**Killaloe Diocese**

***Recommended Best Practice Guidelines for Sacramental Preparation Journey.***

**Step 1. Meeting with the parents in September( In person)**

**( Speaker to explain significance of this sacrament, what's involved, registration, enrolment, outline preparation programme , importance of parents'/parish involvement etc, )**

**Step 2. Registration form to be completed.**

( Diocesan Approved Registration Form (2023) to go to parents via the school from parish .

Signed forms are returned to the parish via the school (unless there are other arrangements in place) by latest, October 1st.

Data base set up in Parish Office to record registrations.)

Step 3. Enrolment Ceremony to take place.

(Enrolment = A commitment by parents and children to engage in the Preparation programme.) Separate Enrolment ceremonies for Confirmation and Communion. Enrolment ceremony to be celebrated preferably on weekday evening so as to fully engage the Parents and children -too rushed at weekend Mass!

 Updated Enrolment Ceremony sent out from Diocesan office annually.

Step 4. Ideally ... Parish based Pre-sacramental Preparation programme -- involving the parents & children takes place , running concurrently with the School's Preparation Programme " Grow in Love."

 Co-ordinator /Co-ordinating group needed to organise this, and keep the communication going with all parents. Small group meetings / Larger meetings helpful also during programme .

(Zoom is a possibility in the “ongoing “programme) .

Parish Based Preparation programmes may include: \*Parents engaging with children “At Home” to discuss topics. \*Activities to be completed by children with parents' help at home and returned for display in the church for liturgies**.**

\*Preparation Masses and other rituals held throughout the Year for parents and children.. \*This is very important as many families are no longer used to being in Church. \*Parents Participate in Sunday Liturgy by Reading Prayer of Faithful, Welcome / choir, etc

\* Parish based Pre-Sacramental Programmes for First Communion " Do this in Memory "

Veritas: "Grow in Love parish newsletter " Other. \*Confirmation Parish/Parent Programmes: (example. “You Shall Be My Witness” (Leaders,/parents/children) “Confirming Our Children” ( 5 minute Rituals before Sunday Mass) “ Traditional” Faith Friends Programme “ Retreat Day before Confirmation”

Step 5. First Confession/ Reconciliation. A meaningful celebration.

Ceremony to take place in the church with Parents/Guardians present. Use the updated Liturgy Ceremony from the Grow in Love, Programme as circulated from Diocesan Office. Parents invited to present their children and to participate in readings, prayers etc .

Step 6 Celebration of the Sacraments on the Day .

Focus on the Sacrament / its meaning and importance .

Involvement of the parents is key. Keep the celebrations simple, fuss free and stress free, with the children involved in a non-competitive/ non-comparative way.

 Post Covid Survey Results indicate an overwhelming desire for small group celebrations, where the focus is on the sacrament and what it means in the child's life.

Family involvement is desirable.

Concert -like performance on the day should not be the focus, the child is at the centre of the day and is ministered to by the adults.

Guidelines for Practices in the Church in preparation for the Celebration of Sacraments. (Issued in 2015 with the launch of the New R.Ed Curriculum for Ireland and updated in 2023 by Dept of Education)

2 hours - two hours- which is the equivalent to one weeks RE classes allowed out of school for practice for the Sacraments.

Below are some comments from teachers following the sacramental preparation and celebration as experienced during Covid. These comments are taken from the respondees to the survey sent to teachers.

*“It was less of a show this year and more about the ceremony. Children and parents were more relaxed as a result.”*

*“It needs to remain simple. We are under enough pressure as it is. I also think the ceremony should continue to be limited. While I loved the 3 mainstream schools of our parish coming together as one community for Confirmation day unfortunately I'm not sure it worked in practice due to the large number of children. At times our church resembled more of a cattle mart than a place of worship on Confirmation day pre covid.”*

*“We enjoyed our confirmation ceremony this year and last. There wasn't the same pressure as other years to have it "perfect" and our priest was so helpful in the preparation of the ceremony and so relaxed that it reduced the pressure and nerves for all! It was definitely more meaningful and reverent. However we did miss the addition of music and song to make it more of a celebration without it being a "performance”.”*

*“Confirmation was very simple but all of the parents I spoke to felt it was a far more personal and intimate ceremony. It took a lot of the pressure off the school and this is extremely positive. Confirmation had become a performance and this is not what it should be about.”*

*“We would like to see very, very simple, meaningful ceremonies going forward where family has a much bigger role than school.”*

 *“The confirmation was a very special and intimate ceremony. Confirmation is a time to celebrate for families. This was different for many this year due to COVID-19.”*

*“I 'm teaching 33 years and this year’s ceremony was the nicest by far and I think most parents would agree. We had a past pupil singing and it was beautiful. Do we need to put children (who do not go to mass) through weeks of practice just because they are in the school? The parish organised a singer for the ceremony and in my opinion this took a lot of stress out of Confirmation preparations. It allowed more time to focus on the actual ceremony itself with the children.”*

***A Few Statistics from Survey***

***100% of Priests from Survey and 88% of teachers agreed that the smaller group ceremonies were more meaningful, intimate and personal.***

***96% of priests and 75% of teachers agreed that they would welcome more family involvement.***

***85% priests and 84% of teachers would welcome more parish involvement.***