

Dear Parents,

As we look forward to enrolling your child into the formal, parish preparation programme for his or her reception of First Holy Communion I need to bring to your attention a change to this year's programme of events.

Firstly, I must assert that, as parents, you are the primary educators in the life and Catholic faith of your child, and so I speak here only of that formal or direct parish preparation that will hopefully support you in this task. Clearly, a child's preparation for First Holy Communion does not just begin this autumn. Ideally – the last couple of years have clearly been exceptional - a Catholic child entering Year 3 should already have gained some basic familiarity, understanding and experience of Sunday Mass through their regular attendance with members of their family. Indeed, I know that there are children who are already excited and looking forward to celebrating their First Holy Communion. Nothing about coming to Mass – from our basic prayers and gestures, signs and symbols, and what happens when – should by now be unfamiliar or uncomfortable for your child. In theory, the transition from simply attending Mass to receiving Holy Communion regularly should be something of a seamless robe.

Each individual child's journey in faith is important to our community and we recognise that, for some families, many of modern life's demands make regular attendance at Sunday Mass difficult. I like to think we are sensitive to some of the difficulties; for example, the weekend dictates of parental separation or the lure of the many sporting and leisure opportunities that now crowd our previously 'quiet' Sunday mornings. Nonetheless, 'attending the Sunday Eucharist is a personal response to the selfless offering of Christ's love and part of the way of life proper to all the baptized. When we say "Amen" to Christ in receiving his Body, we express the love of God which is deep within us, and at the end of Mass, when we are sent forth; we express our love for our neighbour, especially those in need,' (The Bishops of England & Wales statement: *Honouring Sunday*, 19 November, 2021).

In order to make clear the importance of regular attendance at Sunday Mass there will be no formal one-off First Holy Communion Mass next year. Instead, you can simply apply for a date and any one of the weekend Masses after the formal preparation programme has been completed (this includes First Confession). I envisage therefore celebrating a number of Masses in the late Spring and early Summer at which First Holy Communion will take place, quite probably in groups of three or four; we shall see. Hopefully, this will reduce any sense of expectation or 'timetable pressure' on those families who, for whatever reason, have not been able to maintain a regular and stable attendance at Mass. In such a case, we can simply wait until the appropriate moment is reached later in the year or indeed in subsequent following years. It should be noted that for a variety of reasons some children do not receive the Sacrament until later in their childhood and this is perfectly understandable and acceptable.

To be fair, if I want to avoid the difficulties of setting a target date then that must apply to all children equally. Therefore, I am also willing to consider requests regarding those children

whom their parents and catechists consider sufficiently ready and prepared earlier than our regular programme might suggest.

Finally, looking ahead, I especially commend to parents with children in Years 1 & 2 our Sunday, Children's Liturgy of the Word. It does seem from experience that regular attendance is of considerable benefit to a child when the time comes to directly prepare to celebrate First Holy Communion in Year 3.

The pressures on our Catholic practices and culture are many and so we give thanks to God for your decision to seek Sacramental preparation for your child as an integral part of your decision to live the Christian faith in your family. Our parish community is anxious to support you in this noble and worthy cause and to enable your child to take his or her further initiation into the Body of Christ.

Yours, in the Lord,

Rev Mark McManus

First Holy Communion Programme 2023

These are the dates for the classes that will take place in at St Joseph's School. As the formal part of our community's preparation the classes are designed to support and enhance the work that is already taking place within the family.

January 14th - 09.30-10.30am Introduction with parents

January 28th - 09.30am - 12.00pm

February 25th - 09.30am - 12.00pm

March 25th - 09.30am - 12.00pm

April 29th - 09.30am - 12.30pm

Suggested reading for First Communion candidates

The Mass - illustrated for children by Susan Bateman ISBN: 978-0-9555380-7-0

My simple Mass book - CTS - ISBN: 978-1-86082-878-2

YOUCAT for Kids - CTS - ISBN: 978-1-78469-595-8

Further suggestions can be sought from our catechists.