

# DIocese of MEATH

Religious Instruction and Sacramental Preparation  
for pupils attending non-Catholic Schools



Providing for the Catholic education of children is primarily the responsibility of their parents. This responsibility is ordinarily supported by the local Catholic school and by the wider parish community in partnership. In the absence of a Catholic school, or where a child has been unable to secure a place in the local Catholic school, a greater commitment is necessitated from parents regarding their child's religious education. The Code of Canon Law states: *"Parents are to send their children to those schools which will provide for their Catholic education. If they cannot do this, they are bound to ensure the proper Catholic Education of their children"* (Canon 793).

Where such a commitment is evident, and parents of children attending non-Catholic schools request that their children receive the sacraments, their local parish will endeavour to support them to this end. Weekly attendance at Sunday Eucharist is the principal sign of the commitment of parents to the religious education of their child.

The Code of Canon Law outlines the duty of the Parish Priest to *"ensure, in accordance with the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop, that children are properly prepared for First Confession and First Holy Communion and for the sacrament of Confirmation, by means of catechetical formation over an appropriate period of time"* (Canon 777<sup>o</sup>2).

To this end the following diocesan norms will apply:

1. All children who have reached the age of reason (seven years and over) who are presented for the sacrament of Baptism should undergo a **period of catechetical preparation before Baptism**. Following Baptism, there should be an adequate period of religious instruction before they are admitted to the sacraments of First Confession and First Holy Communion (*see Canon 852<sup>o</sup>2*).
2. Each September parents of all children attending non-Catholic schools should be **notified through the local parish bulletin and/or their school** that they need to make immediate arrangements for their child's religious education if they wish them to receive the sacraments in due course.
3. Prior to being admitted to the religious education or sacramental preparation programme, the parents are expected to **apply in writing** on behalf of their child for instruction and for admission to the sacraments. The application should confirm their commitment to attend Mass with their child each week

and to participate in the local parish programmes such as ‘Do this in Memory’. The application must be accompanied by a **copy of the child’s baptismal certificate**. The application and the baptismal certificate should be forwarded to the Parish Priest where the child will receive the sacrament.

4. It is inadequate to confine catechesis (which is a life long process) to a short period of preparation before the reception of a sacrament. It is desirable that children be enrolled in the parish religious education programme from Junior Infants if their parents wish them to receive the sacraments in due course. A minimum of two years catechetical and sacramental preparation should be completed before children are admitted to the sacrament of First Confession and First Holy Communion. **Children must be enrolled in a parish programme from at least first class** if they are to receive First Confession and First Holy Communion in second class. Those seeking Confirmation should have attended instruction since second class.
5. Two models of religious education and sacramental preparation outside of the Catholic school are envisaged in the Diocese of Meath:

**(A) A Parish or Deanery based programme:** The Parish or Deanery will employ the services of trained and qualified catechists. Parents will be expected to contribute on a weekly basis to help cover the costs of running the programme. The suggested weekly contribution is €10. The programme will be expected to observe the norms of the Diocesan Safeguarding Children Policy.

**(B) An ‘after-school’ programme organised by a committee of Catholic parents of children attending a non-Catholic school:** The parents’ committee arranges an after school programme. The parents’ committee assumes the legal responsibility for the employment of the catechist, insurance matters and best practice where child protection is concerned. The Parish Priest where the school is based should approve the appointment of the catechist and should also approve the programme content. The parents committee should be aware that the Diocese reserves the right to have the programme assessed by the Diocesan Advisors for Religious Education.

6. All catechists appointed are to be **qualified primary teachers who have completed the *Diploma in Primary Religious Education***. They should be asked to sign a voluntary declaration form and should be vetted in due course in keeping with Safeguarding Children (Policy and Procedures for the Diocese of Meath).
7. **It is strongly recommended that candidates receive the sacraments in their parish of residence** : The candidates should be issued with a certificate by the course director stating that they have completed the preparation programme and are deemed ready to be admitted to the sacraments. They should present this certificate in their home parish in order to be admitted to the sacraments. In most instances the children will be expected to join children from other schools of the Parish. Where the parish priest determines that a separate ceremony is necessary, the emphasis should be on the **parish celebration**. It should be stressed that the children were prepared outside school by the parish. The celebration should not be presented as pertaining to a particular school.
8. The programme should strive to provide for the **same contact hours per week as a child who is attending a Catholic primary school** (i.e. 2.5 hours per week). The programme should observe strictly the set primary school academic year (minimum 35 weeks). Prayer should be an integral part of every lesson.
9. Each September, the co-ordinator of the programme should, in consultation with the children's parishes of residence, **furnish the parents with a full schedule of classes and important dates for the year** (e.g. dates and times for enrolment ceremonies, Do This in Memory programme, First confession, First Holy Communion etc.)
10. **An attendance register should be kept each week** as an effective way of assessing the commitment of candidates. Those who miss significant number of lessons may be requested to defer applying for the sacraments for a further year.

