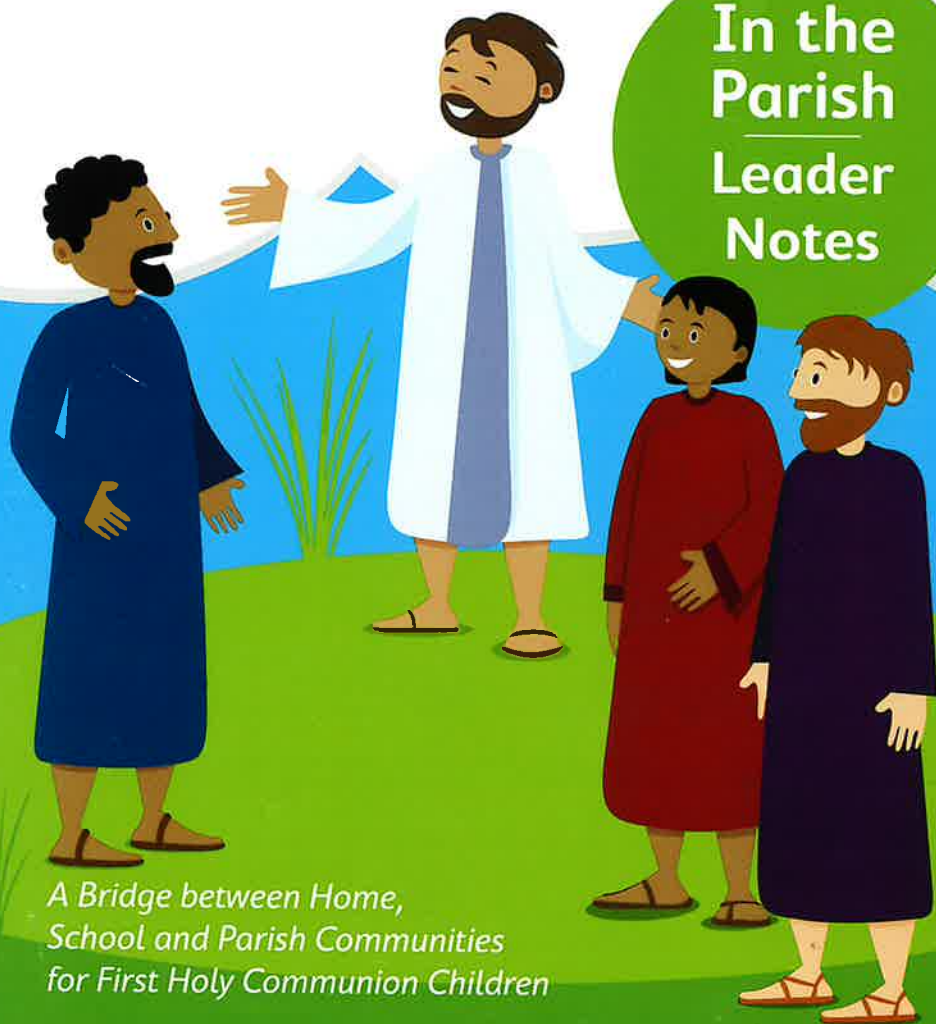




GROW IN Love

In the
Parish
Leader
Notes



*A Bridge between Home,
School and Parish Communities
for First Holy Communion Children*



IN THE PARISH

*A Bridge between Home,
School and Parish Communities*

VERITAS

This booklet and the corresponding newsletters published by Veritas Publications
7–8 Lower Abbey Street
Dublin 1, Ireland

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www.veritas.ie

ISBN 978 1 84730 976 1

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Acknowledgements

Veritas wishes to acknowledge the contribution of the parishes where the *Grow in Love* newsletters were piloted. Their comments helped shape the final version.

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Veritas books are printed on paper made from the wood pulp of managed forests. For every tree felled, at least one tree is planted, thereby renewing natural resources.

Printed in Ireland by Walsh Colour Print, Kerry



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Introduction and Overview

It has long been acknowledged that good religious education requires the active participation of a child's home, school and parish families. Effective catechesis seeks to involve parents/guardians in their children's faith journey. It also desires to help families to get to know their parish community, and their place in it. *Share the Good News*, the National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland (2010), affirms these principles in stating that 'co-operation between home, parish and school is essential in encouraging young children in coming to know who they are and to whom they belong' (142). The document underlines this most clearly when it says that 'The school and its teachers support parents/guardians and their parish in the Christian initiation of children, not the other way round' (102).

For this reason, the *Grow in Love* series creates a variety of opportunities for families to engage with their children's religious education. For example, teachers are encouraged not to use the *Grow in Love* children's book only as a classroom text, but rather to see it as both a home and school resource. One of the pillars underpinning the *Grow in Love* series is the importance of providing concrete opportunities for families to engage in religious education together. By sending

home a piece of work, a prayer and a topic to chat about each week, teachers provide parents/guardians and families with such support. Many schools are embracing this opportunity and there are encouraging reports of parents'/guardians' willingness to engage with the materials provided.

The *Grow in Love* series also seeks to reflect the fact that the children, their families and their school are part of a much larger community of faith, the parish community. For example, in Junior Infants/P1 we explain that the church is the place where the family of God go to pray. In Senior Infants/P2 we build on this by introducing the concept of the parish. In both programmes, children learn about the church building. From First Class/P3 on, we help the children to learn about the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. Here, our emphasis is not on the first celebration of these sacraments, but rather on the fact that these sacraments are celebrated regularly by the parish family, and that the children are now ready to participate fully in them.

As the *Grow in Love* series became established in schools, and as reports of parents'/guardians' willingness to engage in the *At Home* material were shared, it

became apparent that a resource based on the *Grow in Love* programme for use in the parish context would complete the circle of home, school and parish working together to foster children's faith and their sense of belonging to a faith community.

This resource has three main elements:

- 1. A series of liturgically based initiatives.** The aim of these initiatives is to help families with young children to feel a greater sense of belonging to the parish community, and to find their place in the ordinary Sunday Mass, both in the year of sacramental preparation and beyond.

These initiatives have been collated and crafted with help from parish communities who have tried various ways to include young children and their families in the liturgical life of the parish. One initiative is offered each month. Each is designed to help families gain a deeper appreciation of a particular aspect of Church life – for example, of a sacrament, a liturgical season or a Church teaching. The initiatives have been prepared with due regard for the limited resources that some parishes have, and they do not necessarily require the experience of a trained catechist. Rather, they can be organised by a small group

of parishioners, perhaps even parents/guardians of children preparing to celebrate the sacraments for the first time that year, under the guidance of a priest or parish worker. They could also be coordinated by a catechetical committee within the parish, or by a subgroup of the Parish Pastoral Council.

