



Ashbourne-Donaghmore Parish Diocese of Meath



Parish Sacramental Preparation Programme Policy

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, 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.

6. The following policy has been compiled by Ashbourne-Donaghmore Parish in consultation with the Parish Priest, Parish Pastoral Council and the Diocese of Meath Guidelines for Religious Instruction and Sacramental Preparation. It aims to assist Catholic parents with children in non-parish schools who wish to enrol their child in the Parish Sacramental Preparation Programme. However, no programme can ever be a substitute for active Christian parenting and participation in the liturgical life of the worshipping community.

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-Donaghmore Parish each sacrament receives two years preparation. A child must be baptised in order to receive the Sacraments of First Confession, First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

8. Parents/Guardians* 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. 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 6th 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.

Registration

10. It is the Parents/Guardians responsibility to register their child to attend the parish sacramental preparation classes. Registration opens each year in the month of May and concludes at the close of the Parish Office (12noon) at the end of August (*dates confirmed on an annual basis*). The parish will notify parents of the need for registration in the parish newsletter. The parish policy, code of behaviour and relevant forms can be downloaded from the parish website: www.ashbourneparish.ie. The parish does not write out to individual schools and families with registration details.

11. In order to register a child for sacramental preparation parents can either call to the Parish Office during office opening hours (Mon-Fri – 9.30-12noon; Sat – 10-12noon), or download the relevant forms from the Parish Website, including Parish Policy and Code of Behaviour.

Parents/Guardians sign the form stating that they understand how the parish programme operates and the obligations on them as a Parent/Guardian. When documentation has been received by the Parish Office, parents will be given the class schedule.(day, venue, time) passport, and the Catechist's name. Should contact numbers change, it is the responsibility of the parents to let the Parish Office know immediately.

12. 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.

13. For insurance reasons, only registered children are allowed to participate in the Parish classes.

14. 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.

Late Registration

15. Late registration is not possible since each child must complete a **minimum** of 32 classes, attended in full, in order to advance to the next year of religious instruction or receive the sacraments.

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/Teacher* 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. After the first class, parents must accompany their child to the concrete ramp in the courtyard area to the right of the Parish Office and collect their child promptly from the courtyard after each class.

19. 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.
22. Parents are reminded that the only forum for discussing matters relating to the Parish Sacramental Preparation Programme is a pre-arranged meeting with the programme Co-ordinators.

Attendance & Diocesan Requirements

23. 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. [Please note: If a child is absent for more than three weeks, reception of the sacrament will be deferred and the candidate will have to repeat the year in its entirety until the child has completed the prescribed contact time (32hours) stipulated by the Diocese of Meath.] No exceptions will be made to the minimum requirements.
24. On submitting the Registration/Consent Form, each child will receive a 'passport'. This passport is retained by the child and brought to class each week. It will then be stamped at the end of each class as evidence of attendance. The teacher will also retain a roll for verification. When completed, the passport should be returned to the Catechist and the Parish Office will issue a Certificate of Completion. The Certificate of Completion is required to progress from one year to the next for sacramental preparation.
25. Attendance records and the curriculum covered will be inspected on an annual basis by the Diocesan Catechists appointed by Bishop Smith.

Contribution/Charges for Classes

26. Currently a fee of €110 per year will be charged for the delivery of the programme and the payment of Catechists. This fee can be paid in two instalments (€55 – by the end of October and the remaining €55 by the end of February). Please enclosed fee in an envelope with your child's name clearly written on it. This envelope can be given to the Catechist on the day of class, and it will be forwarded on to the Parish Office, or it can be dropped into the Parish Office directly during office hours.

27. Receipts for all contributions received will be issued and distributed to the children via the sacramental preparation classes.

28. Failure to pay the required fee will necessitate dismissal from the sacramental preparation classes. The decision of the Catechetical Team on these matters is final.

29. Parents will be required to purchase First Holy Communion/Confirmation workbooks. The prescribed book-titles will be issued at the beginning of the programme. These books will be purchased in bulk by the parish in order to pass any savings on to parents and thereby reduce the burden of additional costs on families.

30. If the 'passport' is lost, a new one can be re-issued from the Parish Office for a charge of €5.

31. In all cases, it is the responsibility of the Catholic parent-body as a whole to ensure all costs relating to the payment of Catechists is covered in the annual fee. (Please note: where a situation arises that there is not an adequate number of children to warrant running a sacramental programme, the classes may be deferred to another year to allow numbers to build up until there are enough financial contributions to warrant the hiring of a Catechist).

Special Needs Children

32. It is the wish of Ashbourne-Donaghmore Parish to facilitate as many parents as possible who wish their child to receive sacraments. 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.

33. 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 and special arrangements may have to be made.

Code of Behaviour

34. The Catechists follow the Code of Behaviour for children which has been read by parents/guardians and signed 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

35. Dates for First Confession and First Holy Communion are decided by the Parish Team on an annual basis and published in the Parish Newsletter.

36. The date for Confirmation is set by the Diocese of Meath.

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 and the completion of the 'passport'.

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

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

38. The above programmes take place in the second year of preparation for First Holy Communion and for Confirmation. A meeting for parents will be held annually in Sept/Oct to outline these Parish-Links Programmes. Parental support is essential to ensure the children's involvement in the rituals. The details and dates of these programmes will be available on the Parish Website.

Mass Attendance

39. 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 this is a necessary part of their child's preparation for sacraments, faith formation and development.

Catholic Parents' Committee

40. Where the parish deems it necessary to establish a 'Catholic Parents' Committee' it is formed from the catholic parent-body, with parents who have expressed a desire and willingness to support and assist the parish in their children's preparation for sacraments. The Catholic Committee, through their support to the parish, help to immerse their children further into the Christian community and parish life.

Responsibilities of the Catholic Parents' Committee

- To assist the Catechist with supervision during class time. (See below)
- To assist the parish with administrative duties associated with the programme.
- To liaise with parish/diocesan agencies – Safeguarding Reps, Liturgy Groups, etc.
- To encourage active involvement of parents in the parish-links 'Do This in Memory' and 'Confirming our Children' programmes.
- To assist in preparation of the Annual End of Year Mass and presentation of Certificates of Completion.
- To organise of First Holy Communion/Confirmation 'breakfasts'.
- To assist with the organisation of retreats for Confirmation candidates.

Irish Language-Medium Schools

41. While the parish will endeavour to provide sacramental preparation through Irish, this is entirely dependent upon the parish's ability to secure Catechists with an adequate level of Irish and the required qualifications in religious instruction.

42. Ashbourne Donaghmore Parish will endeavour to celebrate the sacraments through Irish (with elements in English) subject to the availability of priests.

43. Pursuant to the data protection legislation in force this jurisdiction; all documentation associated with the Sacramental Preparation Programme in Ashbourne-Donaghmore Parish will be stored securely and confidentially. It is retained for lawful purposes, and is not used or disclosed in any manner incompatible with those purposes. Access will be restricted to the Parish Priest, and/or the Parish Representatives, including Parish Safeguarding Representatives. This applies to: parental consent forms, incident records, necessary medical details, personal contact details, Safeguarding Declaration and Volunteers Forms, Garda Vetting Forms, etc.

44. Parents/guardians who are dissatisfied with any aspect of the classes should inform the Parish Sacramental Preparation Programme co-ordinators.

45. Any concerns regarding the welfare and safety of children participating in the sacramental preparation programme should be brought immediately to the attention of the Parish Safeguarding Representative, the Designated Person or the Statutory Authorities. Contact details are displayed on the notice boards in the Parish Office and the church porch.

**For the purpose of this entire policy document, the word 'Parents' includes also 'legal Guardians'. The word 'Catechist' is used interchangeably with the word 'Teacher'.*

Please Note:

The delivery of this programme is dependent upon parental assistance with supervision. If the parish cannot comply with supervision ratios prescribed by the National Board for Safeguarding Children the sacramental preparation programme cannot commence.

It is the responsibility of the Parish Priest of Ashbourne-Donaghmore Parish to monitor the delivery of the sacramental preparation programme and the celebration of the sacraments.