

The Parishes of Saint Oswald and Saint Sebastian  
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This last year has been difficult in many different ways for all, not just within our communities. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown restrictions that we are still living under, have had a knock-on effect with families financial situations. There are hardships that many have encountered and are continuing to face due to the restrictions.

One aspect of our church life that was put on hold, was the First Holy Communion preparation. This is a parish responsibility, not a school one, and all decisions made for Holy Communion are made for all within our parish community, which includes all three schools. As I am working without catechists, and given the confines of gathering, the short online course has been made available for the benefit of all the children in our three schools.

However, after meeting with the head teachers of all three schools, a discussion was had regarding the reception of Holy communion, and how best to accommodate the number of children from all three schools, and over the two year groups of children who will be receiving Communion this year. During this discussion, it was felt that any unnecessary financial burden could push more people further into debt, especially as there are cases of multiple siblings receiving Communion at the same time through the three school communities.

I know that there are families out there who have struggled, (and who still are struggling), due to the ongoing lockdown. I believe the fairest way of ensuring they do not incur any unnecessary debt is through not having to feel that their children should wear a Communion Outfit, especially as there is only 7 weeks until Holy Communion Masses start, and as non-essential retail does not open until at least the 12<sup>th</sup> April. This was ultimately the motivation behind the decision to have the children receive Holy Communion in school uniform. The decision to split the classes up and have a cap on guest numbers was to ensure that the ongoing restrictions on people gathering together in groups were being followed.

Having considered different viewpoints, I would like to propose the following for Holy Communion, and will hold a Zoom meeting to gather people's opinions.

The children will make their Holy Communion at Saint Oswald's Church, on the allocated Saturday, all wearing their school uniform. This way, emphasis will be on the importance

of the Sacrament, and the children will all be dressed the same as their peers (please refer to my previous letter on this). However, the next day, your child may also come to one of the parish Masses (09:30 or 11 :00) dressed in their Holy Communion outfit, if this is your choice. It is absolutely fine if you choose that your child does or does not attend the Sunday Mass. The Sunday will be an added day of celebration for those wishing to wear a special outfit. It would also be good to show the whole parish community the sacramental life of the church is still ongoing, despite the difficulties we have all had to endure.

Or:

2. We defer all communions within the parish until such time that we are able to gather as a whole class community (possibly October), which will give families the extra time to sort out Holy Communion Outfits, as well as any extra family celebrations.

I will send out the zoom meeting details via the school messaging in the very near future when you will have an opportunity to give me feedback

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Fr. Liam Collister". The signature is stylized with a large "F" and a cursive "Liam".

God bless, and stay safe.

Fr. Liam Collister