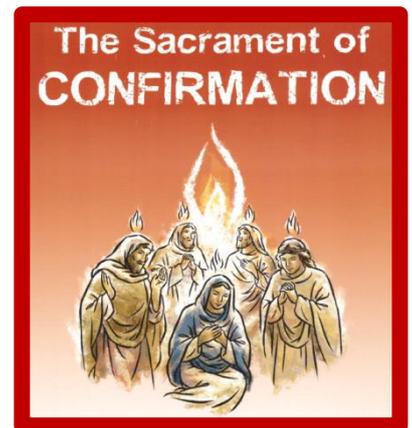
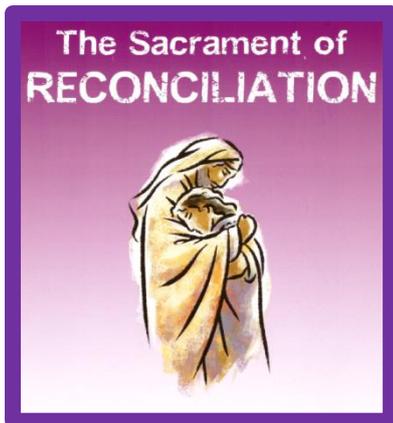


St Christopher's Holsworthy



Sacramental program



GUIDELINES and POLICY

Current as at October 2015

St Christopher's Catholic Church, Holsworthy
205 Heathcote Road, Holsworthy NSW 2173
Ph: 02 9825 1679 | Fax: 02 9825 1488
W: www.stchristophers.org.au | E: stchris@tpg.com.au

Sacramental Program – Guidelines and Policy

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References:

- 1970 Renewal of the Education in Faith
1971 General Catechetical Directory
1979 Catechesi Tradendae
1981 Familiaris Consortio
1994 Catechism of the Catholic Church
1997 General Directory for Catechesis
2011 Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney Sacraments of Initiation Policies

These Guidelines and Policy has been endorsed by the Parish Pastoral Council on November 2015.

*Fr Thanh Nguyen
Parish Priest*

Sacramental Program – Guidelines and Policy

ST CHRISTOPHER'S SACRAMENTAL PROGRAM

1. Our Sacramental program is parish based. This means that our programs are implemented and supported by the Parish. It is open to all parishioners and their families who worships and are active participants in our parish community as well as families from outside our community but their child attends one of the schools within St Christopher's parish.
2. Our program is 'family centred'. This means that parents are required to be actively involved with their children's lessons during each of the Sacramental programs.

While the school based Religious Education Curriculum supports and enriches our Sacramental program, the church recognises that the parents are the **first educators** of their children's development in faith. After all, it is the parents who presented their child for Baptism into the Catholic Faith and promised to nurture that faith.

As parents, knowledge is not the key factor but their faith and a willingness to spend time sharing with their child as they go through this journey of development.

3. Our program is only successful due to the many wonderful parents who volunteer to be Group Leaders who help run small groups of classes over a five to six weeks period. At St Christopher's we require 12 to 15 volunteers to be Group Leaders for each Sacramental program. All Group Leaders are provided with the resources and support is on hand from the Sacramental Co-ordinator.

Seeking Group Leaders will take place via the weekly church bulletin, St Christopher's school community at the start of each calendar year for all three programs.

4. Small group sessions facilitated by our Group Leaders provide a forum of dialogue among parents and their child about matters relating to faith. Many parents have been astounded at *how close they have become* to their child after going through the program. It often provides a unique insight into their child's experience and understanding of faith.

SUPPORT

1. From our parishioners

Our parishioners are encouraged to fully embrace and support our candidates and their families through keeping them in our prayers throughout their Sacramental preparation period.

2. From the schools within the Parish boundary

All schools including our State Schools within our parish boundary fully embrace and support the ethos of our parish based program. There is no promotion of division or segregation of the candidates based on their respective schools.

3. From our Parents

The parents of our participating candidates are to fully commit and be active 'first educators' of their child's journey in faith. These three Sacraments are important in their child's faith journey and while it is an exciting time for them and their family, it is also a daunting time. Therefore having full parental support and active guidance with both action and words are important to their child as they experience this wonderful journey in faith.

