

St Mary's Faith Formation Guide



A guide to the
'Sacraments of Life....and the Life of Sacraments'
at St Mary's Parish Greensborough

2020

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Preface

The Catholic School as the place for holistic development of children

As Parish Priest of St. Mary's, one of my most important responsibilities is interviewing the parents who have enrolled their children into our parish school before they commence the school year. You may well remember that day yourself. I see it as an opportunity to meet you with your children together with our Principal, Helen Anderson, in order that we might begin to know one another and to begin to appreciate the uniqueness of your child whom you entrust to our care for his or her development and formation over the next seven years. As a Catholic school, our responsibility is not only the intellectual, but also the emotional, psychological, social and spiritual development of your child.

The parish, school and parents working in partnership

You may also remember that I make a point of saying that I believe that we as the parish and its school, work in partnership together with you as parents, not only in the academic development of your children, but also in their faith formation, understanding that you are choosing this school because, amongst other things, it also provides religious formation in the Catholic faith. You may also remember that I ask you if you are prepared to participate in formation sessions we offer to you as parents as your children prepare for reception of the sacraments. No one has, as yet, ever said they would not be prepared to do so. I explain that we are working together in partnership in forming your children in faith and that these occasions offer opportunities for you to better understand your own faith as adults so that you can better participate in that partnership and enable you to model to your child the importance and relevance of your Christian faith in your own life. Though I do not necessarily meet and interview all parents who send their children to one of the local State Primary Schools but request that they undergo preparation for the Sacraments through our Catechetics program on Sundays, I would like to make clear that they too work in partnership with the parish for the formation of their children in their Catholic Faith.

As a Catholic parish, we are mandated to teach the children of our school and Catechist classes the Traditions of our Catholic Christian Faith. However, Christian faith in God is not only knowledge about these Traditions; it is also about relationship with Jesus Christ. Our teachers hopefully reflect a relationship with Christ in their teaching, but it is essentially you, as parents who need to witness to this for your own children.

St. Mary's Faith Development Team

When you had your children baptised, you committed yourself to raising your child in the Catholic Faith. I can appreciate that you may have had little opportunity to develop in your own understanding of your Catholic Christian Faith since you left school. Since that time, much has happened in your own life and you have had to

develop in so many other ways: in your careers, in parenting skills, in your relationships and in a host of other areas of life as you mature to respond to the various situations that present themselves to you as adults. Your asking to have your children educated in a Catholic school, or your request to have them prepare for reception of the Sacraments through the Catechist Program or the RCIC offers you an opportunity to come to a deeper appreciation of your own Catholic Faith as adults. That is why our parish Faith Development Team, which consists of our School Principal, the Religious Education Coordinator, the Catechist Program coordinators, our Pastoral Associate, at least three parents of school children and I, meet regularly to plan and develop, amongst other things, the evenings for you as parents of children preparing for Sacraments.

Two Sacramental Formation evenings for parents

Each year there is a general Sacraments evening at the beginning of the year at which it is expected that all parents who have a child receiving a sacrament that year will participate. The Faith Development Team makes an effort to ensure that we have an engaging presenter each year that can enable adults to appreciate the relevance of sacraments in our daily lives. Because of the richness of sacramentality, each year a different presenter will be able to expand our appreciation of the sacraments from different perspectives. Therefore, it will never be repetitious, even if you have participated in one or more of these nights before.

The expectation is that you, as parents will participate in a second evening with your child for the particular Sacrament he or she is to receive that year. Again, the Faith Development Team tries to ensure that even though you may have participated in one of these evenings before for another child of yours, it will not be the same presentation. On these evenings we engage you with your children by facilitating you to discuss with them the significance and relevance of the Sacrament in your daily life and relationships. The presenters will always ask questions for you to discuss with your children that may be challenging, but always with the intention of enabling you to have a fruitful conversation with your child that can enrich your relationship with one another and deepen your understanding of the Sacrament for which your child is being prepared.

On the two nights in which you are asked to participate as parents, we are aiming to equip you to partner us in the faith formation of your children by enabling you to come to a deeper understanding of the sacraments at an adult level. I am sure that as parents you may be aware of a gap between what you learnt as children at school and what the Church is wanting to say today in its sacramental celebrations. The Sacramental Information evenings can act as a "bridging course", to make connections between what you recall from your own knowledge and experience and the role you now take on as faith formators of your children. I would never want to state that your participation at these two evening information sessions is

obligatory, but would hope that you can understand why they are important and that in your desire for your child to grow in Faith, you would want to be involved in a way that equips you for the task.

I recognise that participation at these two Sacramental Information evenings is really a basic minimum. I hope that they offer a taste that can be further satisfied by the use of our library resources, which offer books and DVDs. Also there are several opportunities throughout the year for Faith formation and days for a short retreat or reflection on life sessions that we offer for adults. Of course, participation in the prayer life of the parish community is the most fundamental opportunity for our growth in faith - particularly at the Sunday Eucharist and the times of sacramental Reconciliation.

Why this booklet?

Precisely because we are working in partnership for the faith formation of our children, we would like you as parents to be as informed and confident in your role as you can be so that we might work well together for the sake of our children. My hope is that this booklet will enable you to refresh your memories about the sacraments, and also learn something about the way the Church talks about these important religious rituals today, but more importantly, that you may come to a deeper understanding of our Catholic Faith and a more life-enriching appreciation of our Sacramental life. The initiation of your children into the Catholic Faith is important to you because it has been a fundamental part of your own identity which you now want to impart to your children as theirs. As your parish and school, we honour this and seek to assist you to develop this identity for your children.

The sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist and Reconciliation are important moments in your child's unfolding journey of faith within the Catholic community. This booklet has been written to assist you with the wonderful and, at times, daunting task of supporting your child's preparation to celebrate these sacraments. This can be an exciting time. The anticipation of celebrating an important religious ritual may re-awaken in you memories associated with your own preparation. There may be moments of excitement and wonder, but there may also be moments of uncertainty or confusion as you take an active role in preparing your child to take another step along the way in the life of the Christian community.

For some of you, it may be the hopeful prompting or spoken expectations of grandparents that moves you to find out more about what you can do to help your child prepare. In this case along with non-Catholic parents, or parents who no longer feel at home in the Church, you may feel inadequate and unsure about how to support your child at this important time. My hope is that this booklet and your participation in the Sacramental preparation evenings will enable you to also appreciate that the Sacraments are relevant to our daily lives and help enrich our lives and relationships.

This booklet also provides the practical details you will require to prepare for the day of the Sacramental celebration. It offers suggestions designed to help you support and learn with your child at home, and to make use of opportunities to pray together as a family.

Why are parents asked to be involved in the sacramental preparation process?

The Church recognises that parents are the first educators of their children in the faith. Children need the support and example of their parents as they prepare to learn more about the Church so that they can take an active role in the mission of the Church. This is the community of believers who claim that God is important in their lives and that it is important to belong to one another in order to live life more meaningfully. I would recommend strongly that you read through this booklet quite thoroughly from beginning to end in order that it might be of real benefit to you. In this way it could help to deepen your understanding of the Sacraments and your Catholic Faith. Only after that, go back to the section that is relevant to your child at this time of his or her preparation for one of the Sacraments.

I look forward to continuing working with you for the holistic development of your children at St. Mary's as I ask for your continued support to this effect. I also trust that in working together in partnership, you will be enabled to come to a better understanding of your faith so that you may come to see not only its relevance to your life and relationships but also to live life more deeply. My hope is that you also recognise that St. Mary's (or whichever parish you may belong to in the future) is your spiritual home and can be the source of nourishment for your inner life.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven Rigo". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath it.

(Parish Priest)

Foreword

Times have changed...

We live in times that are marked by rapid change — not all of it good. Everyone these days seems to live life in the fast lane: we work longer hours, often both parents work and we have access to a multitude of opportunities for sport, recreation, entertainment and socializing. We also live in times that often do not support family life and do not value as highly the things our parents and grandparents valued. There was a time when it was said that the family that prayed together stayed together. When was the last time you heard that?

Nowadays we experience many split layers in family life: different meal times, meals on the run in front of TV, odd working schedules, extra-curricular activities several nights a week and shopping and sporting activities all days and nights of the week. When we arrive at Sunday, more of the same happens, and people often have little energy or inclination to make their way to Church.

We have changed...

In addition, some people who have been away from church-going for a period of time find it difficult to find a place in the community where they know and understand what is going on, because there have been significant changes since they last participated in a Sunday Mass. For many parents this all becomes relevant when one of their children begins preparing to celebrate a sacrament, such as Reconciliation, Eucharist or Confirmation. Even hearing words like Eucharist and Reconciliation can be daunting. These new names for the sacraments reflect just a couple of the changes people face as they try to understand new ways of reflecting on the sacraments and being part of the Christian community today.

The way things are now

Since the Vatican Council, which concluded in 1965, and during which much was done to revise the Sacraments and the way they are celebrated, the celebration of the sacraments is seen less as a time for children to 'learn about religion' and more as an opportunity for parents to share their faith journey with their children and to initiate their children into both a Christian way of life and a supportive Christian community.

In the Christian way of life, the community is important. Children need to learn to pray, to be with the community when it celebrates on the Lord's Day and to take part in the worship of the community. By coming to church on Sunday and participating in the celebration of the Eucharist, children learn about the Christian story, and come to understand what the Christian community is all about and how they can be part of it.

The sacraments are opportunities to acknowledge the various moments along the journey when the children, with their parents, become more involved in the life and

work of the Christian community. Becoming more involved includes developing a personal relationship with Jesus through prayer, learning about and getting involved in the good works of the community and being with the community for special celebrations.

What does it mean to be part of the Christian Community?

Take a moment to think about any time you might have wanted to join a club or a team:

What was it about that particular group of people that attracted you and made you want to belong to the group?

- How did you go about making enquiries about the group?
- Did someone tell you about the group or team and what it was all about?
- How did you go about making formal arrangements to join?
- What was required of you before you could be accepted into the team or club?
- What about training, being actively involved with the club, before and after matches?
- How did you begin to understand the team's goals and strategies?
- When did you begin to experience a sense of belonging and an ability to contribute to the work of the group?

