

First Holy Communion Policy

St Marks with Holy Family Brantham and St Mary Magdalen Parish

Welcome to St Marks and St Mary Magdalen Catholic Parishes. In our parishes we are committed to supporting one another in becoming disciples of Jesus Christ, fully alive to God and to one another. We welcome all people, of all ages and backgrounds to encounter the living God who comes to us most especially in the sacraments and above all in our Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. (Mass). We are a parish committed to renewal, believing that the beautiful gift of faith is too precious to be taken lightly and too important not to be encouraged to grow and flourish. We therefore approach the preparation for the sacraments in a way which may be different to what you may have been used to in the past.

First Holy communion is a pivotal moment in the life of a Catholic Christian. To be a full member of the Catholic Church, a person is required to receive the three Sacraments of Initiation, these are: Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Communion. These three sacraments are usually received during childhood, so it is imperative that parents and families are resourced to journey with their children as they are brought into the full life of the Church. Sacraments are gifts from God, they are visible signs and gestures that confer invisible graces on the person receiving them. They are not, however, magic. The person receiving them still needs to receive and cooperate with the gifts being given in the sacraments. Just like a seed planted in soil, if it is not nurtured, watered and protected, it will die, so too, if the person receiving the sacrament is not nurtured, watered by faith and protected from those things that endanger the life of faith, then the graces given in the sacrament will weaken, wither and die. Therefore, the role of parents and family is critical, and in fact the Church teaches that it is the parents, before anyone else who are responsible for educating their children in the faith;

From The Catechism of the Catholic Church:

2223 Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children.

2225. Parents should initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the "first heralds" for their children. They should associate them from their tenderest years with the life of the Church.

2226 Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years...The parish is the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents.

At St Mark's and St Mary Magdalen we are committed to a family centered approach to the sacraments which supports parents in bringing up their children in the faith.

Our preparation for First Holy Communion adopts what we refer to as a "readiness approach." Where the child being ready to receive the sacrament is the focus of the preparation. This means that rather than a child following a structured one-size-fits-all course, which is on a strict timetable, and then making their First Holy Communion as a group on a fixed day, preparation for First Holy Communion occurs when the child and their parents feel they are ready for First Confession and First Holy Communion.

The readiness of the child is assessed by Fr Luke and his catechetical team and when agreed, the child is then invited to make their First Holy Communion at any regular Sunday Mass throughout the year.

Because parents are the chief educators of their children in the faith, we are committed to forming and educating parents so that they have the tools to help their children understand the faith. One of the key ways we do this is that we expect at least one parent, to participate in an Alpha Course (unless recently done so with another sibling). For more information on Alpha and our parish see our Alpha policy and information.

The key points to our First Holy Communion are:

- Sunday Mass (or Saturday night) participation is understood to be the main mode of preparation for the sacraments

- Parents are given the “Jesus comes to me” work book which they are invited to work through with their child at their own pace – a link catechist for each family is assigned as a point of contact should they need remote help.
- Once a Month (4th Sunday) after Sunday Mass at St Mark’s (during the tea and coffee slot) we will hold a “Kids Church” – a 30 min session for children of primary school age – **whilst this is not a First Holy Communion course – it is expected that any child who wants to make First Holy Communion would regularly participate in this.**
- When a family thinks a child is ready, they will apply to Fr Luke and he or a team member will meet with the child and his/her parents to assess whether they are ready to make their First Holy Communion – we will be looking at:
 1. Have they been able to work through most of the course materials at home
 2. Do they regularly participate in Mass
 3. Does the child know how to say basic prayers: Make the sign of the Cross, the Our Father and Hail Mary
 4. Does the child understand that Holy Communion is not bread and wine but really Jesus who comes to them at Holy Communion.
- Once assessed, the child and family will either be asked to wait if not quite ready and work on a particular area of preparation with help from the catechist, or will be invited to make their First confession and find a suitable Sunday date for First Holy Communion.
- First Holy Communion therefore takes place at a regular Sunday Mass (as baptisms do), the child can still dress up and have a party with the family, but there is no single big parish celebration.