- 2. A series of newsletters.** The newsletters are designed to run in parallel with the school-based *Grow in Love* programme, and to reinforce the concepts therein. It is envisaged that they would be distributed on a monthly basis to families. Ideally, this should be done in a parish context – for example, at a monthly family Mass.

These newsletters are designed to be a 'bridge' between the work of sacramental preparation done at home, in school and in the parish community. Some years ago, Martin Kennedy produced a report about the catechesis of children, entitled 'Islands Apart' (1999). In it he referred to the home, school and parish as three 'islands' on which religious education takes place, with little or no communication between one and the other. Arguably, sincere and effective efforts have been made to enhance cooperation in the twenty or more years since then. It is also true, however, that the 'islands' of home, school and parish

month. It gives families concrete ways to engage together around these themes.

- The 'Parents/Guardians' Page' offers an adult reflection on faith for parents/guardians, as well as a 'Question of Faith' section, which answers some common questions about the Mass.
- Each month the *Grow in Love* parish newsletter introduces a new prayer to families. The children are invited to cut out these prayers and arrange them on the poster that they received at the beginning of the programme. It is intended that this poster would be displayed in the child's bedroom prayer space, as a focus for family prayer.

3. Speaking notes. Each month, speaking notes are offered for the priest, together with a sample Prayer of the Faithful. The speaking notes draw attention to the key features of the newsletter for that particular month, and the Prayer of the Faithful picks up on the theme for that month. By referencing the newsletters, and naming specifically some of the activities in them, the speaking notes provide parents/guardians and families with a context for their participation at home with their children in the activities suggested. The priest could

read from these speaking notes as part of the homily, or a parent/parish representative could do so at another time during the Mass; for example, after the distribution of Holy Communion. Engaging in either of these options will be much more effective than simply distributing the newsletters without any reference to them. A further 'Note for the Parish Newsletter' offers a suggestion for inclusion in your regular parish newsletter or bulletin. This will help to draw the attention of the parish community to the programme of preparation being undertaken by those hoping to celebrate Holy Communion and Reconciliation for the first time during that school year.

The sacraments are events in the life of the Christian community, not just in the life of the individual. They are grace-filled moments for the community. Parish communities will therefore benefit from sharing responsibility and ownership for sacramental preparation and celebration with home and school. We hope these newsletters will be a source of information and inspiration to parents/guardians, and serve to strengthen the engagement of children and their families in the life of the Church.

Distribution of Newsletters

The *Grow in Love* parish newsletters follow the liturgical year closely, so the order in which they are distributed will change yearly, depending on when Easter falls. Each parish will also need to consider when children will celebrate the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist for the first time, and distribute the appropriate newsletters accordingly. Below are the general guidelines for distribution.

The first five newsletters should always be distributed as follows:

September — Distribute the first newsletter entitled 'Welcome!' and the *Grow in Love* poster. (Children will paste a different prayer on to this poster each month.)

October — Distribute newsletter 2, entitled 'The Rosary'.

November — Distribute newsletter 3, entitled 'In November, We Remember'.

December — Distribute newsletter 4, entitled 'Advent'.

January — Distribute newsletter 5, entitled 'Baptism'.

For **February, March and April**, each parish should decide when the next three newsletters will be distributed, based on when Easter is celebrated that year and on when the children will celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time.

- Newsletter 6, entitled 'Reconciliation', also covers the topic of Lent, and is most appropriately distributed immediately before the celebration of Reconciliation for the first time.
- Newsletter 7, entitled 'Do This In Memory of Me', is most appropriate immediately prior to the celebration of Easter.
- **The newsletter entitled 'Prayer' (not numbered) is suitable for distribution at any time. Most likely, it will be used either before or after Easter, depending on when Easter falls.**

May — No newsletter is provided for this month, as it is anticipated that this is the month when children will receive Holy Communion for the first time.

June — Distribute final newsletter 8, entitled 'Living as Followers of Jesus'.



IN THE PARISH

Speaking Notes, Prayer of the Faithful and Note for the Parish Newsletter

Theme: Welcome!

(Plan for implementation during the month of September)

Suggestions for Parish Participation

Designate an area in the church to be dedicated to young children and their families. It should be in the main body of the church rather than in the sanctuary area, with free and easy access for all. This may require consultation with members of the parish community.

Using attractive and child-friendly materials, create a 'Welcome' sign for the area. Consider what other items could be added to the area. For example:

- A 'Prayer Basket' with pieces of paper and pencils so that children can write their own prayers
- Small battery-operated candles so children can safely light a candle of their own



- A selection of children's books with religious themes (children's Bible, book of saints, Bible stories, etc.)

Then add a noticeboard with the heading 'We are preparing to share in Holy Communion'.

Prior to the first family Mass, distribute a piece of card to each child who is preparing to receive Holy Communion (for example, at a parents' meeting or through school). Ensure that, when collected, all of the pieces of card will fit on the noticeboard that has been prepared in the children's space. Ask the children to write their Christian name (only) on the piece of card, and encourage them to personalise it with various

colours and pictures. Ask the children to bring their name card to the first family Mass. Have volunteers collect the cards as the children come into the church. Then, during Mass, arrange the cards on the noticeboard. After the distribution of Holy Communion, ask two children and/or parents/guardians/family members to carry the noticeboard to the children's area. The priest can make reference to the fact that the children's names are now displayed, and emphasise the special place that they and their families have in the parish community this year.



Speaking Notes

Have the following to hand to show to the congregation:

- The *Grow in Love* parish newsletter entitled 'Welcome!' (no. 1)
- The *Grow in Love* poster
- This month, it would also be beneficial to have the children's *Grow in Love* book from school, if possible.



Those children who are preparing to celebrate the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the first time are especially welcome to our Mass today. As a Church community, we believe that the best way to prepare children for the sacraments is for home, school and parish to work together. This year we invite families to enter into this partnership in a special way. In order to help you the children's parents or guardians to do this, each child will receive a *Grow in Love* parish newsletter at the end of Mass today (*show newsletter*). This resource will follow and build on the work that children are doing in school using the *Grow in Love* religious education programme (*show Grow in Love children's book, if possible*).

Parents/guardians and families, you are your child's first and most important teachers, and nothing can replace what you do. We therefore encourage you to pray with your child, to bring him/her to Mass regularly, and to teach him/her about God's love and care for us.

To the rest of our parishioners, we know that children have a special place in our community, especially when they are preparing to celebrate one of the sacraments for the first time. The sacraments are events in the life of the Christian community, not just in the life of the individual. They are grace-filled moments *for* the community and not just events that happen *in* the community. We invite and encourage you to support these children and their families in a particular way this year, especially by praying for them.

[Note: If you plan to add the names of the children preparing to receive Holy Communion to the children's space in the church, as suggested above, you can reference this here by saying, 'You will find their names displayed in the children's space after today's Mass'.]