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Children learn from their parents' actions, so they **MUST** show responsibility and good example by accompanying their child to the lessons on time and going to church for weekend Masses, not just during the program period but continuously.

Each Sacrament will commence with a **Commitment Mass** where the candidates will be presented to the Parish and they, along with their parents, will be asked to state their full commitment to the program.

4. From our Candidates

The candidates are to be fully committed to attending their lessons, completing their workbooks and homework sheets (with guidance from their parents where needed) and everything that is required of them to be able to fully comprehend the sacrament and be ready and worthy to receive it at the end of their preparation period.

In the event that there is an unforeseeable issue or event within the family, (illness or family tragedy) please notify the Sacramental Co-ordinator immediately via the Parish Office.

THE PARTICIPANTS - At what age do these programs take place in our Parish?

According to the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney – Sacraments of Initiation Policies - for the administration of these three initiation Sacraments to children, it is required that they have sufficient knowledge and are carefully and properly prepared so as:

| | |
|--|---|
| <p><u>For Reconciliation</u> – to be able to receive this sacrament knowledgeably and freely. Catechesis for children must always respect the natural disposition, ability, age and circumstances of individuals. (Canon 914)</p> | <p>At St Christopher's, the child is eligible to celebrate First Reconciliation when he/she reaches Year 2 and above and is baptised into the Catholic faith.</p> |
| <p><u>For Communion</u> – to understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity and can receive the Body of the Lord with faith and devotion" (Canon 913)</p> | <p>At St Christopher's, the child is eligible to celebrate First Holy Communion when he/she reaches Year 3 and above, and have received the Sacrament of Reconciliation.</p> |
| <p><u>For Confirmation</u> – to understand that they are receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit which strengthens the baptised and obliges them more firmly to be witnesses of Christ by word and deed and to spread and defend their faith. (Canon 879)</p> | <p>At St Christopher's, the child is eligible to celebrate Confirmation when he/she reaches Year 6 and above, and have received both the Sacraments of Reconciliation and First Holy Communion.</p> |

Children of other ages will be considered on consultation with the Parish Priest and the Sacramental Program Coordinator.

NOTE: There is **no hard and fast rule** that they have to participate in these Sacraments in those respective years. The above is only a guide within this Parish which may differ slightly to other parishes.

Sacramental Program – Guidelines and Policy

However parents have a better judgement of knowing if our child is ready and mature enough to receive these Sacraments – especially for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which is the first of the three Sacraments.

Some parents have deliberately deferred their child from receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation, because they felt their child was not mature enough in Year 2 to fully understand Reconciliation. This is totally acceptable and encouraged if applicable.

It is important to remember that participating in a Sacramental program is NOT about doing it or making it with your child's peers. It is about your child being ready to receive these sacraments by way of understanding what it is he/she is doing within his/her journey of faith.

Therefore, in the best interest of the child and the parish community, the Parish Priest has the final right and decision to defer a candidate from receiving a Sacrament based on their fulfilling the requirements for preparation.

Children not yet baptised - Are you a Catholic parent/s who for whatever reason have not yet had your child baptised but desire your child to participate in the first of our program – the Reconciliation Program. Then you need to contact the parish office immediately to organise a meeting with our parish priest, for you to discuss your situation.

Like all Sacraments, you and perhaps even your child will be required to attend a Baptismal Information Night. This will be arranged following the meeting with our parish priest.

Children with Special Needs - Children with special needs will also be considered for our Sacramental program. Parents will need to make an appointment to see the Parish Priest. At this meeting parent and child will meet with Father and their participation will be considered based on the child's individual needs. While it is preferable that all children receive the sacraments as part of a community celebration, we recognise their preparation and reception may need to be provided at a pace more appropriate to their learning capabilities.

At St Christopher's parish we will work together with these parents to ensure that their special needs child does not miss out on these Sacraments.

Children attending schools within our Parish boundary but resides and worships in their own Parish.

It is not mandatory for these children to participate in St Christopher's Parish Sacramental programs just because they attend one of the many schools within our parish boundary.

As most Sacramental programs are Parish based, the Sydney Archdiocese believes it would be far more meaningful and appropriate for families to have their children participate in their own Parish program, as it has provided the context for understanding and growing in faith. However as parents have chosen to have their child participate in our program, their full commitment and participation will be expected.

