



After-School Sacramental Preparation Programme Policy

Policy 1st Devised 2010/ Last Updated March 2024

Introduction

1. Providing for the Catholic education of children is primarily the responsibility of their parents. This responsibility is *ordinarily* supported by the local Catholic school and by the wider parish community in partnership. In the absence of a Catholic school, or where a child has been unable to secure a place in the local Catholic school, and parents have enrolled their child in a non-Catholic school, a greater commitment is necessitated from parents regarding their child's religious education.
2. The Code of Canon Law states: *"Parents are to send their children to those schools which will provide for their Catholic education. If they cannot do this, they are bound to ensure the proper Catholic Education of their children"* (Canon 793).
3. Where such a commitment is evident, and parents of children attending non-Catholic schools request that their children receive the sacraments, their local parish will endeavour to support them to this end. Weekly attendance at Sunday Eucharist is the principal sign of the commitment of parents to the religious education of their child.
4. The Code of Canon Law outlines the duty of the Parish Priest to *"ensure, in accordance with the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop, that children are properly prepared for First Confession and First Holy Communion and for the Sacrament of Confirmation, by means of catechetical formation over an appropriate period of time"* (Canon 777 °2).

Background

5. The Christian family is called the 'Domestic Church'. It's the place where faith, love and values are passed on to children. It is God's design that fathers and mothers serve as the primary mentors, educators and guides for their children in matters of faith.

Catholic Parish schools and parish programs like 'Do This in Memory' exist to aid and support parents but can never be substitutes for active Christian parenting and participation in the liturgical life of the worshipping community.

6. The following policy has been compiled by Ashbourne Parish in consultation with the Parish Priest, and the Diocese of Meath Guidelines for Religious Instruction and Sacramental Preparation for pupils attending non-Catholic Schools to assist Catholic parents with children in non-parish schools who wish to enrol their child in the parish sacramental program.

Sacraments

7. Parents new to the parish or enrolling their children for the first time in parish sacramental preparation classes should note that in Ashbourne Parish candidates for both First Holy Communion and Confirmation receive two year's preparation. A child must be baptised in order to receive the Sacraments of First Confession, First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

8. Parents who wish for their children to receive the sacraments of First Penance and First Holy Communion will be offered instruction in First and Second Class or above. Child receives Sacrament of First Confession during Lent in Year 1 of preparation. The Programme concentrates on First Holy Communion during Year 2. Parents who wish for their children to receive the sacrament of Confirmation will be offered instruction in Fifth and Sixth Class. Additional time may be required on occasion to facilitate additional preparation for sacraments. Parents will be informed in advance of any changes to the prescribed programme.

9. The Sacrament of Confirmation is traditionally associated with sixth class. However, Confirmation like all sacraments may be deferred until the child is in Secondary School or wishes to wait until they are older. A child does not have to receive a sacrament because they are in a given class in mainstream education.

10. Ashbourne Parish does not support any home-schooling model of preparation for Sacraments.

Registration

11. It is the parents/guardian's responsibility to register their child to attend the parish sacramental preparation classes. An Information Meeting for Parents on the after school classes and the registration process takes place after Easter each year. Parents are invited through the parish newsletter and parish Facebook accounts. Please note that the parish does not write out to individual schools and families with registration details. The parish policy, code of behaviour and After School Sacramental Preparation Registration Form are available at the meeting. After the Parents Information Meeting these forms are obtained from the priests of the parish after Sunday Mass. The parents or guardians should introduce their child to one of our priests and make known their request to participate in the after school program.

12. In order to register a child for sacramental preparation, parents bring the completed forms and required documents to the Parish Office during opening hours, (Monday-Thursday– 9.30-12noon). Parents/guardians sign the form stating that they understand how the parish programme operates and the obligations on them as a parent/guardian. Registration Forms should be accompanied by the required financial contribution. Once the child is enrolled parents will be given the class schedule (day, venue, time), before classes start in September. Usually, the classes are on a Tuesday or Wednesday afternoon. Should family contact details change during the year, it is the responsibility of the parents to let the Parish Office know immediately.

13. If their child is baptised in a parish other than Ashbourne-Donaghmore, parents should furnish a Baptismal Certificate when submitting their child's Registration/Consent Form. If the child is baptised in Ashbourne-Donaghmore Parish, this should be indicated on the Registration/Consent Form and the appropriate search form completed.

14. For insurance reasons only registered children are allowed to participate in the parish classes.

15. Children who reside in parishes other than Ashbourne but wish to avail of sacramental preparation in Ashbourne-Donaghmore Parish will require a letter of permission from their Parish Priest approving religious instruction outside their parish of residence. This should accompany the Registration/Consent Form.