Children, on the day that you were baptised, you became a follower of Jesus and a member of the family of the Church. Every week, the followers of Jesus gather together in church buildings all over the world to celebrate Mass. The church is a special place and there are many special things in it. In your *Grow in Love* newsletter this month, you will find information and activities about the things in this church, such as the stained-glass windows, the baptismal font and the statues. Maybe you and a

member of your family could make a visit here to the church at some other time, and do some of the things suggested in the newsletter.

Parents and guardians, you are encouraged to help your child set up a Prayer Space in their bedroom this month. A Prayer Space is just a small area containing some visual reminders of faith, for example, a candle, a cross, a Bible, etc. It might go on your child's windowsill or on a shelf in their bedroom. Every month, a new item for the Prayer Space will be suggested in the *Grow in Love* newsletter, and there will be a new prayer to say. These prayers can be cut out and pasted on to the *Grow in Love* poster that you will also receive today (*show poster*).

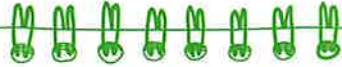
This is the beginning of an exciting journey for all of us. We ask God's blessing on our home, school and parish communities, and we pray that we will all 'grow in love' for God and for all of God's people.

Sample Prayer of the Faithful

The Prayer of the Faithful is introduced by the priest and the individual prayers are led by representatives of the community that has gathered – the parish community, the parents, school staff and children.

1. We pray for our families;
(*pause to pray*)
that God will give them the
strength and courage to
continue to be our first and best
teachers in the ways of faith.
Lord, hear us.
2. We pray for our priest(s) and our
teacher(s);
(*pause to pray*)
that God will continue to bless
their good work.
Lord, hear us.
3. We pray for each child preparing
to celebrate the Sacraments
of Reconciliation and Holy
Communion later this year;
(*pause to pray*)
that they may grow in their love
for God and for all God's people.
Lord, hear us.
4. We pray for those who have little
food and who often go hungry;
(*pause to pray*)
that we may share with them
from what we have.
Lord, hear us.
5. We pray for farmers and all
those who work on the land;
(*pause to pray*)
that they may stay safe during
this busy harvest season.
Lord, hear us.

Note for the Parish Newsletter



Grow in Love in the Parish

Grow in Love is the name of the Religious Education programme that children use in school. This weekend, we help the children to extend their learning about God into the parish community by welcoming them and their families to our Mass. May we all support each other as we endeavour to 'grow in love' for God and for one another.



IN THE PARISH

Speaking Notes, Prayer of the Faithful and Note for the Parish Newsletter

Theme: The Rosary
(Plan for implementation during the month of October)

Suggestions for Parish Participation

Include a statue of Mary and some rosary beads in the Children's Prayer Space this month. This mirrors what teachers include in the classroom Prayer Space at this time. You may also like to add a sign that says, 'October is the month of the Rosary'.

Consider giving each child who is preparing to receive Holy Communion for the first time their own set of rosary beads. Sacramental objects like this are foreign to many children today. They may have seen them being used by others, but very few will have their own, particularly at this stage in the year. Items like this can mean a lot to children.



Rosary beads could be blessed and distributed by members of the parish community after a family Mass. It should be emphasised that they are a gift from the parish family to each child to connect us all in prayer during the month of October. A note to this effect is included in the Speaking Notes below.

Speaking Notes

Have the following to hand to show to the congregation:

- The Grow in Love parish newsletter entitled 'The Rosary' (no. 2)
- Rosary beads

During the month of October, many people make a special effort to pray a prayer called the Rosary. The Rosary is a very old prayer. In it, we think about different moments in the life of Jesus and his mother Mary. In many ways, Mary was an ordinary girl. She grew up in a little town called Nazareth with her parents Anna and Joachim. But there was something very special about Mary too. God chose Mary to be the mother of his Son, Jesus. We can ask Mary to pray for us, and to help us to be faithful followers of Jesus.

Some people use rosary beads like these (*show rosary beads*) to help them pray the Rosary. The beads are divided up into five parts. Each of the five parts stands for a different set of moments or events in the life of Jesus. We call these different moments or events 'Mysteries'. In your *Grow in Love* parish newsletter, you will learn about the Joyful Mysteries, but there are other mysteries in the life of Jesus too, like the Sorrowful Mysteries.

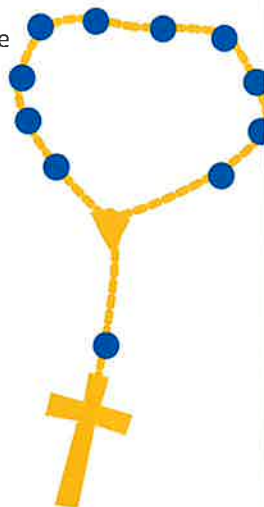
As you can see (*show rosary beads*), there are ten beads on each part of the rosary beads. These ten beads (*show this part of the beads*) help us to count the number of prayers we say while we are thinking about one of the Mysteries of the Rosary. Mary's special prayer is the *Hail Mary*, so that is the prayer that we repeat as we pray the Rosary. One

Our Father is said before the first *Hail Mary*, and a *Glory be to the Father* is said after the tenth *Hail Mary*. While these twelve prayers are being said, we think about one of the Mysteries in the life of Jesus. That is how we pray the Rosary.

[*Note: If you plan to give the gift of rosary beads to each child, you can reference this here by saying, 'Children, your parish family would like to give you a gift of rosary beads. This is our way of helping everyone to pray the Rosary, or part of it, during this month. When we all pray the Rosary, we are connected in a special way. You can collect your rosary beads from the Children's Prayer Space after Mass'.]*

If you are not presenting the children with the gift of rosary beads, continue as follows:

Children, you might have some rosary beads at home. If you do, you can put them in your Prayer Space. If you don't, you might know someone who has rosary beads. Ask them if you can see them or even use them at home this month.



Parents and guardians, you can use the activities in the *Grow in Love* newsletter (*show newsletter*) this month to talk to your child about the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary. You might even pray part of the Rosary together during October.

To the rest of our parishioners, we encourage you to pray the Rosary this month too. If you have spare rosary beads, you might give them to a child you know, and teach them how to use them. Please also continue to pray for our children who are preparing to celebrate the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion.

Sample Prayer of the Faithful

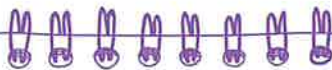
The Prayer of the Faithful is introduced by the priest and the individual prayers are led by representatives of the community that has gathered – the parish community, the parents, school staff and children.

1. We pray for all mothers;
(*pause to pray*)
that they, like Mary, will be their children's first and best teacher in the ways of faith.
Lord, hear us.
2. We pray for all those who leave their homes to spread the Good News about God's love for us;
(*pause to pray*)
that they will be strengthened in

their good work.
Lord, hear us.

