

## Questions around Baptism and First Communion post lockdown

*The easing of lockdown and the resumption of public worship in some churches has brought to the fore the question of what to do about families seeking to celebrate one of the sacraments. Lockdown cut across all sorts of preparation programmes and has resulted in a backlog of those wanting to celebrate baptism, first confession and first communion. The continuing uncertainty also raises questions about what/how preparation may be offered into the autumn and new year.*

On 14<sup>th</sup> August, a gathering of more than 50 catechists and priests shared:

- Questions.
- Experience/insights/ideas.
- Specific resources/supports.

This was some of the feedback:

### **Baptisms**

- Baptism preparation may be easier to deal with as it involves smaller numbers.
- Small baptism groups were more prayerful.
- I've heard some lovely feedback about the increased intimacy in celebrating baptism and first holy communion.
- Small groups would seem to be an important new learning.
- Parent workbook/sheets resource for baptism would be good as physical preparation will not be happening for a long time. That would make one-to-one follow up better.
- Pre-meeting workbook for parents for baptism to then meet as a small group or one-to-one to follow up by going through the ceremony and its meaning.
- We prepared 15 parents and are planning for the baptisms to take place throughout September and October with one family at a time (quite a commitment). We're also looking at providing a short refresher leaflet.
- Baptism preparation has been put on hold for the time being. Families can still book baptisms but only one child is baptised at a time and a maximum of 30 people can attend.
- One baptism at a time though, a gathering of up to 30 people most of whom are not parishioners and from areas you don't know is difficult when COVID is still active in the North West and some places are in lockdown.
- Our families are content to delay baptisms and wait for their whole family to be able to celebrate.
- It was reassuring to hear from a parish that had already held two baptisms the practical issues faced and their solutions to overcome.

**Points that stood out for some: small group preparation/single ceremonies (held throughout the week)/a new resource would be helpful to assist with preparation at home.**

## First Communions

- Have some brief and simple reminders of the essentials of first holy communion for families who have not had any catechesis since the beginning of lockdown.
- I saw in my head a child receiving their first holy communion from a priest in a face shield. Can the little ones understand that?
- Creative use of outside spaces for preparation.
- The increased use of technology had helped us reach out to families.
- The number of children seems to be significant in planning a way forward to receive the sacrament and not having completed the final session is also a major factor. How would the Archdiocese feel about the final session being delivered via a Zoom session with small numbers of children (possibly five) with clear Zoom expectations?
- We could deliver most of the *With You Always (WYA)* sessions via Zoom. New families with no prior experience may need personal 'old school' delivery. Archdiocesan support with materials for electronic courses would be useful.
- Could the Archdiocese provide a PowerPoint to support a Zoom meeting with parents?
- Parishes could collect email addresses from parents so that Zoom meetings could be organised at a central level for a small group of parishes at a time if it can't be managed locally.
- Personal contact with the family and children is very important - so a Zoom arrangement might not work.
- Technology will play a part but remember there might be families who can't or won't use Zoom.
- It's important to remember that we communicate with all our senses... alienation is a very real threat.
- Context is so important and no parish is the same as another. Some video resources around WYA might be useful.
- Can we have a walk-through of the WYA resource on YouTube, so parents and children can do it at home?
- Could there be video support to be accessed by families at home with question and answer sheets to show involvement?
- I was impressed with a church delivering Little Church online using video.
- We cannot rely on all families having Wi-Fi in order to connect.
- Do we need to adopt another programme, shorter than WYA, that can be delivered to smaller groups?
- Condense the preparation sessions.
- It's an opportunity to focus on what really matters - receiving Jesus.
- It's an opportunity to get back to basics and focus on the essence of the sacrament.
- We need to look at what could be omitted without losing the essence of the sacramental instruction. We must be realistic in what can be done if the COVID situation continues like this. We also must be aware of the capacity of catechist teams so that work/life balance is acceptable.
- We are presented with a new opportunity to simplify what we are doing.
- A more flexible, shorter programme, with school involvement.
- Important that schools work with the parishes to support the preparation process.
- How can we use schools as they will not allow visitors?

- Children not attending school means they have missed out on religious education through the *Come and See* programme which supports WYA and helps them to understand the preparation they are part of. The worry is that if there is another lockdown, or local lockdowns, and schools are closed again when will they catch up with the religious education they have missed?
- Concern over groups being split up and the children losing the joy of celebrating the sacrament with their peers.
- Flexibility is the thing.
- We are THE resource, and the future will be fine if we each and all remember that and are willing to be flexible.
- Being flexible with local knowledge is key to the success of the programme. We are governed by the facilities each parish has.
- It will be different for each parish and the numbers involved.
- How and when we do sacramental preparation will be very much down to the individual parishes and the catechists involved.
- Should we order some WYA booklets for the next group or not?
- Maybe parishes who put in place something that works, or is successful, could share it with other parishes so that successful practices could be adopted by others?
- It would be helpful to talk to other catechists who are involved in larger parishes with bigger numbers of children.
- Helpful things being considered by one parish:
  - Use September to prepare: this will involve the three primary schools and their headteachers and those involved with last year's year 4 children.
  - Try to complete the first holy communions by half term in October.
  - Recognise that some families may not want to do it without having a big celebration and that we will have to sort out later.
- Perhaps make use of the cathedral for large numbers?
- We've promised the families that we will come together for a group celebration at some point in the future when possible.
- We all want to be here together out of our love for the Church. Our children on the whole seem to love the things of God and the Church from what they learn at school but usually (sadly) they are not supported by their parents. It would be lovely to dream that the excellent discussion we have had could be shared with parents but I suspect only a small minority would be interested. We do suffer from many being indifferent to the things of God and the Church among the adults, even if they should never be judged as you never know what is going on within them. I think we are in a more tricky situation for the future than we might think. My impression is that the best techniques or books will not really touch the hearts and souls of people as there is a context in which we live that does not support either the things of God or the Church. Our best hope is to create such a loving community in our parishes that will want to learn.

**Points that stood out for some: simplification of catechesis/flexibility/extended use of technology to deliver but not as the sole means/sharing of best practice/Archdiocesan support/realisation that one programme does not suit all/school involvement.**

**Catechists**

- It's impressive to hear the strong commitment of catechists keeping contact with families.
- Continue gatherings such as this for catechists to come together to share and reflect.