A Family Focused, Parish Based, Catholic School and Parish Religious Education Program (PREP) Supported Approach to the Preparation and Celebration of the Sacraments

Priests and Coordinators’ Session
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Celebrating a sacrament for the first time is an important step in the life of a Catholic child.

Sacraments are vital expressions of Catholic life. Each time people receive a sacrament there is a deeper response to the call of Jesus to discipleship. Since sacraments are so important they are taken very seriously and there is a need to prepare to receive them thoughtfully and thoroughly. All sacraments are events for the whole Catholic community to celebrate together, this is reflected when parishes prepare and celebrate the sacraments as a community.

Sacraments flow from the life of the Church. Religious education, whether it takes place in a school or parish setting, functions as a support to the sacramental life of the Church.

Sacraments as Catechesis

*The aim of catechesis is communion with Jesus Christ. Catechesis leads people to enter the mystery of Christ, to encounter him, and to discover themselves and the meaning of their lives in him. At the heart of catechesis is the Person of Jesus. The ultimate aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ. (GDC 80)*

Sacramental catechesis is a unique and very singular activity intimately related to but distinct from religious education. In the past these two activities have often been confused with the result that both activities are weakened.

Common practice has been that when young people reach a particular year level they automatically receive certain sacraments. This has caused people to unconsciously link sacraments to school life more than to parish life.

The context for sacramental catechesis especially for the Sacraments of Initiation is the parish community. It is important that it takes place within the community of the faithful because initiation is the responsibility of all the baptised. This principle is a challenge for parishes to facilitate the parish community as the context for sacramental preparation in the Church.

The parish community as the context for sacramental catechesis means that those who are receiving religious education in the Parish Religious Education Program (PREP), the Catholic school, or the home, come together for sacramental preparation.

The context for sacramental catechesis is important because the Constitution on the Liturgy (CSL) points out that "Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations belonging to the Church" (CSL 26).
General Directory for Catechesis (GDC 1997) proclaims that "catechesis is the responsibility of the entire Christian community" and therefore "is not an action which can be realised in the community on a private basis or by purely personal initiative" (GDC, 220, 219.b). And the revised liturgical rites of the Church all emphasise the responsibility of the people of God in the preparation for the sacraments. In other words, sacraments are not just conversion moments for those preparing to receive them for the first time, but for the entire parish community.

The entire parish community is invited to come to renew and deepen their spirituality in the sacrament. It truly becomes a time of total parish renewal. And those preparing to receive the sacrament for the first time do so within the context of the parish community committed to living the sacramental life.

This model is not easy to implement when people are used to 'fragmenting' parish life through structures that keep people separate. We need to be inspired by the GDC directive that "it is important also that the catechesis of children and young people, permanent catechesis and the catechesis of adults should not be separate watertight compartments . . . it is important that their perfect complementarities be fostered" (GDC, 72). Too often we have the Parish doing sacramental preparation in one time period, the Catholic school in another, those of different age groups at another time during the year.

Sacramental moments are natural times in the life of the parish to gather and renew all the people of God in the sacramental life of the Church. It is a wonderful witness to those receiving a sacrament for the first time that this is not an isolated instance of sacramental celebration, but a way of life lived by a sacramental community.

**Role of the Family in the Sacramental Catechesis:**

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC, 2223-2236) teaches clearly the role of parents in nurturing the gift of the Catholic faith. It is the role of parents as primary educators of their children to present them for initiation into the Christian community. It is in the family where children receive the help and example needed to live a Christian life and share in the mission of Jesus.

Taking an active part in a child's spiritual formation is the right and dignity of Christian parents. It is in the home that children primarily experience and come to know about God. When children experience the loving care of their family, when they are challenged to be the best people that they can be by their parents, and when they witness a family's unceasing striving for healing and reconciliation, then children really learn about who God is. Parents are, whether they realize it or not, the "sacrament" of God's presence to their children.

Parents have the responsibility to pray with their child and to see to it that their child attends Mass each Sunday in order for them to grow in their faith and as members of the Catholic community.
In recognising parents as the primary religious educators of their children, the Catholic Community relies on the cooperation of families for preparing children for the Sacraments.