3. We pray for those who are sick;
(*pause to pray*)
that they may feel Mary's loving and healing presence.
Lord, hear us.
4. We pray for those who have died;
(*pause to pray*)
that they may return home to God in heaven.
Lord, hear us.
5. We pray for the earth;
(*pause to pray*)
that we may always look after it.
Lord, hear us.

Note for the Parish Newsletter



We continue to welcome in a particular way those children who are preparing to celebrate the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the first time next year. Our focus this month is on helping them to understand the Rosary as a special prayer said by the parish family, in which we recall events in the life of Jesus and his mother, Mary. We can all make a special effort to say the Rosary, or part of it, during the month of October.



IN THE PARISH

Speaking Notes, Prayer of the Faithful and Note for the Parish Newsletter

Theme: In November, We Remember

(Plan for implementation during the month of November)

Suggestions for Parish Participation

Include a statue or picture of a saint in the Children's Prayer Space this month. It could be a saint who has some significance locally, such as the patron saint of the parish, the parish church or the school. Or it could be a saint who is well known to everyone. This mirrors what teachers include in the classroom Prayer Space at this time. You might also like to decorate the space with fallen leaves as a reminder of how the natural world is changing at this time of year.

Remove the children's names from the noticeboard in the Prayer Space for this month and replace the sign

with one that says 'In November, We Remember'. Provide small pieces of card and some writing materials close by. Children can then be invited to write on the pieces of card the names of those they know who have died, and they can be helped to pin them to the noticeboard. A note inviting the children to be involved in the activity is included in the Speaking Notes below.



He'll be again, boys and girls!

During the month of November we remember in a special way those who have died, and we pray for them.

The 1st of November is the Feast of All Saints. On this day we remember all the saints who live at home with God in heaven. Saints are people who showed love for God and love for others during their lives on earth. We learn from their example how to live well and how to love.

We can pray to the saints and ask them to help us to live as Jesus taught us.

During the month of November, but in a special way on the 2nd of November, we also remember and pray for all those who have died. The 2nd of November is the Feast of All Souls.



Speaking Notes

Preparation:

- If your church/parish/local GAA club/school is named after a saint, you might like to prepare a short description of his/her life to share with the congregation today.
- You may also like to prepare some notes about the things your parish does to remember and pray for those who have died during the month of November (for example, a Book of Remembrance or Altar List of the Dead, a Blessing of the Graves Liturgy or a special Mass).

Have the following to hand to show to the congregation:

- 'In November, We Remember' *Grow in Love* parish newsletter (no. 3)

During the month of November we remember in a special way those who have died, and we pray for them.

We call 1 November the Feast of All Saints. On this day, we remember all the saints who live at home with God in heaven. Saints are people who showed love for God and love for others during their lives on earth. We learn from their example how to live and how to love. We can pray to the saints and ask for their help to live as Jesus taught us.

Here in our church, we have (statues/pictures/icons) of Saint(s) _____. [If your church/parish/local GAA club/school is named after a saint, you might like to say a little about his/her life at this point.] You might also know about the life of some other saints, like St Patrick, St Brigid, St Thérèse of Lisieux, St Vincent de Paul and St Louise. You can read about them again in your *Grow in Love* parish newsletter this month (show newsletter).

During the whole month of November, but in a special way on 2 November, we remember and pray for all those who have died. We call 2 November the Feast of All Souls.

In our parish, we remember and pray for those who have died during the month of November by

[Note: If you are inviting the children to put the names of loved ones who have died in the Prayer Space, you could add: 'In the Children's Prayer Space you will see small pieces of card and some writing materials. You can write the names of people you know who have died on these pieces of card, and then get some help to pin your names to the noticeboard. You can do that at any time during the month of November.']

We invite all of you here today to take part in these activities with your families during the month of November. Together we can pray for those who have died by saying:

Eternal rest grant unto them,
O Lord, and let perpetual light shine
upon them.
Amen.

May their souls and the souls of all
the faithful departed, through the
mercy of God, rest in peace.
Amen.

Sample Prayer of the Faithful

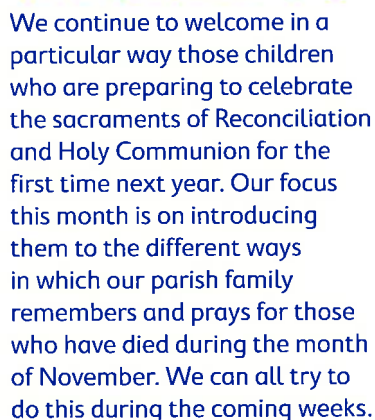
The Prayer of the Faithful is introduced by the priest and the individual prayers are led by representatives of the community that has gathered – the parish community, the parents, school staff and children.

1. We pray for ourselves;
(pause to pray)
that we may learn from the
saints and become like them.
Lord, hear us.
2. We pray for those who have died;
(pause to pray)
that they will return home to
God in heaven.
Lord, hear us.
3. We pray for safety on our roads
as the days become shorter;

(pause to pray)
that we may all take
extra care and arrive safely at
our destinations.
Lord, hear us.

4. We pray for those who care for
the sick and the dying at home
or in hospital;
(pause to pray)
that they will be strengthened in
their work.
Lord, hear us.
5. We pray for the animals and
plants that are beginning their
long winter sleep;
(pause to pray)
that we may always be conscious
of the beauty of the created
world, and care for it.
Lord, hear us.

Note for the Parish Newsletter



We continue to welcome in a particular way those children who are preparing to celebrate the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the first time next year. Our focus this month is on introducing them to the different ways in which our parish family remembers and prays for those who have died during the month of November. We can all try to do this during the coming weeks.



IN THE PARISH

Speaking Notes, Prayer of the Faithful and Note for the Parish Newsletter

Theme: Advent

(Plan for implementation
during the month of December)

Suggestions for Parish Participation

Include an empty Christmas crib on top of a purple cloth in the Children's Prayer Space this month. This mirrors what teachers include in the classroom Prayer Space at this time, and emphasises Advent as a time of waiting. Rehang the children's names on the noticeboard, together with the sign that says, 'We are preparing to share in Holy Communion'. Leave a large box or basket in the Children's Prayer Space marked 'Christmas Cards for the Parish Family'. Children will be invited to place their Christmas cards in here, as outlined below.

Early in December, organise for a parish representative to make a



short visit to each of the schools that have children preparing to receive Holy Communion for the first time. This may be a priest or pastoral worker, but it could also be a member of the parish pastoral council or catechetical committee within the parish*.

* Note: A one-off visit of this nature to a classroom usually does not require Garda Vetting. However, all parish representatives should check this with the parish Child Safeguarding and Protection Representatives, and act in accordance with the Safeguarding Policy in both schools and the parish. When making the Christmas cards, children should be encouraged to sign off using their Christian name only, and not to add any personal details.

