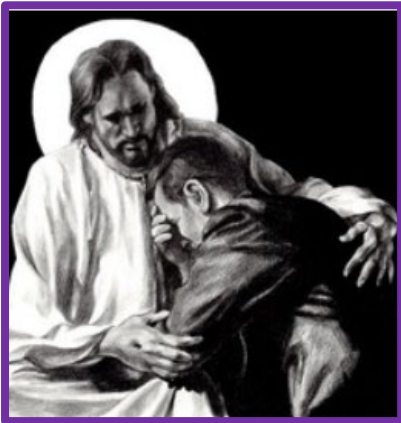




St Martha's Strathfield

Sacramental program



GUIDELINES AND POLICY

Current as at February 2020

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Sacramental Program – Guidelines and Policy

<i>Index</i>	Page
- The Program	2
- Explanation of program	
- Expectations	3
- Parishioners and parish community	3
- Schools within parish boundary	3
- Parents of candidates	3
- Candidates	3
- The Participants	4 - 6
- List of schools within parish boundary	4
- St Martha's Sacramental Program period	4
- Sydney Archdiocese Sacramental policy on eligibility	4 - 5
- Celebrating the Sacraments at St Martha's	4 - 5
- Children with Special Needs	5
- Children residing and worshipping outside St Martha's parish	5 - 6
- Children of another Faith	6
- Converting to Catholicism	6 - 7
- Program Protocols	7 - 8
- St Martha's Sacramental Calendar	7
- Conditions of Enrolments	7
- Enrolment Process	8
- Commitment to the program	8
- Parents	8
- Candidates	8

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

This policy has been overseen by the St Martha's Parish Administrator effective February 2020.

*Father Jacek Cichy
Parish*

Administrator

Sacramental Program – Guidelines and Policy

ST MARTHA’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 – 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 development.

4. 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 Martha’s we require ten (8-10) volunteers to be Group Leaders for each Sacramental program. All Group Leaders are provided with all the resources and support is on hand from the Sacramental Co-ordinator.

Advertising for Group Leaders will take place via the weekly church bulletin and applications will be available from the church or parish office for each Sacrament:

Sacrament	Call for Group Leaders
Reconciliation Program in Term 4	Late Term 2/early Term 3
Holy Communion Program in Term 2, following year	During Term 4 while Reconciliation is on
Confirmation Program in Term 3	Late Term 1/Early Term 2

5. 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.

Sacramental Program – Guidelines and Policy

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.

During the preparation period of each Sacrament, parishioners will be able to read what the candidates have learnt each week through the weekly Church Bulletin.

2. From the schools within the Parish boundary

It is expected that all schools within our parish boundary 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. Therefore having full parental support and active guidance with both action and words are important to the child as they experience this wonderful journey in faith.

Children learn from our actions and as parents, we **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

It is expected that the candidates fully commits 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 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 or team leader immediately at the Parish Office.

Sacramental Program – Guidelines and Policy

THE PARTICIPANTS

1. Schools in St Martha’s parish boundary.

The recognised 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

St Martha’s Sacramental Program will not and does not support segregation of candidates based on schools. Our Parish based program promotes inclusiveness of all candidates and families of our parish community. We ask that all parents embrace this inclusiveness.

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 2 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;

Sacramental Program – Guidelines and Policy

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 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 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 worships in their own Parish.

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.

At St Martha's Parish, we also encourage this practice.

- **Do you and your family attend Mass weekly at St Martha's?**
- **Are you registered to contribute via the weekly planned giving envelopes?**
- **Are you and your family actively involved with St Martha's parish community?**
- **Do you and your family actively participate in St Martha's parish activities?**

If not, 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.

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.

If parents do happen to find themselves in this situation when the time comes, parents need to take the time to explain to their child why it is that they can't receive the Sacrament.

Sacramental Program – Guidelines and Policy

However, if the child feels that God has become important in their life, and that as parents, they wish for God to be a part of their child's life, then there are certain processes that need to take place beginning with making an appointment to see the Parish Priest well before we start our Sacramental program each year.

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

It is our aim to promote St Martha's Sacramental Program at least twelve (12) months in advance of the following year.

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 2
- 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.

- 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.
- 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.

Sacramental Program – Guidelines and Policy

3. Enrolment Process

- Enrolment forms can be downloaded from the parish website www.stmarthas.org.au and sent to the Sacramental email sc@stmarthas.org.au by the closing date.
- 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 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.
- 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