To be a member is to be 'initiated'

The process of becoming a member of a group, described above, can also be called 'initiation'. People, who are 'Initiated' into a group, become full members of that group with rights and privileges denied to people who are not members. In the same way, we talk about being 'initiated' into the 'group' that is our faith community. For Catholics, our faith community includes both the parish in which we receive the sacraments and worship and, on another level, the world-wide Church.

The Sacramental Life of the Church

Belonging to the Church as members brings with it privileges and responsibilities. The primary privilege is 'belonging' itself. Belonging to others is fundamental to being human. We are social beings and we need to have a sense of belonging to people who help us form our identity and the need we have to be among people with whom I feel comfortable and who accept me for who I am - can be with me in my times of joy and celebration as well as in my times of pain, sorrow and grief. To belong to the Church means that I belong to a people who claim by their lives and

the values they live, that God is important in their lives and that their relationship with Jesus and with one another makes a difference to the way they live and the priorities they have.

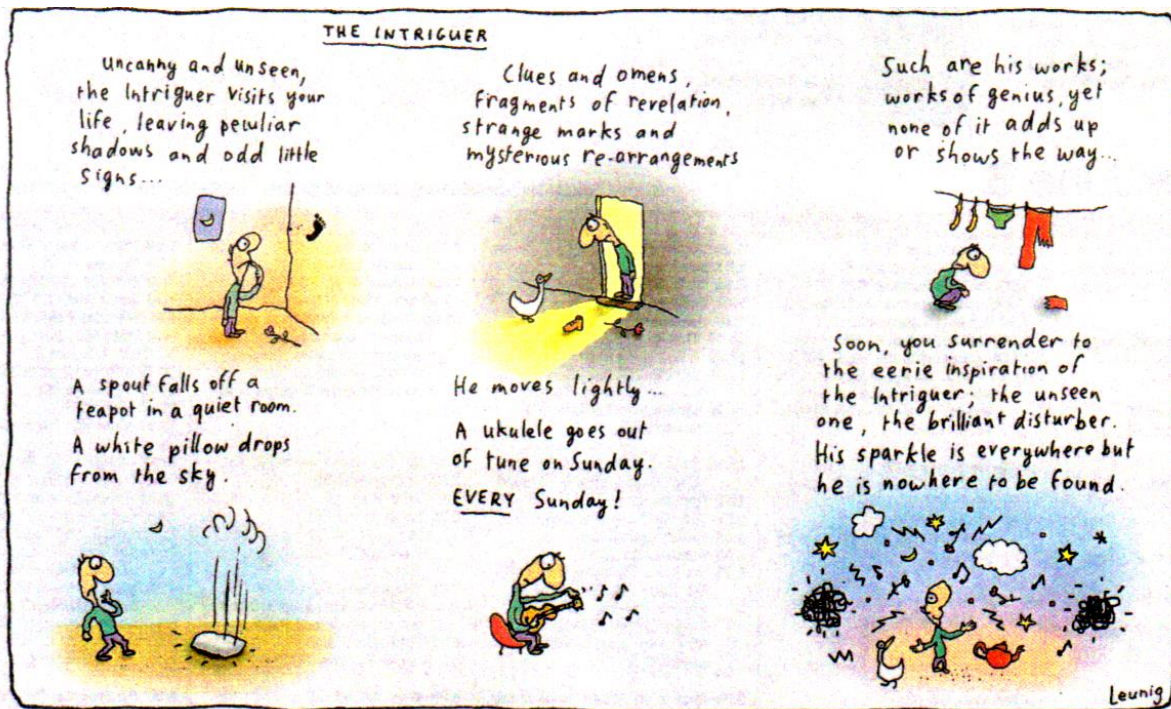
Belonging to the Church not only enables members to celebrate the Sacraments, but also charges them and empowers them to live out the meaning of each of the Sacraments in their lives so that they just don't remain single events celebrated in the church building.

Even though your children will generally be only celebrating the four Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist and Reconciliation, this booklet will briefly give an explanation of each of the Sacraments - what it is that is being celebrated, as well as what it is that each of these Sacraments calls and empowers us to do in our daily lives. Each of the Sacraments can be placed under three headings that help us understand their individual nature and purpose:

Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist;

Sacraments of Healing: Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick;

Sacraments of Ministry: Marriage and Holy Order.



The Gift of Imagination - to see beyond the obvious

Michael Leunig is a master of portraying how the 'sacred mystery' is present in the ordinary things of life and as such, we can easily miss it. When we do see it, we see much more deeply and our lives are enriched by what we see. In the above cartoon, I believe that Leunig is trying to point out for us that God communicates with us in the ordinary, yet sometimes mystifying events and circumstances of our lives. The Sacraments themselves use ordinary symbols like water, oil, bread and wine, the laying on of hands, etc. and ordinary words such as "I baptise you..." or "I absolve you...", etc. to communicate to the one who receives the Sacrament, what God seeks to say and do in that person's life. In living out the Sacrament in a person's life, that person becomes attuned to the God who seeks to encounter us in our daily lives. God gives us the gift of imagination so that we can see beyond the obvious to the something more that is contained in it.

Children have an uncanny capacity to see more deeply because their capability to imagine is quite powerful. As we grow older, we are educated to learn "facts" and we tend to remember them and develop skills to understand and analyse them, but in the process, our powers of imagination can become dulled.

A grandmother related this story that captures something of what I am saying. Her grandson, who is 5 years old, has as a treasured possession - a tatty little blanket - that he often holds onto as he goes to bed. He allows it to be washed, but it gets more and more tattered after each wash. His mother offered to give him a new one, but he insisted that he wants to keep the old one. He agreed to his grandmother's offer to mend it and when she asked him why it was so important to him, he replied

that it was special to him because that was the blanket his mummy used to wrap him in and hold him when he was a baby. Something so old, simple, ordinary and tatty that anyone else would discard is so special, significant and filled with meaning for this young boy.

God encounters us in life experiences

I'm sure you have treasured possessions like that yourself - in themselves they are ordinary, perhaps insignificant to others, but for you, they are full of meaning - sacred. God reveals himself, communicates with us and encounters us in the



'ordinary' & often mundane experiences of our lives and in often seemingly insignificant things that are carriers of a deeper meaning for us. They are not necessarily immediately powerful, nor are they necessarily wonderful or filled with joy. They may be sometimes tragic and painful circumstances that require our seeing more deeply into them to capture the sacred significance and perceive the God who encounters us through them. The circumstances and experiences can be as broad as the sense of awe and wonder we may have when looking into the clear night sky,

or standing on the top of Mt. Feathertop, or sitting on the edge of Bell's Beach, or the experience of holding your child immediately after having given birth, or the compassion you feel when hundreds of thousands of people perish as a result of natural disasters or as a consequence of wars, or the experience of grief after having lost someone you love. If you allow them to, these can be profound and deep experiences that touch you to the core and move you to feelings of wonder or deep joy or compassion or anger or pain. It would be sad indeed if people so cluttered their lives that they would not be touched by these profound, yet everyday occurrences in our lives.

Symbols that point beyond themselves

There are also 'symbols' you have that are precious to you, such as your wedding ring, or a piece of jewellery given to you by someone you love, or those articles that we consider sentimental possessions, not because they are valuable in themselves, but because they are carriers of a deeper meaning for you and may remind you of a person you want to always hold close to your heart. They are symbols because they point beyond themselves to another reality - one that is significant for you.



We use rituals to celebrate

There are also rituals in which we engage; we celebrate birthdays of the ones we love in order that as friends and family we express our appreciation for the gift of

this person in our lives; we celebrate wedding anniversaries, often romantically, to express our gratitude to the most important person in our lives and to recommit ourselves in love for the future; we celebrate graduations as an expression of congratulations for an achievement gained and to mark the beginning of a new phase in life; we celebrate funerals of ones we have loved who have died in order to express gratitude for a person's life and their relationship with me and to hand them over to God to be drawn into eternal life.

These ritual celebrations or parties also employ symbols that are essential to the meaning of what we celebrate such as the birthday cake and the singing of "Happy Birthday", or the quiet candle-lit dinner table, or the gowns and mortar boards being worn as graduates are called to the stage for the conferral of degrees and etc. Rituals are ways we celebrate important people and events in our lives.

Sacramental Life of the Church and the Life of the Sacraments

Sacramentality

The basis of this term is the Incarnation - that the invisible, incomprehensible God chose to reveal himself and his love and plans for us in a language we could understand - in the human expression of God himself in Jesus Christ. If we want to know what God is like and what he thinks of us, it is revealed in the human person of Jesus. But already before Jesus, we can know something of the wonder of God in creation. That is why anyone who sincerely searches for truth and life can find God through created order and in the circumstances of life. But it is in Jesus that we gain clarity into the nature and purpose of God. In his words and actions, in his life, passion, death and resurrection we come to know God's compassion for us and the lengths to which he will go to show us how loved we are and how he seeks to free us from all that would rob us from living a fully human life.

Jesus completed his mission on earth, but he intended to remain with us always through the power of his Spirit which he bestowed on his disciples and apostles. We are the descendents of these followers of Jesus - the Church. In ever new situations of our world and times we are guided by the Spirit of Jesus and we continue to live out our relationship with him and with one another in the life of the Church.

The Seven Sacraments

Just as we use symbols and rituals in our lives to move us beyond the 'ordinary' and take time out to celebrate meaning-filled events in our lives and relationships, the Church expresses its communal life and relationship with Jesus in sacramental celebrations in which we are encountered by God.

Each of the Sacraments picks-up something that is part and parcel of life and elevates it in such a way that we can see and live their sacred significance. So the 'ordinary' becomes the place where God encounters us. We celebrate what is the 'ordinary' in our lives in a sacramental way so that we can perceive the God who is present in all aspects of our lives.



The Sacraments are therefore not only restricted to the event of the sacramental celebration, but are lived in our daily lives. Similarly, it is not only at the romantic candle-lit dinner on your wedding anniversary that you express your love and continued commitment to your spouse - you celebrate what you try to live 364 other days of the year and your celebration helps provide the impetus to continue to love.