If a visit to the school cannot be arranged, the teacher may engage the children in the activity outlined.

During the class visit, the person speaking with the children can engage them in some conversation about Advent and about how they are preparing to celebrate Christmas, conscious that some children in the class may not be Christian and may have other ways of marking the winter season. The speaker should mention to the children that there may be some people in the parish who are not as excited as they are about celebrating Christmas – for example, people who are sick, sad or lonely. Then suggest that the children might like to make Christmas cards for these people. These Christmas cards can be brought to the church and left in the Children's Prayer Space during the month of December, and they will be distributed by the parish to people who are in hospital, in local nursing homes, living alone, in prisons, direct provision centres, senior citizens groups, drug rehabilitation centres, etc. A note inviting the children to be involved in the activity is also included in the Speaking Notes below.

Speaking Notes

Have the following to hand to show to the congregation:

- The 'Advent' Grow in Love parish newsletter (no. 4)

About this time every year, we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas. This special time of preparation is called Advent. There are lots of things we can do during Advent to prepare for Christmas. Families may be preparing at home by planning Christmas decorations. Children may be preparing in school by learning Christmas carols. Here in the parish family, we are preparing too. We have our Advent wreath displayed and you can see the colour purple in lots of places, like the altar cloths and the priest's vestments.

[Note: If the children have been asked to make Christmas cards for someone in the community, you could add: 'Children, you are being invited to share in the parish preparations for Christmas in a special way this year, because you are being asked to make a Christmas card for someone in our parish. You won't know who the person is, but it will be someone who would really like to receive a Christmas message from someone like you. This person may be sick, sad or lonely, and might really appreciate that a child in the parish thought of them. So, boys and girls, you will find a box in the Children's Prayer Space where you can place all of your cards, and we will distribute them on your behalf.']

Today, we are going to give every child preparing for Reconciliation and Holy Communion an Advent calendar that

they can take home. Children, this calendar is special because it won't just help you to count down the days until Christmas. It will also suggest ways of becoming closer to God and to other people at this important time of year. So, for example, today is the ____ day of Advent (*show newsletter*). When you look at today's space on the Advent calendar, you will see that your task for today is _____. When you complete the task, you can colour in the box or tick it off. By the time Jesus' birthday comes on Christmas Day, you will be able to look back at all of the wonderful things you have done to prepare for this special day. These things will have helped you to grow in love for God and for others.

Parents/guardians and family members, you can help your child to remember that Christmas is the celebration of Jesus' birthday by placing a crib in a prominent place in your home. The Christmas story is here in the *Grow in Love* newsletter (*show newsletter*). You can read it with your child as he/she looks at the crib figures.

To the rest of our parishioners, we encourage you, too, to keep to the forefront of your mind that Jesus is the 'reason for the season' and to keep the 'Christ' in Christmas. It is very easy for all of us to get caught up with the commercial aspect of the season and, indeed,

the busyness of it. The following reflection from this month's *Grow in Love* parish newsletter might help us all to recall once again the importance of the Christmas story:

In 1969 the world held its breath. In living rooms, hotels and even at shop windows all over the globe, people huddled around television sets to witness something amazing taking place. Finally, they saw what they never would have believed possible. They saw Neil Armstrong climb down the steps of the lunar space module and walk on the moon. It was a truly historic moment.

Almost two thousand years before that, an even more momentous event took place. No one noticed except a few shepherds and three Eastern gentlemen, but it was an event that changed the nature of human history for ever. In a stable on a dark and lonely hillside outside the city of Bethlehem, a baby boy was born. God had come on earth as a human being.



Sample Prayer of the Faithful

The Prayer of the Faithful is introduced by the priest and the individual prayers are led by representatives of the community that has gathered – the parish community, the parents, school staff and children.



1. We pray for everyone gathered here today;
(pause to pray)
that we may keep Jesus at the centre of our Christmas celebrations.
Lord, hear us.
2. We pray for those who find Christmas a sad or lonely time;
(pause to pray)
that they may experience the love of God through the kindness of others.
Lord, hear us.
3. We pray in thanksgiving for the generosity that people show at this time of year;
(pause to pray)
that we may always be willing to share what we have with others.
Lord, hear us.
4. We pray for those who don't have a home to celebrate in on Christmas Day;
(pause to pray)
that others will act as kind innkeepers for them.
Lord, hear us.
5. We pray for those who are travelling at this time of year;
(pause to pray)
that they will reach their destination safely.
Lord, hear us.

Note for the Parish Newsletter

We continue to welcome in a particular way those children who are preparing to celebrate the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the first time next year. Our focus this month is on helping them learn how to prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. May we all try our best to keep our focus on Jesus as the 'reason for the season' this Advent.



IN THE PARISH

Speaking Notes, Prayer of the Faithful and Note for the Parish Newsletter

Theme: Baptism

(Plan for implementation during the month of January)

Suggestions for Parish Participation

Include some symbols of Baptism in the Children's Prayer Space this month (white robe, holy water, oil of chrism, etc.). This mirrors what teachers include in the classroom Prayer Space at this time. The holy water could be carried in as part of the Opening Procession and blessed by the priest before the Penitential Rite, after which it can be returned to the Children's Prayer Space.

Provide a small bottle of water for each child to be blessed at Mass today, or ask the children to bring a bottle of water with them.



5

Theme: Baptism

Philos egen, bays and gylt

January is the first month of the New Year. It is a time of new beginnings. In this month's Grow in Love parish newsletter we remember the beginning of your life as a follower of Jesus. The baptism of Jesus when you were baptized there are some things you can do with your family to remember your Baptism:

- Place your baptismal candle in your Prayer Space.
- Ask to see the baptismal gown or shawl that you wore on the day of your Baptism.
- Talk to your family about the day of your Baptism. Remember to talk to your grandparents and grandparents too.
- Before you go to bed each night this month, ask someone in your family to make the sign of the Cross on your head. This was one of the first things that they did when they brought you to be baptized.
- On the day of your Baptism you became a follower of Jesus. Think about all the ways you can show that you are a follower of Jesus now that you are older.



Speaking Notes

Preparation:

- Where possible, it would be beneficial to have the following items to show to the congregation as you talk about Baptism: oil of chrism, white garment, baptismal candle.
- You might also like to show children the parish register of Baptisms.

Have the following to hand to show to the congregation:

- The 'Baptism' Grow in Love parish newsletter (no. 5)

January is the first month of the New Year. It is a time of new beginnings. It is therefore a good time to think about when we began our lives as followers of Jesus. We became followers of Jesus when we were baptised.