Note: The Parish Priest does reserve the right to decline enrolments based on the best pastoral interest of the child and his/her family and our own Parish community.

Sacramental Program – Guidelines and Policy

Hierarchical Structure of the Catholic Church in Australia and other Religions.

For better understanding, the Catholic Church in Australia is administratively and geographically divided into Seven Archdioceses, and twenty-one Dioceses. St Christopher's Holsworthy parish is under the Sydney Archdiocese. There are other variants of Catholic faith and these other Dioceses listed below are also recognised as Catholics under the guidance of our Holy Father, Pope Francis. So children baptised under these Dioceses are also eligible to receive our Sacraments of Initiation:

- The Chaldean Diocese of St Thomas;
- The Diocese of St Maroun of Sydney for Maronite Catholics;
- The Melkite Diocese of Sydney for the Melkite Catholics;
- The Syro-Malabar Eparchy of St Thomas, Australia
- The Eparchy (Diocese) of Ss Peter and Paul of Melbourne for the Ukrainian Catholics of the Byzantine Rite;
- The Military Ordinariate for the Armed Services of Australia;
- The Personal Ordinariate of our Lady of the Southern Cross;
- The Personal Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei

NOTE – it is not mandatory that these children undertake their Sacraments at St Christopher's if you as parents wish for them to continue under your own Dioceses – particularly if your family worships at your own church each week.

Children of another Faith.

St Christopher's parish recognises that our local Catholic schools also cater for children who are of another Christian denomination. Understandably, according to the regulations of the Catholic Church, these children will not be eligible to participate in our Sacramental Programs.

As parents, if you are in this situation, please take the time to explain to your child the reason for his/her non participation in the Program. Naturally we understand will be disappointed especially if they feel that they are missing out.

However, this does not mean that these children miss out on the lessons associated with these Sacraments. The content is covered within their school Religious Education curriculum. The lessons conducted via the Parish Sacramental program are more intense which helps prepares the children for the respective sacraments.

Converting to Catholicism.

We appreciate that some Christian and Orthodox religions are deemed very similar to the Catholic Church. Our priests have administered sacraments to them in some capacity.

We have, in previous years, had some children convert to Catholicism because they strongly desire to receive these Sacraments.

The Parish seeks the parent's guidance here as it important that their children understand that becoming a Catholic is **not about** 'making the sacraments with their friends and not wanting to miss out'. It is about their faith, it's about a life journey and that initial and continuing nurturing of the child's faith. This nurturing responsibility also falls onto the parents, which will be supported by our parish community.

Sacramental Program – Guidelines and Policy

A **BIG** commitment is expected from their parents. Effectively, you as parents will become the first educators of your children's faith. Therefore are you prepared to commit yourself wholeheartedly to this challenge?

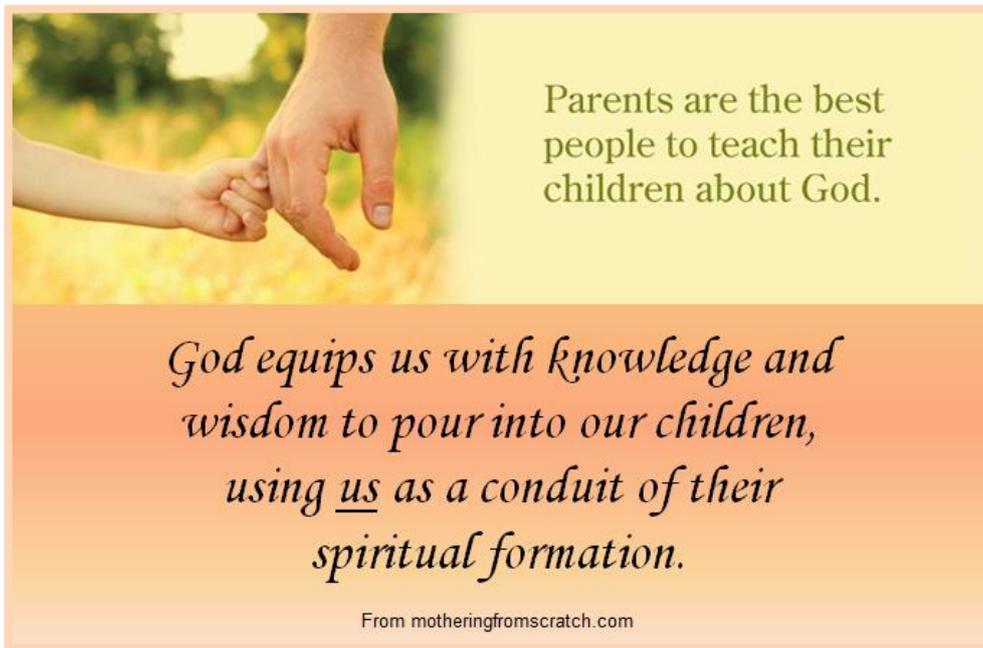
Nurturing of a child's faith is similar to nurturing and encouraging them to excel in their chosen field of sport or interest within the creative arts of music, dance and singing etc. It is about coming together as a family as well as being together as God's family with the other parishioners. It is guiding and joining the child in prayer each day. So please talk to your child as this is not a light decision, it will be his/her lifetime journey – a journey assisted by you.