A Sacrament can be imagined as an event connecting the finite human and the infinite God. The Sacraments function as symbols and rituals that both point beyond to something much more and connect a person to the reality to which they point and so they bring together the concrete & the mystery, the body and the

spirit. They celebrate those realities that are natural to our being human in relationship with others, such as birth and being welcomed into a family or our need for expressing sorrow to someone we love and have hurt and receiving forgiveness, or being in the grip of illness and requiring healing and compassion, and they elevate those realities that we may see their sacred nature and recognise the God who makes himself known to us in and through them.

"Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord."

James 5:14

Sacraments then enable us to live those realities in our lives with an understanding of their sacred significance.

However, Sacraments are not magical events. Just as the wedding ring in itself does not guarantee a life-long marriage and loses its symbolism of love when the relationship sours, so too, while the symbols of the Sacraments convey what God seeks to do and say to a person, they require our active response. In this sense, Sacraments are dialogical - God communicates and encounters us in the Sacramental celebration, but for it to be effective in our lives we need to be open to what God says and does and seek to actively live out what God wants to create in us. As an example, Marriage in the Church is a Sacrament and as such, it is a life-long commitment and unable to be dissolved, but in some instances when a marriage has failed, a couple may seek to have their marriage formally annulled by the Church. Upon extensive investigation, a Tribunal for Marriage may well determine that even though a sacramental celebration of the marriage did take place, it has never even been begun to be lived as a Sacrament. It is upon a determination of this basis that the Church can declare a marriage to be annulled. Sacraments are not magic; they require our collaboration with God to enable them to be effective in our lives.

What do I need to understand about Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist and Reconciliation?

Sacraments belong to the life of the Christian community and mark significant moments in the unfolding and developing religious life of the members of the community. Sacraments are ritual celebrations; they give shape and form to the ways new members are incorporated into the community. The sacraments are celebrated with the community present, and often take place within the context of the Mass (Eucharistic celebration), where the whole community gathers, listens to the Word of God and is invited to the table to participate in the Eucharist.

The Sacraments of Initiation

The Sacraments of Initiation

Now you are part of the Body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."
1 Cor 12:27



Three sacraments together form what we call the Sacraments of Initiation:

- **Baptism** is the sacrament that begins the process of initiation into the Christian community.
- **Confirmation** confirms membership in the Christian community.
- **Eucharist**, or Communion, completes the initiation of the child into the community.

It is through these sacraments that a person becomes a fully initiated member of our faith community.



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Sacrament of Initiation

Baptism

Baptism is the sacrament that begins the initiation process. Just as you welcome a child into your family and begin the process of their development, so, in Baptism, you give thanks for the gift of your child and ask that he or she be welcomed into a wider family - the Catholic Church and more specifically, the parish into which the child is baptised. As parents you seek to pass on a Catholic Christian identity, which by your asking to have your child to be received into the Church, you claim has been an important part of your own identity. You want, as a right for your child, the opportunity to belong to the Catholic Christian community, to be nourished by it and to contribute to its life.

The role of parents and godparents

Just as you commit yourself as parents in raising your child and nourishing him or her, so you make a commitment to raise your child in the Catholic Faith and to nurture his or her spirituality with the help of the community. During this sacrament, the child is anointed with the oil of catechumens to give them their identity as belonging to God and to the community. Later in the ceremony the child is anointed with the oil of chrism to give them a vocation of being perceptive and open to God's love of them and to make manifest that love to all whose lives they will touch.

Godparents are present at the celebration and undertake to support the parents in bringing the child up as a Christian within the community. Both parents and godparents promise to take on the responsibilities of forming the child in the ways of faith, and gradually initiating them into the life of the community.

Symbols of Baptism

The priest pours water on the head of the child or immerses the child in water and says the words: 'I baptise you, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' After this, the child is clothed in a white garment to signify becoming a new creation in Christ. A lighted candle is held by the godparents, symbolising the commitment made by parents and godparents to teach their child by word and example how to live by the light of faith in Christ. The use of each of these symbols in Baptism expresses the on-going journey to enlightenment, the ancient word for Baptism.

Belonging to a family of faith

Baptism is about acceptance and belonging. The Spirit empowers the child to live as a child of God and become one with the family/community - loved and thereby affirmed for their uniqueness. It attends to the task of letting us feel safe and welcomed in the community of believers and opens us to be able to access the necessities for a spiritual life.

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) and Children (RCIC)

Most non-adult baptisms are of infants or children up to the age of 7. In these cases, it is the parents who undertake the preparation for their baby. It is, of course, possible for older children to be baptised. In this case, they may participate in the RCIC.

How we celebrate Baptism at St Mary's Parish

Baptism of infants and small children

At St Mary's, Baptisms are celebrated every second and third Sundays of the month following the 10.00 Mass.

If you would like to arrange a baptism, the first step is to speak with Fr Steven, or Fr Lenin after one of the weekend Masses. They will advise you of the available dates from which you can select the date for the baptism of your child. Following this booking a member of our Baptism Team will make contact with you and invite you to a preparation session prior to your important date.

Then, because Baptism is not simply a personal event but an occasion for the whole community to celebrate, one Sunday before the Baptism you, along with other parents seeking Baptism for their child in the same month, will be invited to present your child to the parish community at the 10.00am Mass.

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

The Church recognises that at times adults approach the Church for Baptism and or to complete their Sacraments of Initiation.

In these situations the adults participate in a journey of deepening relationship with Jesus and learn what it means to choose to become a Catholic Christian. These Enquirers into the Catholic faith are accompanied in the months prior to Baptism, by others who are trained in assisting them to explore and deepen their faith. The focus of this preparation is engagement in a personal journey of coming to know and love Jesus, to sense Jesus' presence in their everyday lives and to consciously choose to be in relationship with him; to trust him and to follow him. Adults who then choose to become fully initiated into the Catholic Church are Baptised, Confirmed and receive the Eucharist at the Easter Vigil the following year, when the Church gathers together to celebrate the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The Easter Vigil is *the night of nights, the night of faith and of hope*, when we celebrate the faithfulness of God, who through Jesus shows us that death has no power over those who believe.

Enquiries about Baptism of infants or small children, or the RCIA - contact the Parish Office on 94351543



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Sacrament of Initiation

Confirmation

This sacrament has been problematic for a number of reasons for many years. Its original significance was to confirm Baptism, hence it took place immediately after the adult convert was baptised. Originally, too, the bishop presided over the Easter Vigil and he therefore conferred the anointing on the newly initiated candidates at the time of their Baptism.

Over time, with the spreading out of the Church, it was no longer possible for the bishop to be in attendance at each community Easter Vigil. Confirmation was then delayed until such time as the bishop was able to visit each community to anoint the candidates. This led to Confirmation being separated from Baptism and its place in the original process of initiation disappeared, although its purpose as a confirmation of Baptism remained.

When is Confirmation to be celebrated?

The meaning of Confirmation seems in part to be determined by when it is celebrated in a person's life. It can be celebrated at the time of Baptism (as is done in the Eastern Rite Churches) as a completion of Baptism. In some countries it is celebrated when young people as teenagers and young adults request it as a 'confirmation' of the commitment that parents made on behalf of the child when he or she was baptised. In this case, the young person indicates that he or she takes on ownership of living out a responsible Christian life and makes a commitment, with God's help to do so. In some dioceses, Confirmation is conferred before first Eucharist (and is sometimes celebrated at the same ceremony) to be faithful to the original practice of Eucharist being the completion of the Sacraments of Initiation and that having been fully initiated into the life of the Catholic community, the person is now enabled to participate in and live out the Sacraments of Healing and Ministry. In our own Archdiocese of Melbourne (as in many throughout the world), we have continued a long-established practice of conferring the Sacrament before the child goes to secondary school. This ensures to some degree the capacity of the child to take ownership of the commitment that was made on his or her behalf by parents at the time of Baptism, but it can give a mixed message of it being simply a milestone in a young person's life as they graduate from primary school. It can further lead to a thinking that now that all the Sacraments have been received, there is no longer any need to participate in the life of the Church until the next Sacrament is required - Marriage. The Sacrament of Confirmation has thus been at times sardonically referred to as "the sacrament of exit". Again, if a Sacrament is to be effective in a person's life it requires a response in faith to what God seeks to do in that person's life.

The meaning and significance of Confirmation

The sacrament of Confirmation consists of a prayer to the Holy Spirit, the laying on of hands while the prayer is said and the anointing of the candidate with chrism. The anointing of the candidates at Confirmation is a sign of confirming the gift of the Spirit, and calling the candidates to become involved in the life and mission of the community. God confirms us for who we are as his children and we are able to confirm what our

parents have said on our behalf when we were baptised and cooperate with the God who continues to mould and fashion us. The actual ceremony is still often presided over by the local bishop, although he may delegate the parish priest to celebrate the sacrament.

Confirmation is about self-esteem. Being created in the image and likeness of God, it empowers our social self when we are receptive to God's Spirit - to live for others and to cooperate with the God who has given us the Gifts of the Spirit to utilise them for the sake of others. It ignites our social consciousness and enables us to develop our gifts to make this world a better place for our being here by making concrete the love of God who works through us.



How we celebrate Confirmation at St Mary's Parish

Ceremonies

The Confirmation dates are advised by the Archdiocese towards the end of each year. All families will be invited to book in for their particular ceremony via an online booking system. The website and booking code will be made available shortly. Families unable to access online facilities will be invited to book through the school office.

Blessings for children and adults who are not Catholic

Each child in our parish school and catechetics' class participates in the Sacrament Program, learning about how God loves us all and calls us into life. Although those who are not Catholic cannot receive the sacraments, they may come forward at the time of a sacrament to receive a blessing. In relation to the celebration of Eucharist, which is central to our faith, the desire for a blessing is indicated by the child or adult coming forward at the time of Communion and crossing their arms across their chest, as distinct from extending their cupped hands to receive the Eucharist.

Specifically, in relation to the Sacrament of Confirmation, Catholic children to be Confirmed will approach the Bishop to be anointed. Following that ritual, children who are not Catholic, may come forward for a blessing, crossing their arms across the chest as described above. As with families booking in for the sacrament of Confirmation, families of children wanting a blessing should also book online.

Confirmation Names

During the final preparation time for Confirmation, the students will be looking at the saints and the holy men and women of our Church's history.