Here in our church, babies are baptised in this font (*point to font*). As part of the Baptism ceremony, parents/guardians and family trace the Sign of the Cross on their child's forehead and the priest pours holy water on the child's head. The child is also anointed with chrism and wrapped in a white garment. A candle is lit on their behalf. (*If you have the parish register of Baptisms, this would be an appropriate time to show it to the congregation, and to explain that the name of every person who has been baptised in your church has been recorded in that book.*)

Of course, most of us don't remember the day of our Baptism. So, children, in this month's *Grow in Love* parish newsletter we give you some questions to ask your parents/guardians about your Baptism (*show newsletter*). For example, you can ask them:

- What is the name of the priest who baptised you?
- Who chose your name, or names, and why?
- Who are your godparents?

Your Baptism was the first step you took on your journey of faith. This year, we are helping you and your parents/guardians to prepare you for the next two steps – the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion. You can read more about those in your *Grow in Love* parish newsletter (*show newsletter*).

When you were baptised, you became a follower of Jesus and a member of the Church. One good way for all of us to recall our Baptism is to use holy water in our homes regularly.





[Note: This would be a good time to bless the water that the children have either brought with them or been given.]

You can use this holy water at home by:

- placing some of it in a font beside the hall door and blessing yourself as you leave;
- blessing the family car, bicycles and any other mode of transport, and saying a prayer for safe travels;
- sharing some of it with someone who is sick.

These suggestions are also on the 'With your child this month' page of this month's newsletter (*show newsletter*).

To the rest of our parishioners, you too can bring home some holy water this month. Maybe your font has run dry. It might even be dusty! Returning to the practice of blessing ourselves and others with holy water

on a daily basis can remind us of and renew our commitment to our baptismal call to love God and to love others.

Sample Prayer of the Faithful

The Prayer of the Faithful is introduced by the priest and the individual prayers are led by representatives of the community that has gathered – the parish community, the parents, school staff and children.

1. We pray for families preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism with their child;
(*pause to pray*)
that they will find a welcoming home in our parish community.
Lord, hear us.
2. We pray for those who live in places where it is unlawful to be a member of the Church;
(*pause to pray*)
that they will continue to live lives of faith as best they can.
Lord, hear us.
3. We pray for all of us gathered here today;
(*pause to pray*)
that we will be faithful to our baptismal calling to live as followers of Jesus.
Lord, hear us.

4. We pray for those who have been baptised but who no longer participate in their church community;
(pause to pray)
that they will know they are always welcome here.
Lord, hear us.
5. We pray for all of the children who are preparing to celebrate the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Holy Communion and Confirmation this year;
(pause to pray)
that they will continue to feel part of the family of the Church.
Lord, hear us.



Note for the Parish Newsletter

We continue to welcome in a particular way those children who are preparing to celebrate the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the first time later this year. Our focus this month is on teaching them about Baptism, the sacrament through which new members are welcomed into our parish family. One good way for all of us to recall our Baptism is to use holy water in our homes regularly.





IN THE PARISH

Speaking Notes, Prayer of the Faithful and Note for the Parish Newsletter

Theme: Reconciliation
(Plan for implementation immediately before the celebration of Reconciliation for the first time)

Suggestions for Parish Participation

The children will prepare a small desert space in the Children's Prayer Space or somewhere else in the church building or porch this month. This mirrors what teachers include in the classroom Prayer Space at this time. You can get the space ready by placing some sand within a designated area as small or large as the space will allow.

Gather some pebbles, twigs and similar objects and place them in containers near the desert space. At an appropriate time during or after Mass, invite the children to come and add the objects to the space.



Theme: Reconciliation



A note inviting the children to be involved in the activity is included in the Speaking Notes below.

Speaking Notes

Preparation:

- Have to hand the days and times of any parish Lenten Reconciliation services and/or the times offered for confessions in your parish.

Have the following to hand to show to the congregation:

- The 'Reconciliation' *Grow in Love* parish newsletter (no. 6)

Every year, the followers of Jesus spend some time remembering how

Jesus spent forty days and nights in the desert, preparing to do the work that God had sent him to do. We call this time Lent, which also lasts for forty days. During Lent, the followers of Jesus fast, pray and share in a particular way. You might notice some of the signs here in the church that show we are celebrating the season of Lent, such as the use of violet altar cloths and violet priest's vestments. (*Mention anything else indicative of Lent, such as a desert/wilderness space in the church.*)

[Note: If the children are to be involved in creating the desert space, you could add: 'Today, boys and girls, we are going to ask you to help us to prepare our church for Lent by helping us to create a desert space. This will remind us all of the time Jesus spent in the desert and of our own Lenten promises during this season.']

We also use Lent to think about the times we have done things that are wrong, and to say sorry to God for those times. Every now and then, every single person, young and old, says or does something that is wrong or that hurts others. When we realise that we have done something wrong, we say sorry to the people we have hurt, and we also say sorry to God. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we say sorry for the times we didn't

live as Jesus asks, and we celebrate God's forgiveness. God is always ready to forgive us when we say sorry and promise not to repeat the wrong that we have done. This year is an important year for some boys and girls here today, because they will celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the very first time.

Parents/guardians and families, you can share your own memories of celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation with your children. You can also look for examples of forgiveness in your family's daily life and chat with your child about these. In every single home, there are moments for 'I'm sorry' and 'I forgive you'. Forgiveness is the basis on which we can talk to children about how and why we celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

To the rest of our parishioners, a gentle reminder that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is open to all, not just the children of our parish. Pope Francis urges us to 'Be courageous, and go to confession'. He tells us, 'Jesus [will be] there, and ... he will receive you with so much love!'



Conclude by mentioning the days and times of any parish Lenten Reconciliation services and/or the times offered for confessions in your parish.

Sample Prayer of the Faithful

The Prayer of the Faithful is introduced by the priest and the individual prayers are led by representatives of the community that has gathered – the parish community, the parents, school staff and children.

1. We pray for ourselves;
(pause to pray)
that we will have the courage to say 'sorry' and to admit when we have made a mistake.
Lord, hear us.
2. We pray for those who have been hurt by others;
(pause to pray)
that they will have the strength to forgive.
Lord, hear us.
3. We pray for all families;
(pause to pray)
that our homes may be places of love and forgiveness.
Lord, hear us.
4. We pray for the work of Trócaire;
(pause to pray)
that, through their efforts, many

people may come to know the love of God, especially those who are most in need.
Lord, hear us.

5. We pray for those who have made Lenten promises;
(pause to pray)
that their commitments may bring them closer to God and to one another.
Lord, hear us.

Note for the Parish Newsletter



We continue to welcome in a particular way those children who are preparing to celebrate the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the first time later this year. Our focus this month is on the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which all members of our parish family are invited to celebrate, particularly during Lent. Pope Francis urges us to 'Be courageous, and go to confession'. He tells us, 'Jesus [will be] there, and ... he will receive you with so much love!'



