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Dear Rev Fr., Principal, 2nd Class Teacher,

The new *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* (2015), and the Religious Education programme deriving from it (*Grow in Love*), continue to be rolled out in Catholic primary schools across the diocese. At Level 2 (1st and 2nd Class), the programme invites parents, guardians, schools and parishes to work closely together to ensure the integrity of the celebration of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion, and to ensure that the celebration of the sacraments are events in the life of the wider Christian community, not just in the life of the school.

I am aware of the immense energy and commitment which surrounds these celebrations at local level. I am also conscious that the pastoral situation regarding the Sacraments of Christian Initiation has been changing in recent years. Those of us in leadership roles in parishes and schools have been trying to adapt and respond to the situation as creatively and constructively as possible. The introduction of the *Grow in Love* programme presents a *once in a generation* opportunity to enhance our preparation for the sacraments and root our celebrations in the liturgical life of the parish. I wish to endorse the vision as set out in the *Grow in Love* programme which seeks to ensure cooperation between the home, the school and the parish so that the responsibility for preparation is equally shared by all.

Sacramental preparation is intrinsic to the Catholic identity of our schools and our schools have prepared our children well. They built on the foundation of children's faith experience in the home and the parish. Over time, and as our society has evolved, that foundation can no longer be presumed, and schools now find themselves in a role far beyond what was previously expected. Today, our culture is experiencing a growing indifference to things of spiritual value. This affects Christian family life and the practice of our faith. The over-emphasis on the "day" of first sacramental celebration itself comes at a cost to families that is unjustifiable spiritually, morally and financially. In this situation, the pastoral practices which accompanied sacramental preparation in the past are no longer sufficient. Ignoring this situation would be a disservice to children, their families, their teachers, and to parish communities.


As we strive to make faith something alive and relevant for this generation, it is time to reflect on how best we utilize our resources in preparing our children for the sacraments of

Reconciliation and Holy Communion. **To encourage this conversation at parish level, I am outlining some principles and guidelines which I hope will prove helpful in preparing this year's liturgical celebrations** (*See attached documents*). Their aim is to create an appreciation of the true meaning of the sacraments our children receive as something much deeper than "once-off" events. This process may prove challenging but at its conclusion will hopefully lead to a deeper appreciation of the true meaning of the sacraments our children receive. This is merely the beginning of a process. In due course, the aim is to produce a more substantial document. Any further suggestions would be greatly appreciated and can be forwarded to Fr Seán Corkery at cloynewevangelisation@gmail.com

Our shared desire is to prepare our children to celebrate these important sacramental moments in their faith journey as fully and as reverently as possible. I hope and trust that this letter initiates a necessary conversation at parish level as a matter of urgency which will bear fruit in the time ahead.

With every good wish,

Yours sincerely,



Most Rev. William Crean, D.D.,
Bishop of Cloyne.



Principles and Guidelines for Preparing and Celebrating the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the First Time in 2018

Principles

1. Parents and guardians are the first teachers in the ways of faith.
2. Baptised children are members of the Church of Christ and each parish has a responsibility to witness to them and to help them grow in faith.
3. The Catholic School supports parents in providing a Catholic identity, a faith community and a catechetical formation.
4. Through the sacraments of initiation, we are incorporated into the Body of Christ and the life of the parish.
5. An important aspect of preparation for the reception of the sacraments is that the child has an adequate understanding of the sacrament in question, and knowledge of the prayers, responses and hymns associated with it.
6. Inappropriate adaptations or practices that are contrary to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* and the *Rite of Penance* are to be absolutely avoided. The liturgy is itself full of ritual meaning and should be given its full expression. Nothing should distract from that.
7. On the reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the first time, the child should be *ministered to* and not have to perform other functions which detract from the essential character of the sacrament being received.
8. Representatives of the home, school and parish who have helped to prepare the children throughout the year are to be encouraged to fulfil the liturgical roles required on the day such as ministry of the word, prayer of the faithful, procession of bread and wine at the preparation of the gifts and extraordinary ministry of holy communion (if required).
9. Mindful of the fact that the days of first sacramental celebrations are special, they should not be disconnected from general parish celebrations. The simplicity and beauty of the liturgical life of the parish must be reflected in the celebration of sacraments for the first time so that unrealistic expectations are not created in first sacramental celebrations.

What Now?

1. **Parish Teams and Schools should take some time to consider the document: *Principles and Guidelines on Preparing and Celebrating the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the First Time*. Going forward, hopefully ways of including representatives of the home in this reflection can be found.***

*Note: Another helpful resource is the Irish Bishops' Conference document *Preparing and Celebrating the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the First Time: Guidelines and Discussion Document for Homes, Parish Communities and Schools* (Veritas, 2016).