The name your child is to take in Confirmation is to be one of these names – the name of someone whose qualities they admire. This name can also be the one chosen by you for your child's Baptism, as long as it fulfils the above criteria.

Sponsors

According to Church law, a sponsor is to be not less than sixteen years of age (unless there is a reason considered just by the Parish Priest), who is a confirmed Catholic, has received the Eucharist and is prepared to assist the child in being a true witness of Christ. It is encouraged that the child considers asking the one who undertook the godparent role at his or her Baptism (Godparent) to be the sponsor at Confirmation. The sponsor should be someone other than a parent of the candidate. NB There is only one sponsor.

Confirmation Faith Night

During our Confirmation Faith Night we will provide opportunities for parents in particular, to deepen their understanding of the Sacrament of Confirmation as, alongside teachers and catechists, they continue to form their children in faith. It is an expectation that at least one parent from each family attend this formation evening to

enhance their understanding of the Sacrament of Confirmation. Sponsors would also be welcome to attend this evening because their role might also be clarified for them.

Confirmation Retreat Day

A Confirmation Retreat Day will be conducted for the St Mary's Year 6 students and the Confirmation students in the Parish Catechist Classes. Our Retreat Day will allow the students time to reflect on what Confirmation means to them and consider the impact it will have in their life of faith. They may hear from adult speakers about the importance of using the gift of the Holy Spirit within their lives.

Commitment Masses - Presentation to the Parish Community

Sacramental initiation is parish-oriented. Initiation to the Church's sacramental life is the means through which one enters more fully into the life of the faith community. It is therefore proper that the faith community, expressed in the parish, be responsible for and intimately involved in the sacramental preparation and presentation of children. Therefore the children preparing for Confirmation will be presented to the parish community at Mass on a weekend prior to the reception of the Sacrament. Families are expected to come with their child, given that our presence at the celebration of Eucharist is a sign of our readiness and desire for the sacrament and that as parents we are role models for our children.

The Confirmation Ceremonies

- **"What should my child wear for Confirmation?"**

This is a commonly asked question. Students should be dressed befitting their age, the occasion and the environment.

- **Sashes & symbols**

At your child's Baptism, he or she was clothed with a white garment to signify putting on Christ. Often the white garment is a sash, as is the case if your child was Baptised at St Mary's. Baptism is the first sacrament of initiation together with Confirmation and Eucharist. As a sign of the continuity of the three Sacraments, at St Mary's we ask that the children preparing for their First Eucharist and Confirmation wear their white Baptismal sash decorated with symbols signifying these two further Sacraments of Initiation. It has also become tradition here that a symbol is included for the child's First Reconciliation.

In preparation for your child's Confirmation we ask you to place a symbol of Confirmation, the date of your child's Confirmation and your child's Confirmation name on the sash. You will be provided with a sheet of symbols which might assist you. Some people use special coloured fabric pens and others have the sashes embroidered. There are a number of embroidery outlets in the local area.

If a replacement sash is required, or if your child was baptised elsewhere and did not receive a sash at the time, these may be purchased at the school or parish office at a cost of \$6.50. Copies of symbols of each Sacrament of Initiation as well as symbols of Reconciliation are also available at the office

Letters to parishioners

As part of the Confirmation preparation, the students have traditionally written letters to the parishioners telling them about their Confirmation plans and asking for the parishioners to remember them in their prayers. The parishioners are invited to reply to the students and in the past these responses have given wonderful insight into the parishioners' own experience of Confirmation. Parishioners are provided with the students' Christian names and class names so that the students may receive a reply to their letters through the school.

Church display for Confirmation

It has been a long held tradition at St Mary's that artwork produced by the children being Confirmed are displayed in the Church for the Confirmation ceremonies for a week or two following the celebrations. This enables parishioners to recognise and give thanks for those children and to pray for them in their time of preparation.

Summary of Important Dates

General Faith Nights: Tuesday & Thursday 18 or 20 February - 7.00pm

Venue: St Thomas the Apostle Parish church, Greensborough North*

Blessing Masses for all sacrament families:

Saturday 22 February - 6.30pm

Sunday 23 February 10.00am or 5.00pm

Faith Night for Confirmation Families: Thursday 18 June - 7.00pm

Venue: St Thomas the Apostle Parish church, Greensborough North*

Commitment Masses: Saturday 21 June - 6.30pm

Sunday 22 June - 10.00am or 5.00pm

Confirmation Retreat Day: date and venue to be decided.

Confirmation Ceremonies: Sunday 2 August - 12:00pm or 2:30pm

*The venue for each of our Faith Formation Nights is St Thomas the Apostle church, Greensborough North. We choose this venue because the Faith Formation Nights are shared with our two partnered parishes, St Thomas and Sacred Heart, Diamond Creek. Out of respect for those who are at each end of the partnership, we meet in the middle – at St Thomas' church. There is ample parking and the seats in the church are comfortable and it's only 5 minutes down the road.

Since our partnership just over three years ago, for very practical reasons we need to find ways to share resources and support each other. Increasingly, we have come to recognise that it is an unrealistic burden to expect our priests and other pastoral and teaching personnel, to provide Faith Formation Nights in each parish. This would potentially amount to an extra 9 or 10 meetings on top of an already heavy load. As it is, Fr Steven often has two or three meetings a night many week nights. It seems reasonable and just for us to come together as a partnership when it is appropriate.

Coming together in a central venue doesn't take away from the unique spirit of community found in each parish, but it can strengthen us when we move beyond ourselves to find our faith and our values shared. Gathering as a partnership for the greater good, may also enrich our experience of Church in our wider community. We look forward to joining with you as we explore our sacraments together.



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Sacrament of Initiation

Eucharist

The Eucharist is the sacrament that completes the process of initiation into the Christian community. When candidates share in the sacred, sacrificial meal of the Christian community for the first time, they do so as fully initiated members.

Eucharist is unique among the sacraments, the sacrament that is at the heart of our faith. It gathers the community, gives it its Christian identity and prepares the community for mission. Eucharist is, by its very nature, communal. It is the sacrament that nourishes and strengthens the whole community and indeed makes us 'Church' and 'Body of Christ for the world'.

The meaning and significance of Eucharist

The Sacrament of the Eucharist is about intimacy and relationship and points to the birth of our relational self - our forming bonds of relationship with others. If we are responsive, it ignites and directs our desire to connect and relate to others and therefore further defines our identity in being in relationship with God and others. When members refuse to take part in this Sacrament which defines the community of believers, then it can be said that their Catholic Christian identity is compromised.

The Eucharist is referred to as the "source and summit" of the Church's life and therefore the life of all its members. In listening to the Word of God and through being nourished by God's life in the Eucharist, we become increasingly who God calls us to be and effectively, who we really want to become. The regular celebration of the Eucharist is essential for the life of the Catholic community in order for its members to live out their faith in their daily lives. We also are enabled to clarify our own identity as Catholics by our participation in the Eucharistic celebration of the community of the parish. As a family reinforces its own identity and that of each of its members whenever it celebrates events that are important in the life of that family, so the parish community reinforces its identity as Christ's Body and affirms all the participants in the gathering of the parish Eucharist.

What is the role of the Sunday Eucharist?

How does your family celebrate important occasions?

Most families have particular ways of acknowledging and celebrating events of importance to individual members and to the whole family. These celebrations often include a gathering of some kind, usually around a family meal, and often other members of extended family, as well as close friends, are invited to the celebration.

On arrival, guests are welcomed into the family gathering, and take part in a meal that has been prepared. Everyone sits down at table, and among the sharing and talking that is done, there is usually some reference to the reason for this particular gathering. For example, the event may be a birthday, a celebration following a sacramental celebration, a wedding anniversary, a graduation, engagement, or something as simple as the beginning of the holidays. Sometimes the gathering might be about acknowledging the death of a loved one.

In addition to sharing good food and wine, there is a real sense in which all the participants have shared something of their lives and experiences and that sharing may have brought them closer together in understanding and appreciation for one another. Whatever particular shape or form your family gatherings take, these are usually some of the elements. In a similar way, the Church celebrates various important moments of the Christian journey by calling the community to gather together.

For the Christian community, Sunday is considered the Lord's day and is therefore a special time in the week for the community to gather together to celebrate the Eucharist. Other religious traditions have their special days or times of prayer and worship. It is important for the Christian community to gather together as a community to give thanks to God and to become more perceptive of the God who encounters us in our daily lives.

At such gatherings, the group assembled usually enters into some kind of storytelling that includes reminiscences about the family. The context of a family meal somehow seems the appropriate scene for such remembering. There may even be moments when an individual expresses sorrow or regret for some misunderstanding with someone else, and there may be moments of healing within the group as new understandings are shared. Expressions of thankfulness and appreciation for the hosts of the gathering are expressed and people are farewelled until the next time such a gathering is possible.

Eucharist as sacrifice and meal

Our Mass has its origins in the Passover meal which was celebrated each year by the Jewish people. This was a sacred sacrificial meal that involved the telling of the story of how God delivered the Israelite people from slavery and led them to the Promised Land where they could live their lives in freedom. At each Passover meal, the assembled family heard the head of the household tell the story of God's wonderful deeds on their behalf and the meal was celebrated in a spirit of gratitude and joy. The memory of God's deeds lived on in the minds and hearts of the people and in this active memorial of their liberation, they drew strength and hope that God would continue to act on their behalf.

When Jesus and his disciples gathered to celebrate the Passover Meal on the night before he died, Jesus took part in this same ritual but gave it a deeper meaning and significance for his followers. Just as God had set the Jewish people free from oppression, Jesus was about to set all people from every nation free from the power of sin and death. He was about to lay down his life for his friends so that all who would follow him would also share in life to the full. At the Last Supper, Jesus took the bread and wine, blessed them and gave them to his disciples to eat and drink. As he did this, he asked his disciples to continue to do this in memory of him.

We become what we eat.

As Catholics we believe that by participating in the Mass and receiving the Eucharist, we become the Body and Blood of Christ for the world. This is why the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life - we are nourished to become what we eat. Without our participation and openness to be formed by the Eucharist, we cannot truly become Christ's presence in the world. This may make it seem that Christ only works through us who participate in the Eucharist. However, the Spirit of God is also active in the world where the Church may not be explicitly active. Or it may be that God's Spirit challenges the Church in its teachings or activity or even confronts the behaviour of some of its members. As a community called to be responsive to the Spirit, we must always be open to that Spirit that beckons us to listen to it speaking through prophetic people and challenging voices and events that demand a response from us as a faith community. It would be arrogant of us to claim that the Spirit of God only works and speaks through the explicit activity and voice of the Church, but our identity as Body of Christ gives us the capacity to listen and recognise God who communicates himself to us places specific demands on us to act in Jesus' name.

The sacrament of gratitude and thanksgiving

Since the time of Jesus, the Christian community has continued to gather, as Jesus asked, to celebrate the Eucharist on the Lord's Day. When we come together:

- We gather as a community;
- We call to mind the memory of Jesus;
- We name ourselves Christian because we are followers of Jesus;
- We listen to and share in the story of Jesus;
- We pray and give thanks to God for the life Jesus shared with us;
- We celebrate Eucharist in memory of Jesus;
- We acknowledge our need for God's forgiveness;
- We share in the mission of Jesus for the Reign of God;
- We involve ourselves in practical ways of caring for the poor, the needy, those unable to provide for themselves.

Whenever the community gathers to celebrate the Eucharist, it celebrates the gift of Christ to the Church and the action of the Church in response to the sacrificial giving of Christ. This joint action of Christ and the Church calls us to give thanks and praise for the radical gift we have been given.

How we celebrate First Eucharists at St Mary's Parish

All families will be invited to book in for their choice of Mass for their child's First Eucharist via an online booking system. The website and booking code will be made available shortly. Families unable to access online facilities will be invited to book through the school office. In order to honour the special occasion, the number of children receiving their First Eucharist as a Parish Mass will be limited. This enables the whole community gathered to celebrate with your families as the children join them for the first time at the table of the Lord.

Blessings for children and adults who are not Catholic

Each of the children in our parish school participates in the Sacrament Program, learning about how God loves us all and calls us into life. Although those children who are not Catholic cannot receive the sacraments, they may come forward at the time of Eucharist to receive a blessing. This is simply indicated by the child or adult crossing their arms across their chest, as distinct from extending their cupped hands to receive the Eucharist.

Eucharist Faith Night

At our Eucharist Faith Night, we will provide the opportunity for parents in particular, to deepen their understanding of the Sacrament of Eucharist as, alongside teachers and catechists, they continue to form their children in faith. It is an expectation that at least one parent from each family attend this formation evening during which parents are given the opportunity to enhance their understanding of the Sacrament of Eucharist.

Commitment Masses - Presentation to the Parish Community

Sacramental initiation is parish-oriented. Initiation to the Church's sacramental life is the means through which one enters more fully into the life of the faith community. It is therefore proper that the faith community, expressed in the parish, be responsible for and intimately involved in the sacramental preparation and presentation of children. Therefore the children preparing for First Eucharist will be presented to the parish community at Mass on a weekend prior to the reception of the Sacrament. Families are expected to come with their child, given that our presence at the celebration of Eucharist is a sign of our readiness and desire for the sacrament and that as parents we are role models for our children.

The Eucharist Retreat Day

The Year Three students from St Mary's School and the St Mary's Catechist Class students who are preparing for their First Eucharist will be involved in a retreat day designed to deepen their understanding of Eucharist. Classroom teachers and catechists will facilitate the day.

The First Eucharist Celebrations

- **Booking arrangements**

Booking in to the Mass for your child's First Eucharist is an online, first in first choice arrangement. Group bookings for a First Eucharist Mass are not taken. If you are thinking of booking a venue for a meal after the Mass, you would be well advised to make sure of the date for your child's First Eucharist, prior to booking the venue.

- **Seating arrangements**

Each family will be allocated one pew for the celebration. Family and friends may also sit in any of the unreserved pews in the church.

- **Sashes & symbols**

At your child's Baptism, he or she was clothed with a white garment to signify putting on Christ. Often the white garment is a sash, as is the case for children baptised at St Mary's. As we have mentioned, Baptism is the first Sacrament of Initiation followed by Confirmation and Eucharist. As a sign of the continuity of the three Sacraments, we ask that the children preparing for their First Eucharist and Confirmation wear their white Baptismal sash decorated with symbols signifying these two further Sacraments of Initiation. It is has also become tradition here that a symbol is included on the sash for the child's First Reconciliation.

At this stage, in preparation for your child's First Eucharist we ask you to place on the sash a symbol of the Eucharist and the date of your child's first reception of the Sacrament. You will be provided with a sheet of symbols which might assist you. Some people use special coloured fabric pens and others have the sashes embroidered. There are also a number of embroidery outlets in the local area. If a replacement sash is required, or if your child was baptised elsewhere and did not receive a sash at the time, these may be purchased at the school or parish office at a cost of \$6.50. Copies of symbols of each Sacrament of Initiation as well as symbols of Reconciliation are also available at the office.

- **"What should my child wear?"**

This is a commonly asked question. There is no parish policy on what the children wear for their First Eucharist other than to be appropriately attired for a special celebration.

- **Photography**

We ask that family members respect the sacredness of the celebration, to be discreet and limit any photos being taken during the liturgy. All children will be organised at the end of Mass for a group photograph and presiding priest will also be available for individual photographs.



Summary of Important Dates

General Faith Nights: Tuesday & Thursday 18 or 20 February - 7.00pm

Venue: St Thomas the Apostle Parish church, Greensborough North*

Blessing Masses for all sacrament families: at St Mary's church

Saturday 22 February at 6.30pm

Sunday 23 February at 10.00am or 5.00pm

Faith Night for parents of First Eucharist Children: Tuesday 18 March – 7.00pm

Venue: St Thomas the Apostle Parish church, Greensborough North*

Commitment Masses for First Eucharist families:

Saturday 21 March - 6.30pm

Sunday 22 March - 10.00am or 5.00pm at St Mary's church

First Eucharist Retreat Day: Tuesday 17 March

Children from St Mary's School at St Mary's church

First Eucharist Dates: Saturday 25 April or 2 May at 6.30

Sunday 26 April or 3 May at 10.00am or 5.00pm

Children from St Mary's Sunday Catechist Program at St Mary's church

First Eucharist Dates: Sunday 3 May at 10.00am or 5.00pm

*The venue for each of our Faith Formation Nights is St Thomas the Apostle church, Greensborough North. We choose this venue because the Faith Formation Nights are shared with our two partnered parishes, St Thomas and Sacred Heart, Diamond Creek and out of respect for those who are at each end of the partnership, we meet in the middle – at St Thomas church. There is ample parking and the seats in the church are comfortable and it's only 5 minutes down the road.

Since our partnership just over three years ago, for very practical reasons we need to find ways to share resources and support each other. Increasingly, we have come to recognise that it is an unrealistic burden to expect our priests and other pastoral and teaching personnel, to provide Faith Formation Nights in each parish. This would potentially amount to an extra 9 or 10 meetings on top of an already heavy load. As it is, Fr Steven often has two or three meetings a night many week nights. It seems reasonable and just for us to come together as a partnership when it is appropriate.

Coming together in a central venue doesn't take away from the unique spirit of community found in each parish, but it can strengthen us when we move beyond ourselves to find our faith and our values shared. Gathering as a partnership for the greater good, may also enrich our experience of Church in our wider community. We look forward to joining with you as we explore our sacraments together.

The Sacraments of Healing

The Sacraments of Healing

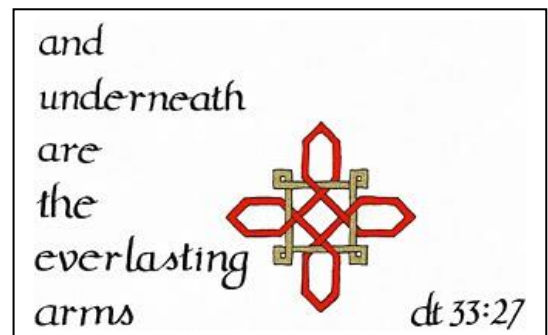
*Now you are part of the Body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”
1 Cor 12:27*

The Church continues, in the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' work of healing and salvation. This is the purpose of the two sacraments of healing:

- **Reconciliation** affirms the truth that God loves us without fail and forgives us before we even recognize our need to be forgiven.

- **Anointing of the Sick and Elderly**

This Sacrament is about letting go and entrusting ourselves to the God who heals when I have little control over my well-being.





The Father's Love by Lyn Deutsh
<http://www.philipchircop.com/search/reconciliation>

Sacrament of Healing

Reconciliation

The Sacrament of Reconciliation invites us to acknowledge that when we make poor choices that result in sinful behaviour, we damage our relationships with God, self and others. Reconciliation is all about building bridges, naming the times we fail to honour others, and making some attempt to make things right. The name Reconciliation helps us to focus on the social aspect of our wrong-doing and the need to make things right.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation (formerly referred to as Confession or Penance) is not one of the Sacraments of Initiation; it is one of the Sacraments of Healing. It affirms the truth that God loves us without fail and forgives us before we even recognize our need to be forgiven. God's love for us is expressed in mercy, compassion and forgiveness. This experience of being reconciled with God is one of a child being restored to the loving care of his or her parents. Reconciliation is supposed to be about celebration: the celebration of God's love for us, the celebration of his boundless forgiveness and the joy of returning to a happy, whole relationship with him.

The word celebration, though, is probably not a word some of us would associate with the lived experience of this sacrament in the past! To understand the contemporary approach to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we need to focus again on the life and mission of Jesus.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation emphasises the relational nature of our lives and reminds us that as individuals and as a community we stand in need of God's forgiving and healing love in all of our relationships: with ourselves, God, others and the world.

The restoration of relationships

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a link with our Baptism and helps us to identify areas where we are not living out our calling as members of the Christian community. It is where we need to express our sorrow and call on the Holy Spirit to encourage and support us on our journey. Reconciliation restores our relationship with God, self and others.

The Gospels are full of incidents where Jesus reached out to the lost, the lonely, the suffering, the broken and the publicly acclaimed 'sinners' of his time. In each instance, Jesus invited people to share something of their life story with him. He talked freely with the person, and in doing so, showed the compassion of God to each person.

Jesus crossed barriers to express his belief in all people; he forgave people and helped them to be restored to themselves, their families and their local community. There was always the opportunity for the individual to make restitution and thereby restore good relationships with those harmed in any way.

People, in accepting Jesus' forgiveness, always went away with a lightness of heart. They were glad of the encounter with him that enabled them to unburden themselves of whatever it was that held them back from being truthful, honest people.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is about truth and integrity - about being true to myself

in my relationship with myself, others, God and the world in which I live. I am called to recognise that at times I miss the mark in my journey throughout life and that I fail and hurt others. Reconciliation ignites the energy to continually align and realign myself to God's will for me, because that is where I find my inner peace.

The power of forgiveness

You would be aware of the power of forgiveness in your own life with those who love you. God forgives us and we celebrate that forgiveness in the Sacrament which then further empowers us to restore relationships that have been affected by my attitudes and behaviour.

Some people state that since God forgives, we have no need to approach a priest, tell our sins and be given a penance - we can just ask for forgiveness directly from God. While it is certainly true that God forgives and we do in fact pray for that forgiveness every time we celebrate the Eucharist in its Penitential Rite, we are bodily beings who need to experience the forgiveness that God extends to us. It is the priest's responsibility to act (by his sensitive listening and by his laying on of hands) and say (through his words of encouragement and challenge and especially the words of absolution) that God loves us, cares for us, forgives us and gives us the power and possibility of making positive changes in my life and that I may observe them as signs of growth that can only come from being loved.

Private or public?

Also, my sins are never private. Sometimes the ways I hurt others are obvious to the person being hurt, but whenever I damage myself, hurt myself and impede my growth to become who I can be, that has its impact on everyone whose life I touch. So, the priest, being the minister of the Sacrament, is also the one who represents the community that is affected by my sinful behaviour, and which receives me back into the community by forgiving and loving me.

The Penance that the priest gives is not a punishment, but rather, the active collaboration of the person receiving the Sacrament to work with God who seeks our growth in the spiritual life. Penance may either be prayer and/or an activity that enables change to occur in my life.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a powerful aspect of the life of the Church that ensures the inner growth of its members who are responsive to the purifying love of God. It is therefore not a Sacrament to be celebrated once when it is celebrated as a child at first Reconciliation, but should become part of the life of every member of the Church.

How we celebrate Reconciliation at St Mary's Parish

The Rites of Reconciliation

There are three different ways we can take part in the Sacrament of Reconciliation:

- First Rite:** Reconciliation of an individual penitent
- Second Rite:** Reconciliation of several penitents with individual confession and absolution
- Third Rite:** Reconciliation of penitents with general confession and absolution.

St Mary's Parish offers the opportunity of Reconciliation in the First Rite every Saturday morning at 9:00am and prior to the Saturday evening Mass at 5:45pm.

However, as is the tradition within St Mary's Parish, children make their First Reconciliation under the Second Rite.

Dates for First Reconciliation

Your child will have the opportunity to celebrate his or her First Reconciliation at any of the times listed at the end of the Reconciliation section of this document. The decision to offer the sacrament over several days is to allow parents the opportunity to attend this special celebration with their child. Further details regarding the format of the celebrations will be forwarded closer to the date.

What Happens at the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

Once the students and their families arrive at the church at their allocated time, they are asked to take their designated seats. When all children are seated, Fr Steven will begin the celebration by sharing scripture and a short insight about the important place the sacrament of reconciliation plays in our lives. When it is time to receive the sacrament, each candidate will be invited one at a time together their parents, to join Fr Steven who will be seated near the altar. We ask that parents introduce their child to Fr Steven and hand their child's stole to Fr Steven who will place it around the child's shoulders once they have received the sacrament. After handing the stole to Fr Steven, parents are invited to wait for their child at the rear of the church.

After receiving the sacrament, students will rejoin their parents at the rear of the church, where they will receive a certificate. Families are then invited to return to their seats to enable the children the time and space to pray any prayers of penance that Fr Steven has given them. During the celebration there will be quiet music played during and we ask all families to assist us to maintain a reverent and prayerful atmosphere.

Once all candidates have received the sacrament, Fr Steven, will close our celebration in prayer and will congratulate all. We do ask all families to remain until our celebration is drawn to a close before departing.

Reconciliation Faith Night

Our Reconciliation Faith Night provides the opportunity for parents, in particular, to deepen their understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation as, alongside teachers

and catechists, they continue to form their children in faith. It is an expectation that at least one parent from each family attend this formation evening.

Reconciliation retreat day

A Reconciliation Retreat Day will be held for the Year Two children of St Mary's School and the Reconciliation Students of the St Mary's Catechist Class. This Retreat Day will allow the children to reflect on what Reconciliation means to them and consider the impact it will have in their life of faith. They will listen to speakers and participate in activities designed to emphasize the importance of forgiveness and restoring relationships. The children will enjoy a provided lunch and on the day. If there are any dietary considerations that staff should be aware of, please contact your child's teacher or catechist as early as possible.

Commitment Masses -Presentation to the Parish Community

Sacramental initiation is parish-oriented. Initiation to the Church's sacramental life is the means through which one enters more fully into the life of the faith community. It is therefore proper that the faith community, expressed in the parish, be responsible for and intimately involved in the sacramental preparation and presentation of children. Therefore the children preparing for Reconciliation will be presented to the parish community at Mass on a weekend prior to the reception of the Sacrament. Families are expected to come with their child, given that our presence at the celebration of Eucharist is a sign of our readiness and desire for the sacrament and that as parents we are role models for our children.

Sashes & symbols

At your child's Baptism, he or she was clothed with a white garment to signify putting on Christ. Often the white garment is a sash, as is the case for children baptised at St Mary's. Baptism is the first Sacrament of Initiation followed by Confirmation and Eucharist. As a sign of the continuity of the three Sacraments, we ask that the children preparing for their First Eucharist and Confirmation wear their white Baptismal sash decorated with symbols signifying these two further Sacraments of Initiation.

It has also become tradition at St Mary's that a symbol is included for the child's First Reconciliation. So, at this stage in your child's faith journey, as he or she prepares for First Reconciliation, we ask you to place on the Baptismal sash a symbol of Reconciliation and the date of your child's first reception of the Sacrament.

You will be provided with a sheet of symbols which might assist you. Some people use special coloured fabric pens and others have the sashes embroidered. There are a number of embroidery outlets in the local area.

If a replacement sash is required, or if your child was baptised elsewhere and did not receive a sash at baptism, these may be purchased at the school or parish office. Copies of symbols of the sacraments are also available at the office. The children are required to bring their sash on the day or evening of their First Reconciliation, but not to wear it until after they have received the Sacrament.

Summary of Important Dates

General Faith Nights: Tuesday & Thursday 18 or 20 February - 7.00pm

Venue: St Thomas the Apostle Parish church, Greensborough North*

Blessing Masses for all sacrament families: at St Mary's church

Saturday 22 February at 6.30pm

Sunday 23 February at 10.00am or 5.00pm

Faith Night for Reconciliation Parents: Tuesday 13 October - 7:00pm

Venue: St Thomas the Apostle Parish church, Greensborough North*

Commitment Masses for Reconciliation families: at St Mary's church

Saturday 17 October at 6.30pm

Sunday 18 October at 10.00am or 5.00pm

Retreat Day: Tuesday 20 October

Celebrations of First Reconciliation:

Tuesday 10 November at 6.30pm or

Saturday 14 November at 10.00am

*The venue for each of our Faith Formation Nights is St Thomas the Apostle church, Greensborough North. We choose this venue because the Faith Formation Nights are shared with our two partnered parishes, St Thomas and Sacred Heart, Diamond Creek and out of respect for those who are at each end of the partnership, we meet in the middle – at St Thomas church. There is ample parking and the seats in the church are comfortable and it's only 5 minutes down the road.

Since our partnership just over three years ago, for very practical reasons we need to find ways to share resources and support each other. Increasingly, we have come to recognise that it is an unrealistic burden to expect our priests and other pastoral and teaching personnel, to provide Faith Formation Nights in each parish. This would potentially amount to an extra 9 or 10 meetings on top of an already heavy load. As it is, Fr Steven often has two or three meetings a night many week nights. It seems reasonable and just for us to come together as a partnership when it is appropriate.

Coming together in a central venue doesn't take away from the unique spirit of community found in each parish, but it can strengthen us when we move beyond ourselves to find our faith and our values shared. Gathering as a partnership for the greater good, may also enrich our experience of Church in our wider community. We look forward to joining with you as we explore our sacraments together.



Sacrament of Healing

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Anointing of the Sick

At times in our lives we find ourselves particularly fragile and dependent on care. This may be when we are physically, or even mentally, sick and vulnerable and later in life as we prepare to die. Jesus in his ministry is often portrayed as healing the sick and it exhibits the compassion of God who seeks to restore us to wholeness - physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. This Sacrament expresses God's power of healing through the Church in the fragility of human life and health.

The Sacrament is about surrendering to God, who heals when I have little control over my well-being. The energy of the Sacrament of Anointing is ignited by God calling me into a new and ultimate level of trust and intimacy that opens me to God's power of healing operative in my surrender to him.

How is the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick celebrated in our parish?

Whenever requested, Fr Steven will anoint someone who desires this Sacrament. These requests can be made to Fr Steven directly or through the parish office.

In addition, twice yearly we celebrate a Mass in which Fr Steven anoints the sick and elderly. All are welcome.

The children at our school also participate in this celebration and in doing so they also witness to the powerful sign of faith that the sick and elderly are to us all. And the children are a sign of hope and love for the sick and elderly who at times are isolated due to their life situation.

The Grade Five children participate in the Mass celebrated midway through the year and the Grade Six children at the end of the year. Letters are sent home to parents and guardians informing you of these occasions, encouraging you to come along and to also bring anyone you know who may desire the sacrament. We also give you details of how you might make a simple contribution, by way help on the day or by providing cakes or sandwiches etc for the luncheon for the sick and elderly following the Mass, if you would like to participate in this way.

Summary of Important dates

Anointing Mass – Thursday, May 7 at 11.00 - Grade Six children to participate

Anointing Mass – Thursday, December 3 at 11.00 - Grade Five children to participate

The Sacraments of Ministry

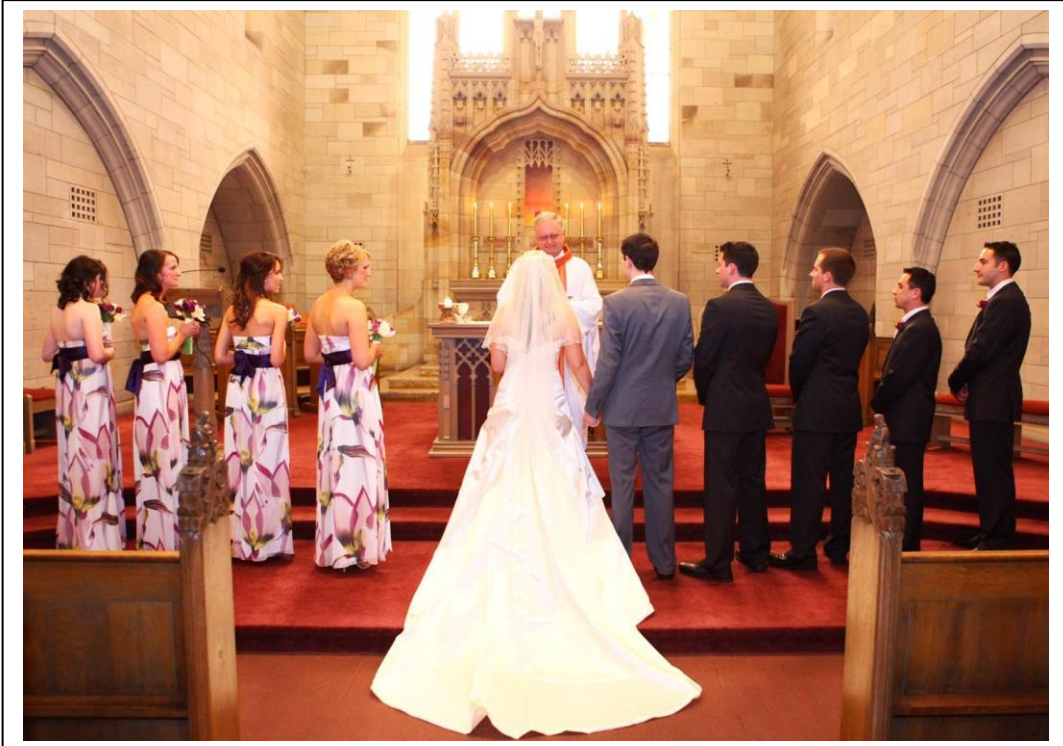
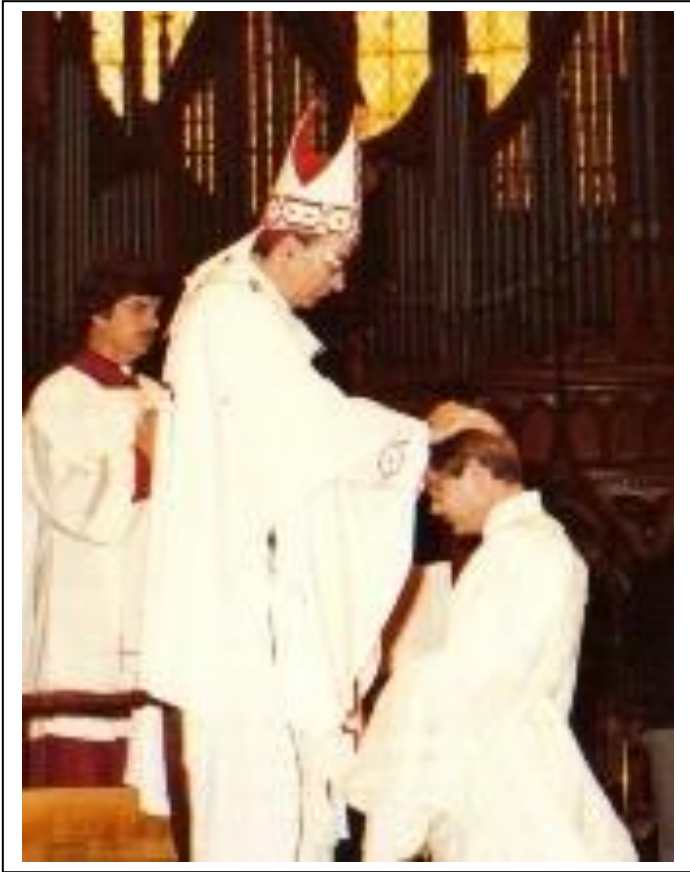
*Now you are part of the Body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”
1 Cor 12:27*

Sacraments of Ministry signify God’s creative love through relationship with others.

Marriage is a Sacrament in which we most clearly participate in the creative power of God's love - made obvious in the children that are born out of that relationship, but primarily in the creative love that enables the development of the other person.

In the Sacrament of **Holy Order**, a Priest is ordained and commissioned to pray for others and lead them to God; to be a person through whose words and actions God is revealed; and to serve others.





Sacraments of Ministry

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Holy Order

Everyone who is baptised has conferred upon them the role of Priest, Prophet and King. In other words, they are commissioned to pray for others and lead them to God; to be a person through whose words and actions God is revealed; and to serve others. In a particular way those who are called to the vocation of ministerial priesthood are to dedicate their whole lives to the care of the faithful in each of these areas and are ordained and commissioned to specific responsibilities of pastoral care.

The energy of Ordination is to ignite those who are ordained to respond in service to the call of the community for leadership and stewardship of God's creation. The ordained priest is given the responsibility of ministering the Sacraments, but to especially care for the spiritual welfare of those in his care. He is to do this under the leadership of the bishop with the aim of building up the community of believers. In his leadership role he is given the responsibility to nurture the gifts of the Holy Spirit in each person in the community and to empower them to exercise these gifts for the sake of the community and in the wider world in which each member of the community is engaged.

Enquiries

If you would like to enquire Holy Order or Religious Life please speak with Fr Steven.

Marriage

This is the only Sacrament that a couple confers on one another - they are the ministers of the Sacrament. The priest acts as the celebrant and witness, but it is the couple themselves who establish a covenantal relationship with one another to be life-giving to each other for the rest of their lives. It involves a type of dying to oneself as each person commits themselves to the upbuilding of the other. The Sacrament is the closest approximation to the life-giving love that God has for us.

It is a Sacrament in which we most clearly participate in the creative power of God's love - made obvious in the children that are born out of that relationship, but primarily in the creative love that enables the development of the other person. If a couple is receptive to the Spirit of God in their relationship, the Spirit can enable each of the partners to be co-creators with God in the further development of each other. This power is further manifested not only in the creation of children from their loving union, but also in their collaborating with the creator God in the nurture of their children. It is because creation is a process of development in which we participate and not just in the conception or birth.

Marriage points to the birth of the creative and generative self, igniting the life-giving and creative energy bonding flesh and spirit; body and soul. It enables a couple and a family to witness to the power of the faithful, life-giving love that God has for us and provides the environment for the nurture and development of each member of the family.

Enquiries

If you would like to enquire about Marriage please speak with Fr Steven.

Supporting your child's sacramental journey

Parents love their children into life and create a family where they love their children and teach them how to love. They share their values; teach their children how to pray, how to treat others and how to live meaningful lives. The Church talks about families as 'Domestic Church', the first experience of church for the child. Parents share the life-long journey in faith with their children especially as they move from Infant Baptism to Confirmation and full initiation with the Eucharist.

Here is how you can support your child's preparation for the celebration of the sacraments:

- Let them know you are interested in what they are learning.
- Share with them something of your own experiences and learning.
- Talk to your own parents and ask them about their memories of getting ready for the sacraments.
- Ask your parents (or people of similar age/ background) to talk about the 'good old days' in the Church.
- Plan together with your child how your family will celebrate this special time.
- Take a look at family photo albums for photos of important family celebrations, such as your marriage, the baptism of your child, special anniversaries, etc.
- Talk with your child about who was invited to take part in the celebrations, and why.
- Take your children along to Sunday Mass so that they will be familiar with the church and what happens during Mass.
- Talk to your children about the things they see in the Church, such as the altar, the crucifix, baptismal font, statues, holy water font, etc.



A Glossary of Terms

Baptismal promises: Just before a person is actually baptized with water by the priest, the person is asked a series of questions to which they respond. When an infant is baptized, the parents and godparents make these promises on behalf of the child. At confirmation the candidates make these promises themselves. During the Easter Vigil ceremonies, the whole community is invited to recommit themselves to the Lord by repeating these promises.

Blessing: In the Christian tradition, as in the earliest Jewish tradition, blessings represent sacred moments. At the Last Supper, Jesus blessed bread and wine and gave them to his disciples to eat and drink. This action still happens at each Eucharist we celebrate. On our behalf, the priest blesses the gifts of bread and wine and asks God's blessings on them and on us. We also bless special places and people. This is a reminder to us that God is with us.

Celebrant: The word celebrant is used to describe the role of the person leading the Eucharistic celebration. The main celebrant who presides at the celebration of the Eucharist is the priest; however, everyone in the community may be described as celebrant because all actively participate in the celebration of the Eucharist.

The Community Gathered: When people gather to celebrate the Eucharist, it is as a community that we celebrate the presence of Jesus. The Church teaches that Jesus is truly present in our community gathering in the assembly.

Godparents: When a child is baptised into the Christian community, the parents choose godparents who will assist them in supporting the faith development of their children.

Grace: Grace is the living and loving presence of God in all the events and people in our lives.

Initiation: To be initiated is to be made a member of a group, organisation or community. Christian initiation is a process of being gradually incorporated into the life of the Church.

Kingdom of God: Jesus came to announce the Kingdom of God and he taught the people about the Kingdom of God through stories. The Reign of God is another name for kingdom and it is a way of describing God's dream for the world. God's dream is for all people to live together in love, justice, peace and harmony.

Liturgy: This word describes what it is that the community does when it gathers together to celebrate the Eucharist, or Mass. The Greek origin of the word means 'the work of the people', suggesting that it is all of the people who share in the work of praising and thanking God. Christians use the word liturgy to refer to the ritual of the Mass.

Eucharist: is a Greek word that means giving thanks. It is also the name the Christian community gives to its central act of praise and worship. The term Eucharist is also the sacrament that completes the process of initiation into the Christian community. When the Christian community comes together on Sundays, it celebrates.

Mission: Being a member of the Christian community means we are invited to join in the mission of Jesus as his followers. Jesus' mission was the establishment of the Reign of God, a way of being and journeying through life. When we are baptised, we are invited to share in Jesus' mission. At the end of each Mass we are sent out - back to our daily lives, and this is where we are called to live the good news and be the Body of Christ to all those whose lives I touch.

Paschal Mystery: When people are initiated into the Christian community, they are immersed into the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. We call this immersion into the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

Preparation of the Gifts: During the celebration of the Mass, gifts of bread and wine are brought to the altar and are then offered to God. This action includes the offering not only of the symbols of human labour but also of our lives.

Word of God: Word of God refers to Jesus, God's son. For Christians, Jesus is the living, active word of God. In Christian celebrations such as the Mass and other ritual celebrations, the Word of God refers to the readings from the Old and New Testaments, often referred to today as the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

RCIA: When the Church renewed the processes and practices relating to preparing and welcoming new adult members into the Christian community, it named this process the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. This rite is now the model for preparation and celebration of the sacraments for infants and children.

Reconciliation: In the Catholic community, reconciliation is a sacrament of forgiveness and peace. Reconciliation is all about restoring peace and harmony to relationships - with one another, with God and in our care for creation. At the beginning of each Eucharist, we acknowledge our need for forgiveness and state our trust in God's forgiveness.

Sacraments of Initiation: The process of becoming a member of the Christian community begins with the sacrament of Baptism where a person is baptised, either by immersion or by the priest pouring water on the head of the person to be baptised. The sacrament of Confirmation confirms a person's Baptism, and then Eucharist completes the process of becoming a Christian.

Some prayers we share as a Community

You may find the following prayers useful as a simple way of assisting your children to enter into the experience of praying with the community.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.

Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen

Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.

Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Glory be

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen

Rosary

The Rosary is a prayer based on the "telling of the beads" while saying the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the "Glory be.." prayers, while reflecting on the events in the lives of Jesus and Mary.

Joyful Mysteries

- The Annunciation
- The Visitation
- The Birth of Jesus
- The Presentation in the Temple
- Finding Jesus in the Temple.

Sorrowful Mysteries

- The Agony in the Garden
- The Scourging at the Pillar
- The Crowning with Thorns
- Jesus carries His Cross
- The Crucifixion

Glorious Mysteries

- The Resurrection
- The Ascension
- The descent of the Holy Spirit
- The Assumption
- The Crowning of Mary as Queen of heaven.

Mysteries of Light (A new mystery recently added by Pope John Paul II):

- Baptism in the Jordan
- Manifestation at Cana
- Proclamation of the Kingdom of God
- Transfiguration
- Institution of the Eucharist

Prayer of Sorrow

O my God, I am sorry that I have sinned against you,
because you are so good, and with your help I will not sin again.

Grace before Meals

Bless us Lord, and the gifts of food and drink that we are about to enjoy. We ask you to help us to be mindful of those who do not have enough to eat and drink. Amen.

A Morning Prayer

(The children pray the following two prayers at school, but they can be adapted for home of course)

Good Morning Heavenly Father,

The sun has risen and you have given us all a new day.

We come to school to work and play,
but before we begin our journey today,
we turn our minds to you and pray.

Thank you father for a good night's sleep,

thank you Father for the food we eat,

thank you Father for the friends we meet-

for everything thank you Father. Today Lord, help

us to listen to each other, share with each other and work together as friends. Amen.

Afternoon Prayer

School today has ended Father
and we turn our heads for home.

Before we go we want to pray,
to remember we're not alone.

You're with us on our journey,
you help us work and play.

For the times we did this well
we thank you and we want to say,
we're sorry for the mistakes we've made
and we'll try our best
to make tomorrow
a better, brighter, brand new day.

Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity to accept things I cannot change; Courage to accept the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

Prayer of Hope

God of love, you sent Jesus into our world to bring us hope. Be with us as we try to be people of hope in our sometimes troubled world. Amen.

Prayer for when everything goes wrong!

Dear God, help me to understand that sometimes things go wrong and I have a miserable day, but that is not the end of the story. Jesus showed us that we can always mend mistakes and begin again. Be with me and help me through these times. Amen.

A Creation prayer

Loving God,

For all of creation; for our mighty rivers, our tall mountains, the birds of the air and fish of the sea - we give you thanks! For our kangaroos, wallabies, goannas and lizards – we praise you!

For our stunning sunrises and sunsets – thank you, God!

For the rain and clouds, and the plants and trees that spring to life – thank you God!

For our family, friends and all the people of the world – we praise and thank you God.

Prayer for the beginning of the day

God of life, thank you for this brand new day. Help me to enjoy this day, to share your gifts with others and to act with kindness and thoughtfulness. Amen.

Imaginative Prayer

A wonderful way to pray is to use the gift of imagination. When you read to, or perhaps make up stories for your children, you engage the imagination and this takes you and your child to another place. Well, God gives us our imagination and in that way we come to know and understand things more deeply than if we simply lived in a world of facts and figures, or relied only on what science proves, or if we understand our faith only in terms of rules and regulations.

Our imagination leads us to understand at a deeper level those elements of Creation that remain within the realm of mystery. Jesus told parables in order to enable his followers to imagine God as faithful, loving and just. And he used everyday language and experiences to do so. He never once spoke of God as distant but he showed his followers that God is in our everyday experiences and if we use our imagination and have a desire to know God, we can sense God in powerful ways. Jesus showed us that God is so much more than we can imagine, but that ultimately God invites us into intimate relationship with the Trinity and all of Creation.

Today we know there are various spheres of intelligence, which includes spiritual intelligence. Parents can play a great part in nurturing their children's imagination and in nurturing their own and their children's relationship with God through the use of imagination. It's not just child's play. Imaginative contemplation and guided imagery is something used by many adults. It is certainly one way of praying that I use and that I encourage others to use.

Here is an example of a guided imagery: Take your child through some stilling exercises, such as becoming conscious of breathing, and letting God's love fill them with every breath – then lead the child on a imaginative journey, suggesting what they might see along the way, e.g. trees and flowers, river, sunlight filtering through trees – leaving

them to imagine the detail. Invite your child to feel the warmth of the sun, or the gentle breeze. This takes them to a heightened sensitivity of the beauty of nature. What you are doing is helping the child to become receptive to God.



Then suggest they come to a comfortable and inviting place – e.g. a little grove, or clearing with a bench seat, or a nice smooth rock upon which they might sit. After a while, the child sees someone familiar coming towards them. It is Jesus. Jesus then sits beside them and tells them something special, or gives them something special. They talk to Jesus and then they listen to Jesus. Let this exercise be slow and gentle and give the child plenty of time with Jesus, without the interruption of your words.

Then when you feel it is the right time, mention that Jesus needs to leave (no reason necessary) and suggest the child takes some time to say goodbye, knowing that he or she may always meet Jesus in that same place.

Gently reverse the sequence of awareness – first inviting the child to notice what is around them, then walking back through the area they came from, you describe the sights they had seen on the way there. Then, invite them to once again become conscious of their breathing until ready to come back to awareness of the room they are in – then wriggle toes and fingers and stretch. Your child might want to share with you what they experienced, but sometimes it is just enough to let savour the experience.

I used this sort of guided prayer with my children as they prepared for bed and hoped the experience would flow through into their dreams. Now as adults my children remember these times of prayer with fondness.

If you would like to know more about this way of praying – either as adults or with your children, please speak with me. I would love to share more with you. – Jacinta Bright (I can be contacted through the school or parish office)

Breath Prayer

In ways similar to the previous prayer, invite the child to relax and become conscious of their breathing. As they breathe in a quiet rhythm, invite them to breathe in God's love and let it fill their bodies, travelling to any part of their body that needs love in a special way. Then invite them to breathe out God's love so that the areas or the people of the world that most need God's love can receive God's love too.

Your own prayer

You may like to pray in any of the ways mentioned above, or indeed allow yourself to be creative and find leisurely time to spend with the God who loves you into life.

Prayer on the net The Sacred Space website leads you into praying with the Scripture of the day. www.sacredspace.ie

Liturgical seasons

Advent

The season of Advent is a time of preparation to celebrate the feast of Christmas. During this season we direct our hearts and minds to remembering and waiting in joyful hope to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Christmas

We celebrate the birth of Jesus and this is a season of joy, happiness and hope for the world.

Lent

The season of Lent is a time of fasting in preparation for the celebration of new life at Easter. During this time, the Christian community prepares by praying, fasting and being generous to the poor and needy. Ash Wednesday is the beginning of Lent. At the end of Lent we celebrate Holy Week:

On Palm Sunday we remember when Jesus entered Jerusalem and was greeted as king.

On Holy Thursday we call to mind the Last Supper Jesus had with his disciples.

Good Friday is when we call to mind the death of Jesus.

Easter

This is the major feast in the Christian tradition and the Church's liturgical year. This season goes for fifty days and the tone and focus of the season reflect a celebration of new life, baptism, joy and hope.

On *Easter Sunday*, we celebrate the feast of the Resurrection when Jesus rose from the dead;

Ascension is forty days after Easter, when Jesus ascended to heaven.

Trinity. This feast celebrates God's love for us by sending Jesus and the Spirit to be with us always. This feast is a real celebration of community.

Pentecost is fifty days after Easter. We celebrate the feast of Pentecost and God sending the Spirit to be with us always.

Ordinary time

Ordinary time is made up of all the other weeks and Sundays between major seasons or celebrations.

ENTER EACH DAY WITH AN **OPEN** MIND

"Even today there is a dictatorship of a narrow line of thought" which kills "people's freedom, their freedom of conscience ... this is the drama of the closed heart, the drama of the closed mind, and when the heart is closed, this heart closes the mind, and when the heart and mind are closed there is no place for God. | Pope Francis

ENTER EACH DAY WITH AN OPEN MIND

Pope Francis in the homily during the morning Mass on Thursday 10th April 2014 in the Chapel at Casa Santa Marta

Parish Contact Details

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