IN THE PARISH

Speaking Notes, Prayer of the Faithful and Note for the Parish Newsletter

Theme: Do This In Memory of Me
(Plan for implementation immediately prior to the celebration of Easter)

Suggestions for Parish Participation

The children's desert space will still be in place this month. During the Triduum, add a path through the desert, leading to a cross. Close to the cross, build a mound of stones, with one large stone in front to represent Jesus' tomb. This reflects the story of Easter that children are learning about in the *Grow in Love* programme at this time.

Provide a symbol of the Easter story for each child to take home from Mass today. Examples include a piece of palm, a palm cross or a small crucifix. Distribute these from



the children's Prayer Space after Mass. A note inviting the children to use this object at home is included in the Speaking Notes below.

Speaking Notes

Have the following to hand to show to the congregation:

- 'Do This In Memory of Me' *Grow in Love* parish newsletter (no. 7)

The season of Lent is almost over and we are about to celebrate the most important season in the life of the Church: Easter. The days leading up to Easter tell a sad story: a story about betrayal, suffering and death.

On the night before he died, Jesus called together his disciples. He knew this would be his last meal and he wanted to share his last meal with his closest friends. While he was at supper, Jesus took a piece of bread, blessed it, broke it and shared it, saying, 'Take and eat. This is my body.' Then he took a cup of wine, blessed it, and gave it to his disciples. He said, 'Take and drink. This is my blood.' Then he asked his friends to do this again, when he was no longer with them, as a way of remembering him. The next day, Jesus was crucified and he died on the Cross.

When we go to Mass, we are doing exactly what Jesus asked his followers to do at the Last Supper – to 'do this in memory' of him. The boys and girls who have been preparing to receive Holy Communion for the first time are almost ready now to respond to Jesus' invitation. And then every time you come to Mass with your family, you will be able to receive Holy Communion. When we receive Holy Communion, Jesus comes to us and stays with us in a very special way.

Three days after Jesus died, three women who were his friends went to his tomb. When they arrived there, they saw that the big stone at the entrance had been rolled back. A young man was sitting inside the tomb. The women were very upset.



But the young man told the women that Jesus had been raised from the dead. The women rushed to tell the disciples what they had heard and seen. Jesus was alive!

Parents/guardians and families, we would like to invite you in a particular way to attend some of the Easter ceremonies with your family, and to help your child to retell the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus. (*Mention here if there is a special liturgy for children during the Easter Triduum.*)

[*Note: If the children are being given a symbol of Easter, you could add: 'Today, boys and girls, we are also going to give you this gift to take with you. Put it in your own Prayer Space at home, and use it to help you to remember the Easter story.'*]

To the rest of our parishioners, as we celebrate Holy Week and Easter this year, let us try to remember that, for those who believe in the Resurrection, there is always hope. Not a 'wishful thinking' kind of hope, which denies the struggles of everyday living, but rather a firm and

certain belief that, in the end, good will triumph. That is Good News, and we can play our part in bringing it to our homes, to our parishes, to our country and to the world.

Sample Prayer of the Faithful

The Prayer of the Faithful is introduced by the priest and the individual prayers are led by representatives of the community that has gathered – the parish community, the parents, school staff and children.

1. We pray for all followers of Jesus;
(pause to pray)
that we may enter into the story of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection in a new way this year.
Lord, hear us.
2. We pray for those children who are preparing to receive Holy Communion for the first time;
(pause to pray)
that these final weeks of preparation may be a time of joy and blessing.
Lord, hear us.
3. We pray for all those who suffer;
(pause to pray)
that they may know that Jesus is with them and understands

their suffering.
Lord, hear us.

4. We pray for those who have died;
(pause to pray)
that they may be raised to new life at home with God in heaven.
Lord, hear us.
5. We pray for the earth;
(pause to pray)
that the signs of life that are all around us at this time of year may flourish and remind us of God the Creator.
Lord, hear us.

Note for the Parish Newsletter

We continue to welcome in a particular way those children who are preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion for the first time later this year. Our focus this month is on the way in which our parish family celebrates Easter. For those who believe in the Resurrection, there is always hope. We can all play our part in bringing that hope to our homes, to our parish, to our country and to the world.



IN THE PARISH

Speaking Notes, Prayer of the Faithful and Note for the Parish Newsletter

Theme: Living as Followers of Jesus

(Plan for implementation during the month of June, after the children have received Holy Communion for the first time)

Suggestions for Parish Participation

Include a statue or picture of the Sacred Heart in the Children's Prayer Space this month. This reflects the teaching on the Law of Love that teachers are working on in the *Grow in Love* programme at this time. Replace the sign that says 'We are preparing to share in Holy Communion' on the children's noticeboard, with one that says 'We have shared in Holy Communion'.

Leave a large box or basket in the Children's Prayer Space marked 'Thank You Cards for the Parish



Family'. Children will be invited to place their 'Thank You' cards in here, as outlined below. Sometime after the children have received Holy Communion for the first time, organise for a parish representative to make a short visit to each of their schools. This may be a priest or pastoral worker, but it could also be a member of the parish pastoral council or catechetical committee within the parish*. If a visit to the school cannot be arranged, the teacher may engage the children in the activity outlined below.

* Note: A one-off visit of this nature to a classroom usually does not require Garda Vetting. However, all parish representatives should check this with the parish Child Safeguarding and Protection Representatives, and act in accordance with the Safeguarding Policy in both schools and the parish. When making the 'Thank You' cards, children should be encouraged to sign off using their Christian name only, and not to add any personal details.



During the class visit, the person speaking with the children can engage them in some conversation about all the people who helped them to prepare to celebrate Holy Communion for the first time, conscious that some children in the class may not be Christian. The speaker should help the children to think beyond the obvious people like parents/guardians, teachers and priests. For example, who opened the church that morning? Who cleaned it beforehand? Who prepared the flowers? Who mowed the grass outside? Who prepared the refreshments afterwards, where applicable, etc.? Then suggest that the children might like to make 'Thank You' cards for these people. These cards can be brought to the church and left in the Children's Prayer Space, and they will be distributed by the parish to people to whom they are addressed. A note inviting the children to be involved in this activity is also included in the Speaking Notes below.

Speaking Notes

Have the following to hand to show to the congregation:

- 'Living as Followers of Jesus' Grow in Love parish newsletter (no. 8)

Let's begin by welcoming all the boys and girls who received Holy Communion for the first time last month ... Congratulations! (It may be appropriate to ask the children to stand up and for the congregation to congratulate them with a round of applause.)

[Note: If the children have been asked to make 'Thank You' cards for someone who helped them prepare to celebrate Holy Communion for the first time, you could add: 'Children, you were invited to think about all the people who helped you prepare for your special day. I know you thought hard about all the members of the parish family who were involved: those who cleaned the church, prepared the flowers, those who take care of the outside, and so many more. So, boys and girls, you

will find a box in the Children's Prayer Space where you can place all of your "Thank You" cards, and we will distribute them on your behalf.]