If you child still wants to participate – where do you start?

You will need to make an appointment to speak with our Parish Priest. Please do so as early as possible and **NOT** just before enrolments.

Parents, please be aware that there is a process that needs to take place and it does require time and commitment. Becoming a Catholic is NOT instant and cannot be rushed for the sake of their child being able to participate in a Sacramental program with their peers.

Children who have been baptised in another faith, approved by the Catholic Church will NOT be baptised again. They will be received into the Catholic Church through a simple blessing ceremony at a convenient time.



THE PROGRAM PROTOCOLS

Conditions of Enrolments - While our Parish Priest and the parish Sacramental team welcome you and promise to support you in every way possible for each of the Sacraments, we also wish to make you aware that all three programs requires a significant amount of time and commitment from parent/s and child.

- a) **Extra-curricula activities** - Please take time to consider this commitment and discern whether both of you are ready for this task. It might be a time to reconsider obligations to other extra-curricula activities that run concurrently with the sacramental programs.

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- b) **Holidays** - We also ask that you be mindful of the Sacramental dates when contemplating booking family holidays - that they are NOT made during the sacramental period. Please do not enrol your child into the Sacrament if you already have confirmed holiday bookings during the period of the Sacrament because 'make up' lessons WILL NOT BE OFFERED. Please defer your child's enrolment to the following year.

Enrolment Process

- There will be FOUR (4) enrolment opportunities over two consecutive weekends for each of the Sacraments.
- A table will be set up outside of the church **after** the following Masses of the Registration weekends – Saturday 5:30pm vigil and Sunday 5:30pm Masses.
- Enrolment weekends will be scheduled as follows and the exact dates will be published through the normal parish channels:
- There will be no extensions to the enrolment closing date to receive late enrolments.
- Late enrolments received will be deferred to the following year.
- Enrolments are to be returned to the presbytery office NOT the school.
- Enrolments will only be confirmed following receipt of completed enrolment form, your payment and copies of the necessary accompanying documents (where applicable).

Commitment to the program

a) Parents of Candidates:

- Attend the compulsory Information Sessions and Commitment Mass to mark the start of the Sacramental program.
- MUST accompany their child to all the four lessons. Under the Australian Child Protection Act, candidates CANNOT be left alone with their Group Leader throughout any part of the four lessons.
- MUST bring their child to weekend Masses during the period of the program
- MUST bring your child to the compulsory Retreat and Rehearsal day.
- Ensure that you arrive on time for all the lessons and the Retreat day.
- Ensure that you arrive on the designated requested time for your Sacramental celebratory Mass.

b) Candidates:

- Attend the compulsory Information Session and Commitment Mass to mark the start of the Sacramental program.
- MUST attend all the four lessons with one of your parents.
- MUST attend weekend Masses during the period of the program
- MUST attend the compulsory Retreat and Rehearsal day.
- Ensure that you complete all your homework sheets properly
- Ensure that you complete all the outstanding work within your workbooks.
- Ensure that you listen to your Group Leaders



*“Never force religious instruction on your child.
It is far more important
for him to feel the impact of your faith...
If your faith is really living in you,
you will not need to depend on pious words:
your children will sense it in your daily life
and in your contact with them.”*

Johann Christoph Arnold
Senior Pastor, noted speaker, Award winning author