**Sacramental Preparation and Celebration**

The National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland: *Share the Good News*outline**s** how, in preparing children for their first celebration of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion, there are three partners: the home, the school and the parish. Traditionally our Catholic schools prepare children for these sacraments and have played a prominent role in the children’s first celebration of Eucharist and Reconciliation, building on the foundation of children’s experience of faith in the home and the parish.

With changing times, that foundation can no longer be presumed, and schools often find themselves in a role far beyond what was previously expected. A new balance is needed. A balance that encourages and empowers home and parish communities to take on a greater sense of responsibility. However, the role of school and its teachers must be to support families and their parish in the Christian initiation of children, not the other way round. (cf SGN,102)

**The Celebration of the Sacraments**

The celebration of the sacraments are events in the life of the Christian community, not just in the life of the individual. The celebration for the first time of Reconciliation and Holy Communion are graced filled moments in the child’s initiation into the community of faith. Therefore, they are also moments in the life of that community. They are faith events that happen to the community and not just in the community. Parish communities must therefore take their share of responsibility and ownership for sacramental preparation and celebration.

**The role of home**

Parents are the primary educators of their children in the ways of the faith. The role of parents/guardians and families in their child’s religious education is vital from the very first day that they start in a Catholic school. Their involvement is not and should not be confined to times of sacramental preparation, but many parents are more conscious of their role at this time than at others. In the *Grow in Love* programme sacramental preparation begins in Junior Infants and continues to be built upon right up to and including Second Class. There are two pages to accompany each week’s lesson in the *Grow in Love* Children’s book. One of these is done in school and the other should be completed by the children with their families at home.

**The role of the parish**

In tandem with the *Grow in Love* programme, parish-based programmes of preparation should be in operation in parishes focusing on the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. Parents and families should be actively encouraged to participate in these, such as the *Do this in Memory* programme and other events organised for parents and guardians. The parish has responsibility for the preparation and the celebration of the sacraments.

**The role of the school/ teacher**

Religious education in school contributes to the faith development of the child. It doesn’t do it all, nor should it, since the parents are the primary educators of their children in the ways of the faith. The school works in partnership with the home and the parish.

The role of the teacher is paramount in delivering the Grow in Love programme. It is each individual teacher in each class who brings the programme and the faith it seeks to communicate to life. A teacher can create in the classroom an open, respectful, caring, trust-filled atmosphere where children can feel valued and have a sense that their uniqueness and potential are recognised. He/she can also help the children to know they are individually known and loved by God, that God is always listening to them, and that they can talk to God about what’s going on in their life – good and bad. In this way, teachers can be witnesses to the faith that they teach, rather than mere communicators of it.

**The Sacrament of First Reconciliation**

In the Grow in Love programme the Sacrament of Reconciliation is approached as celebration of the unconditional love and forgiveness of God. Jesus gave us this sacrament so that we can seek forgiveness for our sins, and receive the grace of the Sacrament to enable us to do good and to avoid future sins.

**The Eucharist**

The *Grow in Love* programme envisages a more incremental approach to learning about the Mass over a longer period of time. In fact it is introduced at Infant level and woven into the series in all Classes. The emphasis is on understanding what happens at Mass, rather than learning about it in the context of the immediate and practical preparation for First Holy Communion. It is to help the children to understand the Mass and the reception of Holy Communion as something that happens every Sunday, to which children and their families are always invited.