@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk](mailto:catechesis@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk)