



St Bernadette's

Parish Castle Hill

Sacramental Program

Penance 2026



Parent Information Booklet

St Bernadette's Parish Mission Statement

*St Bernadette's Parish Castle Hill
Of the Diocese of Parramatta
is a welcoming Catholic Community,
nurturing its people in faith and service
the compassion of Jesus Christ
with our local community and beyond*

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Preparation for the Sacraments

Dear Parish Family,

Thank you for your interest in our parish preparation for the sacraments. Our parish is dedicated to helping families grow in their love for God, to go deeper in their understanding of the Christian faith and how to live this Christian life more authentically and relevantly. We hope to assist you and support you, the parents, in your role as the 'first teachers of your children in the ways of faith'. We are always excited to be part of such a special and important time for your child and your family.

Sacraments are integral to our lives as Catholic Christians, and their celebrations are profound spiritual events. Since initiation demands us to take up our responsibility as active followers of God, as we seek to initiate our children further into God's Church through the sacraments, it is important that they are properly prepared for and aware of what being Christian is. As such, it is vital that families actively participate in all aspects of the preparation process both at the Church and at home. The most important of these is to participate each week in our Sunday celebration of Mass. As "the source and summit of the Christian life" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church #1324*), *the sacrament of the eucharist is essential for living a faithful, Christian life. Families must model this importance to their children by making Sunday Mass a priority, embracing the opportunity to encounter Christ through God's word and the sacrament, and coming together to worship as God has commanded us, every week.*

It is important that all involved - especially parents - continue to develop their understanding and practice of the faith. We especially need to continually reflect on our faith to ensure that we hand on to our children an authentic and lived Catholic faith.

This preparation process for the sacrament of Reconciliation is suitable for children who are currently in year 2 or above. This is not a set age and the sacraments should be received at a time when the child is deemed ready and when their family is in a position to effectively support, be actively involved in, and commit to, the entire preparation process. Please take the time to carefully consider what will be involved and your family's ability to fully and effectively participate, before enrolling.

This booklet contains important information regarding the preparation process for 2026. *Please read all of this information very carefully so you are aware of what is expected of families and do not miss any important details.*

We look forward to supporting the faith development of you and your family. We will continue to pray for all of our parish families during this time as we all seek to grow closer to our Lord.

God bless

St Bernadette's Sacramental Team

DRAFT Schedule of Dates

Reconciliation 2026

Please note dates and times may change depending on enrolment numbers

Please make a note of all events and sessions in your diary. Full participation and attendance are essential to effectively prepare for the sacraments. By enrolling in our preparation process, your family agrees to and commits to attending mass each week and all the events and sessions that form part of our parish preparation.

Date	Event	Location	attendees
Tues 11 th November 2025 7:00pm	Parent Information Night	Church	Parents only
Mon 2 nd Feb 2025	Enrolments close	online	
Tues 10 th Feb 2025 7:30pm	Parent meeting with Fr Fernando	church	Parents only
Sat 14 th Feb 5pm vigil or Sun 15 th Feb 7:30am, 9am, 10:30am, 6pm	Presentation to the Parish-mass	church	All welcome
Mon 16 th Feb 7pm, or Sat 21 st Feb 3pm	Lesson 1	hall	Parent and child
Mon 23 rd Feb 7pm, or Sat 28 th Feb 3pm	Lesson 2	hall	Parent and child
Mon 2 nd March 7pm, or Sat 7 th March 3pm	Lesson 3	hall	Parent and child
Mon 9 th March 7pm, or Sat 14 th March 3pm	Lesson 4	hall	Parent and child
Mon 16 th March 7pm, or Sat 21 st March 3pm	Lesson 5	hall	Parent and child
Tues 24 th March 7pm	First Reconciliation	church	All welcome

The Sacraments of Christian Initiation

Theological Perspective

From Diocese of Parramatta: Policy on Sacraments of Initiation and the Sacrament of Penance for Children of Catechetical Age who have been Baptized {2011}

*The Sacraments of the New Testament were instituted by Christ the Lord and entrusted to the Church. As actions of Christ and the Church, they are signs and means by which faith is expressed and strengthened, worship is offered to God and our sanctification is brought about. Thus, they contribute most effectively to establishing, strengthening, and manifesting ecclesiastical communion.*¹

*From the time of the apostle becoming a Christian has been accomplished by a journey and initiation in several stages. This journey can be covered rapidly or slowly, but certain essential elements will always have to be present: the proclamation of the Word, acceptance of the Gospel entailing conversion, the profession of faith, Baptism itself, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit., and admission to Eucharistic communion.*²

The sacraments of Christian initiation - Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation - lay the foundations of every Christian life. *The sharing in the divine nature given to men through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin, development, and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. Using these sacraments of Christian initiation., they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity.*³

Baptism incorporates us into Christ and forms us into God's people. This first sacrament pardons all our sins rescues us from the power of darkness and brings us to the dignity of adopted children, a new creation through water and the Holy Spirit. Hence, we are called and are indeed the children of God.

*At the table of the Eucharist., we eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man so that we may have eternal life and show forth the unity of God's people. By offering ourselves with Christ., we share in the universal sacrifice, that is, the entire community of the redeemed offered to God by their High Priest., and we pray for a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit., so that the whole human race may be brought into the unity of God's family.*⁴

Finally, Confirmation fills us with the Holy Spirit and makes us more completely the image of the Lord, so that we bear witness to him before the world and work to bring the Body of Christ to its fullness.⁵

Through the sacraments of Christian initiation, *we receive in increasing measure, the treasures of divine life and advance towards the perfection of charity.*⁶

*Though the three sacraments of Christian initiation closely combine to bring us, the faithful to Christ., to his full stature and to enable us to carry out the mission of the entire people of God in the Church and the world.*⁷

Whilst the Sacrament of Penance is not one of the Sacraments of Initiation, it is however a requirement for receiving First Eucharist and Confirmation.⁸ *Conversion to Christ., the new birth of Baptism, the Body and Blood of Christ received as food, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit make us "holy and without blemish. " Nevertheless, the new life received in Christian imitation has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin.*⁹ *Sacramental Reconciliation with God and neighbour disposes us to receive the graces of the Eucharist and Confirmation.*

1.The Code of Canon Law (CIC), 1983. canon 840

2.Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), 1229

3.CCC 1212

4.Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), General Introduction 2.

5.ibid 2

6. Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Confirmation

7. RCIA General Introduction 2 8 CIC914

8. CCC 1426

Initiation into the life of the Church is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful.¹⁰ The whole community is responsible for passing on its faith, its story, values, and traditions to the next generation; and for introducing its children into the Sacramental life of the Church. The participation of the whole faith community is required before, during and after the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation.¹¹



FAMILY

The parents as the children's first and principal educators, provide an introduction to the Sacraments by word and example.

• *Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage parents receive the responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children^{1,2} Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children.¹³ Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith.¹⁴*

10.RCIA 4

11.d. RCIA 9

12.CCC 2225; d. Familiaris Consortio (FC) 38 13 CCC 2223

13. CCC 2226

•The family unit, the *domestic church*¹⁵ has the primary responsibility to form and gradually increase the spirit of faith in the children. ⁶ It is the first community called to announce the Gospel to the human family during growth and to bring him or her, through a progressive education and catechesis to the full human and Christian maturity.¹⁷ This sharing enables parents to lead their child to an understating of and a desire for the sacraments. The parish-based, family-centered, school-supported sacramental process creates particular opportunities for parents to continue sharing their faith with their child at the appropriate time.

•As part of fulfilling this responsibility and preparing their children for the sacraments, parents along with other parish members need to be intimately involved. Parents are an essential part of the discerning which needs to precede the presentation of their child for sacramental celebrations.¹⁸

•There is faith, example, motivation, devotion, zeal, and other gifts that have an important bearing on initiation. These must come first from the parents, then from the parish community.

PARISH

The parish supports the home by providing a more systematic catechesis through parish-based family-centered, school-supported programs of sacramental preparation.

•*The parish is the place where the Christian community is formed and expressed. It is called to be a fraternal and welcoming family where Christians become aware of being the people of God.*¹⁹

•Whether we speak of the initiation of adults or children, *initiation is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful.*²⁰ The parish community is the vital instrument in this process by which God's people/ the Church hands-on and nourishes the faith received from the apostles.²¹ Therefore the community must always be fully prepared in the pursuit of its apostolic vocation to give help to those who are searching for Christ.²²

•The parish sees itself as a community committed to conversion, Gospel discipleship, shared faith, and the ongoing Christian formation which should precede and follow initiation. *In the various circumstances of daily life/ even as in the apostolate/ all the followers of Christ have the obligation of spreading their faith according to their abilities.*²³ The whole ecclesial community bears some responsibility for the development and safeguarding of the grace given at Baptism.²⁴

•For the initiation of the child the sacramental preparation process is properly situated in the evangelizing parish community since this is the community in which the candidate is being initiated. *Before and after the celebration of the sacrament, the child has a right to the love and help of the community.*²⁵ This is the community that expresses Joy-⁶ at welcoming the infant to be baptized and which, through its involvement in sacramental preparation can live out the implications of that welcome.

15.CCC 2204

16.Rite of Confirmation 3

17.FC 2

18.cf. RCIA 43

19.cf. General Directory for Catechesis 257

20.RCIA 4

21.Ad Gentes (AG) 14

22.RCIA 9

23. *ibid.* 9

24.CCC 1255

25.Rite of Baptism for Children 4

26. *ibid.* 79

How Can I Best Help My Child Prepare for the Sacraments?

The rite of baptism begins with the reception of children where parents commit to the following:

"You have asked to have your child baptised. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring them up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbour. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?"

Parents respond, "We do". This is a serious commitment, and St Bernadette's parish is committed to helping parents fulfill their duty as the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith. Listed below are some ways to help form the faith of your child at home.

Lead by example: There is no better way to help your child prepare for the sacraments than to lead by your example. Frequent reception of the sacraments by weekly attendance at mass and regularly seeking the sacrament of reconciliation gives real witness to your child about the importance and value of the sacraments for your family and our Christian life.