16. To comply with Diocesan requirements, no exemptions can be made to the above terms and conditions.

Teacher-Parent Relationship

17. Parents are assured that the parish takes great care in the appointment of the Catechists. The Catechists are Garda Vetted in line with Diocesan Safe-guarding Procedures. Each Catechist must have the relevant qualifications in religious education in order to prepare the children for sacraments.

18. In order for the Catechist to build up a relationship with the child it is good practice for parents to introduce themselves to the child's teacher at the beginning of each academic year.

19. The children attending the catechetical classes must at all times follow the Parish Code of Behaviour.

20. Parents are made aware of meetings, rehearsals, changes to the class schedule via the weekly catechetical classes. There is no obligation on the Parish to send home reminder notes, texts or emails to parents.

21. Parents who may wish to discuss matters of concern relating to their child are kindly requested to do so by prior appointment with the Catechist. For obvious reasons, classes should not be interrupted at any point during the programme.

Attendance & Diocesan Requirements

22. In order to replicate the class-time given to religious instruction in main-stream Catholic schools, each student must complete 35 hours of contact time (35 weeks of religious instruction in any given year). An 'allowance' of 3 weeks absenteeism will be given in any academic year.

23. Attendance records and the curriculum covered will be inspected on an annual basis by the Diocesan Catechists appointed by the Bishop of Meath.

Financial Contribution for Classes

24. An annual fee is charged which goes towards the delivery of the programme and the payment of catechists. The contribution is paid in two instalments: the first is enclosed with the Registration Form and the remainder by the end of February.

25. All books, workbooks and other materials are included in the fee. The parish of Ashbourne pays the shortfall in the provision of these classes and parents are asked to do their best to work at all times in co-operation and understanding of this parish outreach.

Special Needs Children

26. Ashbourne-Donaghmore Parish facilitates any parents who wish their child to receive sacraments in due course. If a child has specific learning needs, details should be noted on the child's registration/consent form. If your child receives additional support in school these learning needs should also be detailed. For children with learning difficulties, a parent may be required to remain on the premises for the duration of the class or parents may be supported in providing the catechesis.

27. In cases of acute special need where the parent or catechist believes that the child will not benefit from attending the catechetical programme, an appointment should be made through the parish office to meet the coordinator of the parish programme. In such circumstances the parish and the parents will decide together what is best for the child. In these circumstances, special arrangements may have to be made.

Code of Behaviour

28. The Catechists follow the Code of Behaviour for children which parents/guardians receive and sign up to at the time of registration. This is in line with Meath Diocesan Safeguarding guidelines. The Code of Behaviour is designed to create a positive learning environment for children and Catechists. Good discipline is required in terms of a child's behaviour in class, respect for others and their attendance and punctuality.

Date for First Confession, First Holy Communion or Confirmation

29. First Confession will take place on a Saturday afternoon during Lent in Year 1 of the After School Programme.

30. First Holy Communion will take place at an allocated Mass on a Saturday in May or early June. The date and time are announced at the First Communion Parents Meeting each September.

31. The date for Confirmation is set by the Diocese of Meath and is published in the newsletter once it is confirmed to the parish. It is made known to the candidates and families once classes begin at the beginning of term.

Please note: The announcement of dates for sacraments by Ashbourne-Donaghmore Parish or the Diocese of Meath does not confirm that any child will receive the sacrament. This is entirely dependent upon completion of the required hours of preparation and religious instruction.

‘Do this in Memory’ or ‘Confirming our Children’ Parish-Links Programmes

32. These two parish-links programmes are an obligatory part of your child’s preparation for sacraments which involve a series of parish-based Masses specifically associated with the sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

33. These programmes take place in year two of preparation for First Holy Communion and year two of preparation for Confirmation. The programme is outlined at a parish meeting of parents from all schools in the parish in September-October. Parental support of this programme is essential to ensure the children’s involvement in the rituals.

Mass Attendance

34. Parents are reminded that weekly attendance at Sunday Eucharist is the principal sign of the commitment of parents to the religious education of their child. It is expected that parents will bring their children to Mass and that it is a necessary part of their child’s preparation for sacraments, faith formation and development.

Data Protection.

35. All Registration forms and associated documents will be held on file in accordance with the data protection policy of the Diocese of Meath. The data received will be used only for the purposes indicated on the form. It may be accessed only by those with responsibility for the administration and oversight of the programme, parish administration personnel, safeguarding personnel, and catechists. Every effort will be made to ensure appropriate security and procedures safeguard your data against unlawful processing, accidental loss, destruction and damage.

Please Note that it is the responsibility of the Parish Priest of Ashbourne Parish to monitor the delivery of the Sacramental Preparation Programme and the celebration of the Sacraments.

