



Children's Sacramental Program

Our Lady of Dolours Parish, Chatswood

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In brief

The children's sacramental program here at Our Lady of Dolours Parish Chatswood covers three sacraments in a three stage process, beginning with Confirmation. The specific dates vary each year, but generally the time of year is as follows:

Confirmation

Preparation: June/July

Sacrament celebrated: Aug/Sept

Reconciliation

Preparation: October

Sacrament celebrated: November

First Communion

Preparation: April/May

Sacrament celebrated: May/June

The sacramental program is offered to children in Year 2, however older children can also be incorporated into the process.

What is a Sacrament?

A sacrament is a sacred ritual by which we enter more fully into the mysteries of our Catholic faith. Every sacrament is a sign of a person's belonging to Jesus Christ and to the Church. It involves sacred words and symbols which have been passed down by generations of Christians and which express the presence of God in a special way. Although the Church acts in the sacrament, in a more fundamental way we believe that it is God who acts in and through these words, these symbols, this priest and this people gathered as one body of Christ. The sacraments use ordinary things (e.g. water, oil, human gestures) to express amazing truths about God's love, power, and forgiveness active in our lives. Sacraments provide the support we need to live out our faith commitment.



Baptism:

Baptism is the first sacrament of Christian initiation. Catholic families usually baptize their children soon after birth. Your child must be baptized in order to receive the other sacraments through the children's sacramental program. [If your child is not baptized, contact the program coordinator or sacramental minister.]

Confirmation:



This sacrament is closely linked with baptism and brings to further fulfilment what was begun

in baptism. This sacrament gives the strength to follow Jesus and to become involved in the mission which Jesus left to the Church. It is especially associated with the story of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down upon Mary and the Apostles.



Reconciliation:

(Confession). This sacrament is a sign and experience of God's unconditional forgiveness. We are called to be one people united with Christ and one another. Sadly, in our weakness this unity is often ruptured through failures to love (i.e. we sin). Yet God's love for us does not cease when we fail. By expressing our sorrow and receiving Reconciliation, we experience forgiveness and healing. Our relationship with God and our unity as Church is made whole again.

Eucharist (First Communion):



The sacrament of Eucharist brings to completion the Christian process of initiation. In this sacrament we remember what Jesus did for us in his life, death and resurrection. We remember particularly the Last Supper, that final meal Jesus shared with his disciples. At that meal Jesus gave us the Eucharist so that we could remember him in a special way. When we receive communion, we believe that we receive the person of Jesus into our very beings. We become one with him.

How does the Sacramental Program work?

The Sacramental Program here in our parish is a family-centred, parish-based program, meaning that the parents prepare their children for the sacraments with the resources and support of the parish.

For each sacrament there are four important preparatory steps:

1. Enrolment:

On a designated Sunday, parents come to the parish hall to enrol their child in the program. Enrolment forms are available at the church and parish office and are also made available through the schools.

2. Presentation:

On a designated Sunday, the children are presented to the Sunday Mass congregation as candidates for a particular sacrament. The parishioners welcome them and pray for them as they begin their preparation.

3. Parent nights:

Two information/input nights are held for the parents. These are presented by the sacramental team. They equip parents with resources and practical tips for teaching their child about the sacraments.

4. Interviews and practice:

These are held in the parish hall on a Saturday shortly before each sacrament. The child and parent meet with one of the team for 10-15 minutes to ascertain the child's readiness to receive the sacrament and to assist with any last minute questions or difficulties. The interview is followed by a brief practice in the church.

The dates and requirements for each step are outlined in the accompanying **gold brochure**. The first step is to enrol your child. By enrolling your child you will have entered the program. From there, the program unfolds, step by step.

Frequently asked questions

‘Why is Confirmation the first sacrament in the program?’

Here in the Diocese of Broken Bay, the policy is to follow Baptism with Confirmation because it is closely linked with Baptism and it is more in keeping with the original order of the sacraments in the early centuries of the Church. Many dioceses have begun to move in this direction, though not all. This is why you find some variation in Sydney parishes.

‘Why are parents expected to teach the children? Isn't that the role of the school?’

As a parent you have a unique and irreplaceable role in your child's upbringing. The way you model faith and religious values to your child is the most important influence on their spiritual development. The Church recognizes this and wishes to support your efforts. The curriculum of the Catholic school will supplement your child's education in the sacraments, as will the catechists at the state schools. Together with the parish they will support your efforts, but they cannot replace your influence as the prime educator of your child.

‘I am afraid I don't know enough to teach my child.’

Rest assured that there is a booklet to assist which is very readable and the activities are easy to implement. The content is quite simple with the emphasis being on parent and child learning together in partnership. Also, the parent information nights are a chance to ask questions and discuss the ‘how tos’. And there are people in the parish who are happy to help if you need extra assistance.

Finally, whilst it is important that your child be taught certain facts about the sacraments, we must acknowledge the power of the Holy Spirit who is active in your relationship with your child and in the community of faith. If we all do our best, honestly and sincerely, we can trust that your child will grow in relationship with Jesus.

‘My children are aged ten and fifteen. Are they too old for the sacramental program?’

The program is designed for families with young children (the age for Confirmation in our diocese is usually 7 or 8), however we always have a number of older children who have ‘missed out’ on one or more sacraments for various reasons. The program is adapted for the older ones. The parents come to the same input nights, but the worksheets and other aspects of the program are tailored to meet the needs of the older children.

‘It's January now. August seems like a long time to wait to start the program. Can't my child receive the sacraments sooner?’

The program above outlines the usual schedule, however we try to be flexible to accommodate families with particular circumstances. Please feel free to discuss your particular situation with the sacramental program coordinators (Tanya Ceravolo H: xxx xxx) and Mary Tobin (H: xxx xxx) or the sacraments minister (Teresa Pirola xxx xxx).

Information on the sacraments can also be found at:

www.chatswoodparish.org.au

In the sacraments brochure stand in the main foyer of the church

In the weekly parish bulletin (also available on the above website).