From now on, you are invited to receive Holy Communion every time you go to Mass. Holy Communion helps us to live as followers of Jesus. It strengthens every person here to love God and one another more, and to show love and care for those who are poor or in need. So, boys and girls, we look forward to seeing you and your families here at the church in the future. You are now an important part of our parish family. We gather here together every Sunday, just like your own families gather together for special celebrations. And, if you are not here, we miss you, just like we miss any members of our families who aren't with us at important times.

Parents and caregivers, there are lots of other ways that you can continue to help your family to keep on growing in faith. Some ideas for this are given in this month's *Grow in Love* parish newsletter (*show newsletter*). Over time, you will add your own faith practices to the ones listed in this newsletter. We hope that, together with your regular attendance at Sunday Mass, they will help your family to share a life-giving relationship with God for many years to come.

To the rest of our parishioners, please continue to welcome these children and their families and to nourish their faith in whatever ways you can. The month of June is traditionally dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Devotion to the Sacred Heart helps us to reflect on God's immense and immeasurable love, which was shown to us in the person of Jesus. It is important that children are reminded of God's never-ending love for them. This love is made concrete by us, their parish family. Let us together make our parish a community where all feel welcome and loved.

Sample Prayer of the Faithful

The Prayer of the Faithful is introduced by the priest and the individual prayers are led by representatives of the community that has gathered – the parish community, the parents, school staff and children.

1. We pray for all who have helped the boys and girls on their faith journey this year;
(*pause to pray*)
that they will continue to offer their time and talents in service of God and others.
Lord, hear us.

2. We pray for those in our parish family who feel left out;
(pause to pray)
that they may feel something of the immense love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.
Lord, hear us.
3. We pray for all those in our parish family who will travel over the summer months;
(pause to pray)
that they will be safe.
Lord, hear us.
4. We pray for those in our parish family who are sick;
(pause to pray)
that they may be cared for with patience and love.
Lord, hear us.
5. We pray for the earth;
(pause to pray)
that we may enjoy the glory of God's creation this summer, and continue to protect it in whatever way we can.
Lord, hear us.

Note for the Parish Newsletter

We welcome in a particular way those children who have celebrated the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion for the first time this year. Our focus this month is on encouraging all our parishioners to continue to nourish the faith lives of their families in the context of our parish family. We pray that we can all continue to 'grow in love' for God and for one another.





Speaking Notes, Prayer of the Faithful and Note for the Parish Newsletter

Theme: Prayer

(Implement at the discretion of the parish, with due regard for the timing of Easter and for the children's celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time)

Suggestions for Parish Participation

Remove the children's names from the noticeboard in the Prayer Space for this month and replace the sign with one that says, 'Our Prayers'. Provide small pieces of card and some writing materials close by. Children can then be invited to write their own prayer intentions on the cards, and can be helped to pin them to the noticeboard. A note inviting the children to be involved in the activity is included in the Speaking Notes below.



Theme: Prayer



Speaking Notes

Have the following to hand to show to the congregation:

- 'Prayer' Grow in Love parish newsletter

Today, we are going to talk a little about praying. Praying is listening and talking to God or to Jesus. We can also pray to Mary and to any of the saints in heaven. The Gospels tell us that Jesus prayed a lot, especially when he faced important decisions. One day Jesus went off on his own to pray. While he was gone, his friends started to wonder about what words Jesus used when he prayed. So, when Jesus came

back, they asked him to teach them to pray, and to tell them what words they should say. Jesus then taught them to say the prayer that we call the *Our Father*. The *Our Father* that we pray today is the very same prayer that Jesus taught his followers more than two thousand years ago. You might say it at home with your family or with your class in school. We also pray the *Our Father* every time we go to Mass.

It is good to pray formal prayers like the *Our Father*. But it is also good to pray using our own words. We can say, 'Loving God, please bless Granny because she's sick' or 'Thank you God for my family'. We can also pray using our 'inside voice': the voice inside our head that only God can hear. God always listens to our prayers, even when we don't speak out loud.

When people pray to God, they get to know and love God better. Boys and girls, as you prepare to receive Jesus in Holy Communion, maybe you and your family can spend a little extra time praying together. You will find some ideas about how you might do that in this month's *Grow in Love* newsletter (*show newsletter*).

[Note: If you are inviting the children to add their prayers to the Prayer Space, you could add: 'In the Children's Prayer Space you will see small pieces of card and some writing materials. You can write your own

prayers on these pieces of card, and then get some help to pin them to the noticeboard. You can do that at any time during this month.']

Parents/guardians and families, your children are used to praying in school, and they will be very open to praying at home. All you need to do is to give them the time and the opportunity to pray with you.

To the rest of our parishioners, you too can benefit from thinking about your prayer practices. Do you take the time, during the week, to talk to God in prayer? What form does your prayer take? Do you always pray prayers of petition – asking God for something? If so, maybe you can add in some more prayers, perhaps of thanksgiving. Do you always use formal prayers? If so, maybe you can incorporate some time for silence, so that you can listen for what God is saying to you too.

Personal prayer helps to strengthen our relationship with God. Then, when we come to Mass, we build on that relationship by listening to the Word of God and receiving Holy Communion. This helps to nourish us and to strengthen our faith and our lives.

Sample Prayer of the Faithful

The Prayer of the Faithful is introduced by the priest and the individual prayers are led by representatives of the community that has gathered – the parish community, the parents, school staff and children.

1. We pray for Pope _____,
for Bishop _____ and
the priest(s) of our parish,
_____;
(pause to pray)
that they may teach us how
to pray, as Jesus taught his
followers.
Lord, hear us.
2. We pray for all of us gathered
here today;
(pause to pray)
that we may renew our
commitment to personal prayer,
wherever we are on our faith
journey.
Lord, hear us.
3. We pray for those who find it
hard to pray;
(pause to pray)
that they may know and believe
that God is always listening.
Lord, hear us.
4. We pray for those who don't
have enough to eat;
(pause to pray)

that their needs will be met
through the love and generosity
of those who have plenty to
share.

Lord, hear us.

5. We pray for all followers of Jesus;
(pause to pray)
that we may be united in praying
to God our Father in heaven.
Lord, hear us.

Note for the Parish Newsletter

We continue to welcome in a particular way those children who are preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion for the first time later this year. Our focus this month is on the way in which we pray, both individually and as a parish family. Personal prayer helps to strengthen our relationship with God. When we come to Mass, we build on that relationship by listening to the Word of God and receiving Holy Communion. This helps to nourish us and to strengthen our faith and our lives.



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PRINTED IN IRELAND



978 1 84730 976 1

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