The Catholic school and the Parish Religious Education Program (PREP) endeavours to nurture a strong partnership between families and the parish in the sacramental preparation program. Parents are encouraged to take on their central role. The parish the Catholic school and PREP assist parents in this task. The church provides the immediate preparation for all sacraments. Catholic schools and PREP provide the initial or foundational preparation in the knowledge and understanding of the Sacraments.

Preparation for the sacraments should aim at leading the young people towards a more intimate union with Christ. The sacraments strengthen what began in baptism, and further initiating the individual journey of faith, empowering young people to go and proclaim the good news.

All three faith communities of family, parish and Catholic school and PREP, are deeply significant in a child’s preparation for the Sacraments. Cooperation between these three will offer the best possible opportunity for the child’s growth in faith.

**Family Focused**

Those parents who wish for their child to receive one of the sacraments need to let the Catholic school or PREP know and enrol their child to receive the sacrament in the parish where they worship. The school and PREP will assist and inform parents with the process for receiving the sacrament. Parents will also need to attend meetings for the sacramental preparation of their child.

Whilst acknowledging the role of parents as the primary religious educators of their children Catholic schools and PREP willingly take on the responsibility for the religious education of young people. By their teaching and by their example of Catholic Christian witness, teachers and catechists are critically involved in the overall faith formation of children and particularly in their preparation for Sacraments.

The Catholic community is very grateful to Catholic schools and to PREP for their ongoing efforts to teach the faith to young people, to form them as Catholics and to assist in their sacramental initiation.

Parents with the assistance of teachers, catechists, and the parish priest have an important role in discerning the readiness of their children to celebrate the Sacraments.

Parents assist in preparing children for the Sacraments by:

- their daily example of Christian living.
• sharing of the faith through stories.
• reflecting together on the day’s happenings.
• praying together as a family e.g. before meals, at bedtime.
• giving children the opportunity to experience belonging to a faith community especially at Sunday Mass.
• giving children the opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance (Reconciliation) prior to the celebration of Eucharist and Confirmation.

What is expected of parents to assist their child with the preparation for the sacraments?

• Attend Sacrament information nights and workshops
• Attend the Enrolment Mass
• Return all relevant paper work by due dates
• Assist and support in the preparation of their child for the Sacraments

Parish-Based

The parish community invites and welcomes new members into its midst, and it is where their initiation into the faith is celebrated and their journey into Christian maturity is nourished and sustained. It is within this community that people learn what it is to be a Catholic.

The parish must make sure that it does not exclude any Catholic who wishes to take part in its activities. Parishes need to make provision for the participation of persons with disabilities and their families. Parish leaders need to work with individuals and their families to determine what steps, if any, are needed to facilitate their participation in parish life.

Realistic provision must be made for persons with disabilities to be prepared to receive sacraments and to participate fully in the Eucharist and other liturgical celebrations such as the sacraments of Reconciliation, Confirmation. The experiences and needs of individuals with disabilities vary, as do those of any group of people. (Canon Law, 777)

It is the parish, as the place of Christian community, which co-ordinates the activities involved in preparing the child for the Sacraments. Working with the family, the Catholic school, PREP and the parish priest, the parish ensures that all requirements necessary to bring the children to the Sacraments are attended to in good time.

What is expected of the Parish?

• To invite families to enrol their children for the sacraments.
• Offer support through communal and personal prayer, hospitality and giving witness to Christian Living.
• To support parents in their role of sharing faith within the family through experiences of family catechesis.
By working collaboratively in the preparation of children for the Sacraments, all who have a responsibility in nurturing faith share in the special faith journey of the children. The process itself encourages a partnership.

**School and PREP supported**

Catholic schools and PREP assist parishes in their responsibilities to parents by providing the knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith including knowledge of the Sacraments.

1. Teach the Religious Education program relating to the Sacraments. This is the key knowledge and understanding element in the students' preparation for the sacrament. Witness to the children, by word and example, the meaning of Christian discipleship.
2. Emphasise repeatedly with children and parents the importance of Sunday Mass and its connection with the other sacraments.
3. Establish membership of Parish Sacramental Team: Principal, Assistant Principal, Sacramental coordinator, Catechist coordinator, catechists, teachers.

