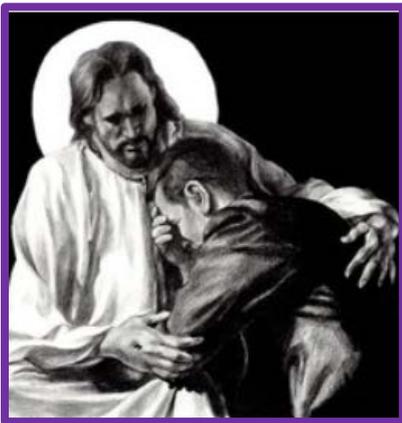




St Martha's Strathfield

Sacramental program



GUIDELINES AND POLICY

Current as at July 2016

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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


Fr Christopher Slattery
Parish Priest

ST MARTHA'S SACRAMENTAL PROGRAM

1. Our Sacramental program is family and parish based. This means that our programs are implemented and supported by the family and Parish. It is open to all parishioners and their families who worship and are active participants in our parish community – irrespective of which school their children attends. By way of definition:
 - Do you and your family regularly attend Mass at St Martha's?
 - Are you registered to contribute via the weekly planned giving envelopes?
 - Are you and your family actively involved with the St Martha's parish community?
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.
3. 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 faith development.

4. **Advertising for the Sacrament and helpers** will take place via the weekly church bulletin and applications will be available from the church, parish office, or website for each Sacrament.

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EXPECTATIONS

1. From our parishioners

It is expected that our parishioners 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

It is expected that all families fully embrace and supports the ethos of our parish based program. There is to be no promotion of division or segregation of the candidates based on their respective schools.

3. From our Parents

It is expected that parents of our participating candidates fully commit and are 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.

Children learn from our actions as parents. We need to show responsibility and good example by accompanying our child to the lessons, arriving 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

It is expected that the candidate fully commit to attending the four lessons, completing their workbooks and homework sheets (with guidance from their parents if needed) and everything that is required of them to be able to fully comprehend the sacrament and be ready to celebrate 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 Parish Office.

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THE PARTICIPANTS

1. Schools in St Martha's parish boundary.

The schools within our parish boundaries are:

- St Martha's Catholic Primary
- St Patrick's College
- Santa Sabina College
- Santa Maria Del Monte
- Homebush Public School
- Marie Bashir Public School
- Strathfield Girls High
- Homebush Boys High

2. St Martha's Sacramental Program runs within a school term as follows:

Sacrament	Program period
First Reconciliation	In Term 4
First Holy Communion	In Term 1 of the new year – after completing Reconciliation
Confirmation	In Term 3

3. 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:

For Reconciliation – 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)

At St Martha's, we celebrate First Reconciliation – when the child reaches Year 2 and above and is baptised into the Catholic faith.

For Communion – to understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity and can receive the Body of the Lord with faith and devotion" (Canon 913)

At St Martha's, we celebrate First Eucharist – when the child reaches Year 3 and above, and have received the Sacrament of Reconciliation;

For Confirmation – 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)

At St Martha's, we celebrate Confirmation – when the child reaches Year 6 and above, and have received both the Sacraments of Reconciliation and First Holy Communion;

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Children of other ages will be considered after consultation with the Parish Priest.

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 with other parishes.

As parents, we 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.

In previous years, some parents have deliberately deferred their child for 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, after consulting with the parents, has the final right and decision to defer a candidate from receiving a Sacrament based on their fulfilling the requirements for preparation.

4. Children with Special Needs

Children with special needs will also be considered on consultation with the Parish Priest based on their 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 Martha's parish we will work together with the parents to ensure that their special needs child does not miss out on these Sacraments.

5. Children attending schools within our Parish boundary but resides and worship elsewhere.

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

As most Sacramental programs are Parish based, 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.

6. Children of another Faith.

St Martha'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.

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.

7. Converting to Catholicism.

We have, in previous years, had some children convert to Catholicism because they want 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 is the responsibility of the parents and parish community.

A BIG commitment is expected from their parents because effectively the parents become their child's first educators and nurturers of their development in their faith. So nurturing of the children's faith is no different 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.

Nurturing of a child's faith is coming together to have that quality family time during Mass each weekend – worshipping together as a family as well as being together as God's family with the other parishioners. It is about guiding and joining the child in prayer each day.

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Parents must 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.

THE PROGRAM PROTOCOLS

1. Promotion of St Martha's Sacramental Calendar

Parishioners can find out about our Sacramental Calendar and when each Sacraments are held via:

- St Martha's parish website – www.stmarthas.org.au
- St Martha's parish weekly church bulletins (when appropriate)
- Printed handouts displayed in the church doorways (when appropriate)
- St Martha's school newsletters (when appropriate)

The main part of the preparation and the celebration of each sacrament takes place over one school term. Here at St Martha's, Strathfield we celebrate:

- First Holy Communion – Term 1
- Confirmation – Term 3
- First Reconciliation – Term 4

2. 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.

- 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.
- 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 CANNOT BE OFFERED. Please defer your child's enrolment to the following year.

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3. Enrolment Process

- Through Parish website
- Filling out an enrolment Form, available at entrance to the Church.

Sacrament	Enrolment Period	Program period
Reconciliation	Within Term 3	In Term 4
Holy Communion	Within Term 3	In Term 1 of the new year
Confirmation	Within Term 2	In Term 3

- Late enrolments received may 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 full payment, full completion of the enrolment form and copies of the necessary accompanying documents (where applicable).

4. Commitment to the program

a) Parents of Candidates:

- Attend the compulsory Information Session 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.

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 Catechist.



*“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