Guidelines

1. Parish – Home

- i. There is already much work underway regarding parish-led preparation programmes. **The diocese encourages programmes such as *Do this in memory of me* and *The Bridge* at parish level as a means of outreach to families.**
- ii. **Ways of promoting family ministry and regular practice of the faith by families are important at parish level.** These could include a children's liturgy for young children on Sundays, children's adoration¹, Christian film and social media initiatives, occasional scripture and faith formation initiatives which bring families together on both a social and catechetical level on Sunday - the Lord's Day. The rhythm of the feasts and seasons of the liturgical year provide a sound basis on which to proceed.
- iii. Given the current climate regarding the practice rate at parish level, **it is prudent for the parish to insist upon an Enrolment ceremony as early as possible in the year for persons who petition the parish to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the first time.**
- iv. The diocesan *Family Prayer Book* can be gifted to families. Other catechetical, biblical and prayer resources can be sourced at local level by parishes to support and nurture the life of faith in the Catholic households of the faith community. The *World Meeting of Families* 2018 in Dublin can be a focal point for initiatives at parish level.

Note:

- a) The diocese is currently developing a **parish-led preparation programme for the parents and guardians of those presenting for the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the first time.** This will support parents and guardians in their role as the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith. During the school year 2017-18, the diocese will undertake a pilot programme in the parish of Youghal. It is hoped to be able to offer the programme to other parishes in the near future.
- b) The diocese currently has 12 trainee catechists participating in a two-year formation programme. Once commissioned, the trained catechists will give a minimum of four years voluntary service (renewable) to the parish that sponsored their training. It is hoped that more parishes will discern suitable candidates for the role of parish catechist and avail of the training at the next available opportunity.

¹ See www.childrenoftheeucharist.ie The diocese supports this programme which is already underway at parish level.

2. School – Home

- i. The *Grow in Love* Primary School Religious Education Programme affirms parents and guardians as the first and best of teachers and the family as the first school of faith. The weekly “At Home” page in the *Grow in Love* Children’s Book provides concrete activities for Parents and Guardians to engage with the child’s faith formation journey. **The “At Home” activity should be a weekly feature of the child’s faith journey during the school year.**
- ii. The primary focus of the *Grow in Love* programme is on catechesis for the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion as opposed to focusing on the day of receiving the sacraments for the first time. This permits the school to become the main resource assisting families of the children in their care. It is particularly noteworthy that *Grow in Love* does not contain templates for the celebration of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the first time. This is deliberate. *Grow in Love* envisages a more incremental approach to learning about God’s forgiveness and about the Blessed Eucharist over the course of 1st and 2nd Class. It is hoped this will offer children the space and time to understand what happens in the Confessional and at Holy Mass, rather than learning about it in the context of the immediate and practical preparation for liturgical celebrations. Sacramental preparation is intrinsic to the Catholic identity of our schools. As such, **the primary concern for the school is to ensure the child has an adequate understanding of the sacrament in question, and knowledge of the prayers, responses and hymns associated with it.** This liberates the school from being solely responsible for the logistics of the liturgies themselves that take place during the year. The diocese of Cloyne endorses the *Grow in Love* vision here:

... the Catholic School contributes an *indispensable* amount of commitment, expertise and resources to sacramental preparation and celebration. It has been, and will remain, a vital partner in this area, as well as in the religious education of children in a more general sense. However, the role of school and its teachers must be to support families and their parish in the Christian initiation of children, not the other way around.

- iii. **The school may cooperate with the parish and the home in the preparation of the liturgies associated with preparing and celebrating the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the first time.** The authors of the *Grow in Love* programme envisage, where practicable, one full school-led rehearsal in the Church prior to first sacramental celebrations. The parish should support the school and its teachers in this rehearsal by the presence and assistance of the school chaplain, members of the Parish Pastoral Council, parish catechists (as they become the norm in parishes) and/or other willing parish personnel. Multiple rehearsals for these liturgical celebrations should not impinge upon core curriculum time during the school day as this is unreasonable to the teacher and his or her professional requirement for classroom contact. If necessary, the parish may then need to take an active role in supporting the school and home by organising an afternoon, evening or weekend rehearsal in the days prior to these liturgical celebrations.
- iv. **Many schools have a tradition of regularly participating in the morning parish celebrations of the Eucharist throughout the school year.** This is a highly desirable practice for a Catholic school when practicable for school authorities.