**Immediate preparation:**

1. The sacramental team meets in the previous year to coordinate parish and school dates, in order to avoid conflicts for parents.
2. Place notices from the parish(es) in your school or PREP newsletter regarding parish meetings etc. pertaining to preparation for all children regardless of where they attend school. It may be necessary to do this for more than one parish if your students come from other parishes.
3. Reinforce with parents that their child receives immediate preparation for the sacraments and celebrates the sacraments in his/her parish of worship. Stress, in word and action, to children and parents that the school and parish work closely together in the preparation for and celebration of the sacraments.
4. Collaborate with the parish in conducting the retreat for those preparing for Sacrament. Collaborate in making school facilities available for parish sessions if the parish does not have suitable facilities for these. Work especially closely with the parish in the preparation of special needs children.
5. Be involved in enrolment ceremonies, parent sessions and the celebration of the sacraments, as invited by the priest.

**Responsibility of teachers and catechists**

Teachers and catechists in the sacramental years have the specific role of maintaining an educational involvement in the process of receiving the sacraments. They continue to develop within religious education an understanding of the Sacraments of the Catholic Church.
(Draft) Guidelines for the Implementation of a Family Focused, Parish Based and Catholic School and PREP Supported Approach to the Preparation and Celebration of the Sacraments

Rationale
To review the role of parents, parish and school in the preparation for and the celebration of sacraments for school aged children within the Archdiocese of Perth.

Guiding Principles
- a common understanding of a Family focused, Parish based and Catholic School and PREP supported approach
- the development of guidelines in accordance with this understanding,
- strategies for implementation and evaluation.

Parish communities are asked to consider:

1. Working as a community in the preparation and celebration of the sacraments

Consideration for implementation

Set up a Parish Sacramental Team

- the parish priest (team leader)
- the sacramental coordinator (new)
- the principal and/or delegated representative
- parish catechist coordinator
- school sacrament teacher/s
- family catechesis coordinator
- parent/s
- member/s of the parish community

Task

- Meet to establish a shared vision of how the sacraments will be celebrated within the parish
- Liaise with the schools and PREP and establish the sacramental program for the current year
- Liaise with, inform and encourage the parish community to support the initiation of members through noticing, welcoming and encouraging children and their families celebrating with them as appropriate assisting with children’s liturgy praying for children and their families modelling the Christian life
Set up the operational procedures for the celebration of the sacraments
After the celebration of each sacrament evaluate the process with the team

2. Preparation for Sacraments within the parish context – Enrolment

Considerations for implementation
- Parishes have the responsibility to put in place structures for the preparation of children for the Sacraments
- Each child is to be enrolled for the reception of the sacrament by the parents into the parish
- The enrolment of children is celebrated ritually during weekend parish masses and after appropriate communication and notification within the parish

3. Preparation for Sacraments within the parish context

Considerations for implementation
- Combined parish based retreats with sacrament candidates
- Combined Parent Meetings parents of sacrament candidates to be held in the parish
- Combined Enrolment/Commitment ceremonies in the parish at a weekend Mass
- Combined celebration of the sacraments within the parish context
- Encourage the parish community to pray for children and families during preparation times

4. Preparation for Sacraments within the parish context – Supporting Families

Considerations for Family Focused parent evenings.
(Wherever possible use the parish facilities)
- One meeting Parents and child workshop
- Two Meetings Adult formation night on the Sacraments for parents
   Parents and child workshop
   or
   Parents and child workshop
   General information night
- Three meetings Adult formation night on the Sacraments for parents
   Parents and child workshop
   General information night
5. Celebration of Sacraments within the parish context

Considerations for implementation

- Celebration of the sacrament take place during Sunday Mass(es) over one or a number of weekends
- Celebration of sacraments includes all sacrament candidates regardless of whether they have been prepared in PREP or the Catholic school in the same ceremony/ceremonies
- Ceremonies outside the Sunday Mass time to held at the parish and to include all sacrament candidates
- Parishes which have two churches within its boundaries may consider celebrating the sacraments at both by giving families the option of choosing the church which they frequent

6. Engaging families within the ceremony

Parents present their child in Baptism and thus have the ultimate responsibility of presenting their child for the other sacraments. The following are some considerations for involving parents in the ceremonies...

