



St Peters RC Church Dagenham



**First Holy Communion
Programme Handbook**

2026/2027

Dear Parents,

Welcome to the St. Peter's RC Church First Holy Communion Programme 2026/2027.

As you are now registered for the First Holy Communion Programme you are committing to the spiritual development of your child.

The First Communion Programme is for children previously baptised Catholic. As parents, we expect that you are both, (or at least one of you) committed practising Catholics.

The Catechists (teachers of the programme) are volunteers, drawn from committed members of the Parish who have given up their time to help your children. They will prepare and guide your children towards receiving the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist. Our parish programme is also designed to support parents, as they are the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith.

Weekly attendance and participation in Mass, at our parish of St Peter's, is a vital commitment in helping your child's preparation for Holy Communion. As well as being part of the natural rhythm of Catholic life, your weekly participation in the Mass as a family will inform and reinforce the learning that the Holy Communion programme provides to you and your child.

Co-operation between catechists and you as Catholic parents is an important part of the programme. Catechists are always available to help you with any queries you may have. Please feel free to come to us with any concerns.

We encourage you to discuss and question any concerns you may have regarding the programme with the catechists.

This is an important stage in your child's continuing journey of faith and together we hope to make it a memorable experience for them.

St. Peter's RC Catechist Team
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Before Starting the Programme

Parents are the first teachers to introduce the Catholic faith to their children. We start and end our sessions in prayer, a good start for you, is to ensure your child knows the following:

- Sign of the Cross
- Our Father
- Hail Mary
- Creed

The Sessions

Due to the increase number of applicants this year, sessions will be held on **Saturdays** from **10am – 11:30am**.

The dates for all sessions are as per the schedule attached.

The sessions provide a complete programme of instruction for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist, it is essential that children attend **all** the sessions. The dates and times of these sessions have been agreed between the catechists and priests and cannot be changed.

Please note however, for your convenience we have avoided holding sessions during the school holidays where practical.

Missed Sessions

If your child misses two sessions they may be asked to leave the programme and re-register the following year. If your child has unavoidably had to miss a session (e.g. through illness), please contact us, and arrangements can then be made for your child to catch up with the missed work.

First Communion Books and Homework

Your child's work books are important learning resources in their journey of faith. The children's books are beautifully illustrated and provide a lovely souvenir of this important stage in their faith preparation.

The children's book contains some scripture for each session and activities which the children will start during the Saturday sessions and then complete at home. In addition, the children will be given prayers to learn and other activities to complete for homework.

The benefit the children get from the books and the programme is reinforced through the support they get at home in completing their homework. As parents we expect you to provide at least 30 minutes of support to your child following each session. This time can be spent by helping them to complete the work in the book, learn prayers and discussing with them what happened during the session.

If your child has special needs or difficulties with reading and writing, please let us know at the beginning of the programme so that we can arrange to give them extra help during the sessions. If you do not tell us and they fall behind in completing their work, then your child could be removed from the programme.

If at any time you want to discuss any queries you may have about the homework or completing the book, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the catechists.

Attending Sunday Mass

Mass attendance is the most important way that you can help your child grow in the faith. We expect that, as a Catholic family, you will be attending Mass every week. You can choose to attend either Saturday 6pm or Sunday Masses at 9am or 11am.

Mass Attendance Card

Your child will be provided with a Mass Attendance Card which must be signed by a catechist each time you and your child attend Mass. The purpose of this card is to have a record of your regular Mass attendance. Where no catechist is available to sign the card, it may be signed by the priest. The card will only be signed when it is presented by the child in the presence of their parent. Cards will not be signed where presented by a parent without the child. The Card will only be signed if you have attended full Mass – lateness will be recorded as non-attendance. The Card **must not** be signed by you as parent, or any other parishioner attending Mass.

Children cannot attend Mass unaccompanied. It is your responsibility as a Catholic parent to attend and support your child, and regularly instruct them in their Faith. If you are not able to commit to attending Mass yourself, then we suggest you withdraw from the programme and register the following year.

The card must be brought for checking to each First Communion session. If you miss Sunday Mass more than twice (without notice) your child will be automatically removed from the First Communion programme.

Parents Meetings

An important part of our preparation programme each year is a series of around three meetings. Towards the end of the programme there is a further meeting about the First Holy Communion Day, to discuss the practical arrangements. **At least one parent from each family must attend these meetings.** We expect full attendance as this demonstrates commitment to the programme.

The meetings are an important part of the Sacramental preparation for you and your child and aim to help parents in their vital role of supporting their child through the programme.

We will be using a variety of sacramental based talks and reflection to introduce topics for discussion in small groups.

We would prefer that children do not attend the parents meetings. However, if you are not able to make alternative childcare arrangements, they can attend, but please bring an activity to occupy them during this time.

Communication

It is important that you bring and collect your child from the sessions. The catechists will take this opportunity for discussion regarding the programme, your child behaviour and support. If for any reason the catechists are unable to meet with you they may contact you via telephone, text message, email or letter. You will be expected to acknowledge the communication request and ensure you contact the catechist. Failure to do so may result in your child being deferred from sessions until you can meet with the catechist.

Joining the Catholic Church

If you are the non-Catholic parent in the family and would like to learn more about the Catholic faith, you might be interested in joining our parish's RCIA programme (**Rite of Catholic Initiation of Adults**). Please ask Fr Marek for more details.

Frequently Asked Questions

What does my child need to bring to the sessions?

They need to bring their Workbooks, any additional homework that was provided and their Mass Attendance Card. There is no need for them to bring pens and colouring pencils as these will be provided.

Does my child have to complete the homework?

Yes they do and we expect you to spend a minimum of 30 minutes with them after each session to help them complete their book and learn prayers. You will also need to provide them with colouring pencils for completing their homework.

What if my child has learning or reading difficulties?

You need to let us know at the beginning of the Programme so that we can arrange support for your child during the sessions. If you do not tell us and your child falls behind with completing homework, we will have to withdraw them from the programme.

What happens if my child misses a session?

You must let us know if they cannot attend a session. If your child misses two sessions, they will be withdrawn from the programme and you will need to reapply next year.

Do I need to come to Mass every Sunday?

Yes. All Catholics are required by their faith to attend Mass weekly. Your weekend activities should be arranged around this commitment.

What happens if I go away for the weekend - can I go to another Church for Mass?

Yes. If occasionally you attend Mass at another parish, the priest there can sign the card as a record of your attendance. This is a common practice and the priest will understand its importance. If you forget your card, you will be marked absent from Mass.

I regularly attend a non-Catholic Church can my child get their card signed there?

No. The First Communion programme is for children of practicing Catholics. If you regularly attend a Pentecostal, Evangelical or other non-Catholic Church, you are not a practising Catholic and your child should not be registered for the programme.

Can I send my child to Mass with a friend/neighbour?

No. You must attend Mass together as a family.

If I am too busy to come to Mass can I drop my child off and collect them after Mass?

No. The Church is a public place and we cannot take responsibility for the safety of your child if they attend Mass unaccompanied. If you are too busy to attend Mass e.g. through work commitments, we suggest you withdraw from this year's First Communion programme and re-register another year.

Can we arrange for our child to make their First Communion on another date?

No. Due to the number of children making their First Communion we have to have a set date - it is not possible to change this date.

I have been given two Mass times for the First Communion Day as my children are in different classes, can they make their First Communion together?

Yes. You will need to let us know on which time you want your children to make their First Communion.