Keep growing in your faith: Take the time to reflect and consider your understanding of the Christian faith. What does our behaviour, life, or attitude tell our children or others about our Christian life? How do we witness our faith? What beliefs or teachings do you find difficult or do not understand? Explore ways of finding out more about our Christian faith.

Give them the knowledge that they are loved permanently and unconditionally: It is only through the experience of unconditional love in a family that a child can begin to understand God's unconditional love for us and, in turn, experience God's love for us through the sacraments. How they develop their understanding of love, forgiveness, morality, and integrity begin with how it is expressed to them in their relationships with their parents.

Pray together: Prayer helps us to grow in our relationship with God. Make prayer a part of your everyday family life - at meal times, bedtime, first thing in the morning, etc. You do not need special words or books, nor do your prayer times have to be lengthy. Let your child know that family prayer time is a time when we can talk to God about problems or difficulties that arise in our lives, thank God for all His blessings, or say sorry to God when things have gone wrong. Prayer also involves listening to God too. Make time to switch off music, TV, or electronic devices and spend time in silence to hear what God might want to say. This helps us to be more aware of God's presence with us each day.

Read the Bible: Share stories from the bible with your child to learn about who Jesus is, what He did, what He taught, and why He did all that he did. Help them to see Jesus as a person and as their friend, and how they can follow His example in their own life.

Have a dedicated prayer space: This is a wonderful way of encouraging prayer and bringing the family together to spend some time focusing on God. Simple rituals such as lighting candles, blessing with water, displaying icons, etc. make the experience of talking to God and praying for and with each other, a special and memorable one.

Actively participate: Be enthusiastic about how you involve yourself in the preparation process. Take the opportunities offered to talk about and share faith with your child as much as possible.

Sacramental Preparation 2026

Detailed information

Following is a more detailed explanation of what has been outlined in the Schedule of Dates. We ask you to please read the information with your family so they all understand the level of commitment that this Sacramental program requires

Registration

Please complete the google form <https://forms.gle/eMH8R7ScsT87LKzt6>
Please ensure that all the information requested on the enrolment form is completed accurately. **A separate form** for each child that you wish to enrol needs to be completed. You will require a copy of your child's **Baptism certificate** as part of the registration process.



Registrations close Monday 2nd February 2026.

To help the parish to cover some of the costs of running sacramental preparation, we ask you to consider making a donation of \$35 for each child. This can be paid by cash, cheque (payable to 'St Bernadette's Parish) or credit card (Visa or MasterCard) at the Presentation mass or parent meeting with Fr Fernando.

If you have any further questions regarding enrolment or throughout the preparation process, please do not hesitate to contact the parish office on 9634 2622 or at sacraments@stbernadette.org.au

Commitment mass

Life of the Parish is nurtured with the celebration of the Sacraments, they are a reflection of the acts of the Holy Spirit in Parish life. At the beginning of the Sacramental program, we would ask you to attend the Commitment Mass where the candidates will be introduced to the Parish and parents will declare their commitment to share their faith with their child in this Sacramental Program.

Parent meeting with Father Fernando

At the beginning of the Sacramental Program, there is a meeting where parents will be guided lesson by lesson by the Priests in the Parish. This is a meeting for Parents only, if you are unable to find someone to help you look after your child on the night, you can bring him/her but please remember that the parents are attending a lesson and the information on the night makes the program run smoothly.

Sacramental Preparation Sessions

This year the Sacramental Preparation program is structured into five lessons. The number of candidates for the Sacrament of Reconciliation are organised into small groups of five, where each parent will be asked to lead one of the sessions for the rest of the group. The Sacramental team will organise the groups and inform you of the other families in your group.

According to the number of candidates, each session will be run at least twice a week in the same week, so families can choose beforehand which night they will enrol their child. Please remember that it is important you remain as much as possible in that class so candidates can get to know each other and you have the chance to prepare your lesson. Each session is designed to last for around an hour.

Celebrating the Sacrament: A practical guide

Reconciliation Ceremony

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is celebrated within the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word. The Ceremony will take place on Tuesday 8th April at 7:00pm in the church. The Parish will organise a number of Priests to come and support the celebration of the Sacrament. On the day, parents will be asked to present their child to the Priest and then let their child do their first reconciliation. Once the candidates are finished, we encourage parents, family members and friends attending the ceremony to renew their reconciliation if they feel the need.

What to wear

Receiving Sacraments for the first time is certainly a special and important occasion for your child. You can help them experience the importance in different ways, and the choice of clothing for the day is important. The only specifications made by the Parish in relation to this is that children should wear "smart casual dress, appropriate for the occasion". Sometimes this is summarised by the expression "Sunday Best". Help your child feel the importance of the occasion, but please don't let this distract you from the importance of the Sacrament itself.

Photography

Due to the nature of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, there is no photography allowed on the day.

How do I know if my child is ready?

What does my child know about God?

Does my child know how to pray?

Does my child know the difference between right and wrong?

Can my child accept that they make mistakes sometimes?

Is my child able to say sorry when it is necessary?