- Family/parents present child at the enrolment ceremony
- Family/parents present child on the day of sacramental celebration i.e. Eucharist and Confirmation
- Family sit with their child at the ceremony

After preparation for sacrament has been completed

- a) inform parents
  b) inform Parish Priest
- Parents are expected to approach the Parish Priest of the parish they frequent to indicate the readiness of their child to celebrate the sacrament.
- A date and time is then set.
A Possible Approach to the Preparation and Celebration of the Sacraments in the Parish

- Parish calls a meeting of all parents who wish their child to receive a sacrament within the year (letter sent from PREP and from Catholic school to known candidates on parish letter head; information also placed in parish bulletin)
- Schools and PREP advertise the meeting details
- At the meeting the procedures and expectations for the celebration of the sacraments will be explained as well as an overview of the sacraments
- Parents are invited to enrol (register) their child for the appropriate sacrament at the parish
- Parents are invited to present their child to the community at the Enrolment ceremony at a weekend Mass
- Child will commence preparation for the sacrament in their Religious Education class
- Parents will be expected to attend a number of faith formation session as decided by the parish
- At the end of the preparation time parents are expected to approach the Parish Priest of the parish they frequent to indicate the readiness of their child to celebrate the sacrament at an agreed time.

Evaluation

Following the celebration of the sacrament, the Sacramental team determines an evaluation process.
### The Tasks and Responsibilities of the Partnership Model

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish Tasks</th>
<th>Family Tasks</th>
<th>School and PREP Tasks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting up and forming a sacramental team</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being a sacramental team coordinator.</td>
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<td>Setting dates for the celebration of the sacraments.</td>
<td>Discerning whether their children are ready to celebrate particular sacraments.</td>
<td>Teaching units of work across the school and catechist program for each of the sacraments.</td>
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<td>Issuing enrolment forms to parents.</td>
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<td>Putting up a display in the church foyer about the children who are participating in parish sacramental processes.</td>
<td>Enrolling their children in parish processes preparing for celebrating particular sacraments.</td>
<td>Liaising with the sacramental team to find out the names of participants and the dates for the sacramental celebrations.</td>
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<td>Notifying parents about sacramental processes.</td>
<td>Providing necessary information to the parish to facilitate sacramental celebrations.</td>
<td>Being part of the parish sacramental team as a religious education coordinator, principal or catechist.</td>
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<td>Offer parents an invitation to be informed about the parish sacramental process.</td>
<td>Participating in activities that are part of the sacramental preparation process in their parish.</td>
<td>Informing parents about what children are learning through sacramental education in the school and catechist program.</td>
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<td>Following up parents/children who have not attended information sessions or preparation sessions.</td>
<td>Paying sacramental levies to meet the parish costs of Sacramental celebrations eg. Purchase of certificates, medals, candles, etc.</td>
<td>Setting up a ‘peer support’ network so all children in the Catholic school or PREP are aware of the sacramental celebrations and are able to support the children participating in the parish sacramental process.</td>
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<td>Planning the liturgy for the celebration of the sacraments.</td>
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<td>Parish Tasks</td>
<td>Family Tasks</td>
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<td>Collecting and checking baptismal certificates for each child involved in parish sacramental processes.</td>
<td>Supporting their children as they prepare to celebrate particular sacraments.</td>
<td>Creating an environment throughout the school and catechist program where the message of the Gospel is lived and shared.</td>
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<td>Ordering stoles, symbols and certificates for children.</td>
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<td>Organising parent information nights (perhaps arranging a guest speaker).</td>
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<td>Photocopying of materials</td>
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<td>Contacting Catholic families in Government schools.</td>
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<td>Providing resources for the sacramental processes in the parish.</td>
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<td>Meeting the financial costs of the sacramental processes eg. photocopying.</td>
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SAMPLES
Samples included

Enrolment Ceremony – Joondanna parish
Infant Jesus Brochure – all sacraments
Confirmation Brochure – CEO
Letters from Ursula Frayne.