3. Home – School – Parish

- i. **The parish supports and promotes the Catholic ethos in the Catholic schools of the parish on many levels.** Frequent visits to the school by the school chaplain provide a welcome support to teachers and gives the children an experience of dialogue with their local priest which they may not otherwise have. *Grow in Love: A Guide for Priests and Parish Workers when Visiting Classrooms: Junior Infants-Second Class* (Veritas, 2016) provides starting points for discussion during such visits and gives an insight into the language of faith that the children are familiar with. The children should know that the visits are by someone with a role in the local Church who wants to share the responsibility of handing on the Catholic faith that comes to us from the Apostles.
- ii. **Persons who petition a parish to receive the sacraments from non-catholic schools should undertake a period of catechetical instruction and faith formation.** This would be facilitated by the parish. The programme of catechetical instruction to be followed requires the approval of the local bishop. Bishop Crean already approves the use of the following programmes:
 - *Grow in Love* First Class and Second Class (Veritas, 2016)
 - *Jesus our Life: Faith and Life Series 2* (Ignatius Press, 2016 [3rd Edition])
 - *My First Holy Communion* (Clonmacnois Press, 2010).
- iii. Sacramental celebrations belong to and in the parish faith community. Liturgical actions are not private but, by their very nature, call for a community celebration for which the parish priest has a responsibility to direct in his own parish. He is to strive to ensure that Christ's faithful are nourished by the devout celebration of the sacraments, and in particular that they frequently approach the sacraments of the Most Holy Eucharist and Penance (cf. Can 528 §2; Can 837§1-2). In this regard, **the diocese endorses the vision contained in *Grow in Love* which is to root our celebrations in the liturgical life of the parish.** With regards to celebrating the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the first time, the following points should be noted:
 - a) The local parish in collaboration with the school remains best placed with the expertise and experience to take the lead role in preparing the liturgical celebrations of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the first time. It is hoped that some competent members of the wider parish community and representatives of the families can be invited to assist in this work.
 - b) Liturgical planning should observe the principles outlined by the Bishop in this document. Given the importance of family ministry and the regular practice of the faith by families, the liturgical rites of first sacramental celebrations should not be disconnected from general parish celebrations so that it creates unrealistic expectations in the minds of an eight-year old and his or her family (cf. Principle # 9).
 - c) To assist in implementing this vision, ***Liturgy Preparation Sheets*** have been prepared for the following liturgies:
 - The Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the First Time
 - The Celebration of Holy Communion for the First Time *within* Sunday Mass
 - The Celebration of Holy Communion for the First Time *outside* Sunday Mass
 - Suggested Readings for Holy Communion for the First Time outside Sunday Mass

These will help foster the dignity of the celebrations and protect families and schools from some of the excess pressures which have become a feature of these celebrations. They are available for download at www.cloynediocese.ie under *Primary Education --- Resources and Downloads*.

The *Liturgy Preparation Sheets* operate from the principle that Reconciliation and Holy Communion are more than one-off events. The proposed liturgies are devised around the prayers and songs of the *Grow in Love* programme and Bernard Sexton's, *Mass of Renewal*, which is widely used in this Diocese. The *Liturgy Preparation Sheets* also provide guidance on preparing the Church building for the celebration. The resources emphasize parish and parental involvement in leading the prayers, so there will be far less demands on the children to rehearse their part.

The following songs from *Grow in Love* can occasionally be incorporated into the repertoire of parish choirs during the liturgical year. It makes sense for children to hear them at general parish celebrations as they will be familiar with them. It will encourage the children to have greater participation in general parish liturgy:

a) The Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Opening Hymn:

- "Lay Your Hands" (2nd Class Teacher Manual, p. 89)

Concluding Hymn:

- Gifts from God (2nd Class Teacher Manual, p. 88)
- Alleluia, Alleluia! Give Thanks (1st Class Teacher Manual, p. 207)
- "This is the Day" (2nd Class Teacher Manual, p. 212)

b) Celebration of Holy Mass

Entrance Hymn:

- Alleluia, Alleluia! Give Thanks (1st Class Teacher Manual, p. 207)
- Christ Be Beside Me (1st Class Teacher Manual, p. 309)
- "Gathering Song" (2nd Class Teacher Manual p. 88)

Offertory Hymn

- We Come to You, Lord Jesus (1st Class Teacher Manual, p. 186)

Communion Hymn

- "The Last Supper" (2nd Class Teacher Manual, p. 190)
- "Eat this Bread" (2nd Class Teacher Manual, p. 191)

Concluding Hymn

- "Gifts from God" (2nd Class Teacher Manual, p. 253)

What Next?

1. **Reflect on how best to prepare and celebrate for sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the first time in 2018 at parish level. It makes sense for representatives of the home, school and parish communities to cooperate on this.**
2. **The diocese proposes that, as soon as possible in the academic year, the presider for these celebrations convene the meeting suggested in the *Liturgy Preparation Sheets*, and organise this year's celebrations in accordance with their guidance.**
3. **It is hoped the contents of this document, *Principles and Guidelines on Preparing and Celebrating the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the First Time*, will foster cooperation between the home, school and parish so that the responsibility for preparation is equally shared by all.**

