



Edinburgh, 16 January 2017

Dear Father,
Dear Head Teacher,

As you know, at this time, our children in Primary 3 celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation followed in Primary 4 by the Sacrament of Confirmation, with First Holy Communion later in the same academic year.

It is true that the present system has had the advantage of a logic and clarity that sits well with the theology of the Sacraments and the traditional praxis of initiation of adults, recently restored with great success in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Post-sacramental catechesis and other kinds of follow up exist and have enjoyed some impact. I also know that many of you have worked diligently to help this scheme succeed, and I am deeply grateful to all of you, teachers, parents and clergy, who have put so much effort into this.

Having said that, what such an arrangement gains for adults appears to fail when applied to our children and their parents, both groups of which are often nowadays unfamiliar with the sacramental life of the Church. While there can be no objection to the order of the Sacraments in the present arrangement, I feel obliged to ask if it might not be better to give teachers, catechists, parents and clergy more time to teach our children about these important moments by returning Confirmation to a later moment in the children's lives. I appreciate the arguments that brought the Archdiocese to concentrate the Sacraments in this way, and to regain, as it were, their ancient order. Our recent experience, however, suggests strongly to me that it would be more advantageous pastorally and catechetically to spread them out as before, meaning the children in P3 would receive First Penance and Reconciliation, followed in P4 by First Holy Communion; while celebration of Confirmation would be returned to P7.

The most obvious advantage of this is that we would gain much more time to instruct and to deepen the faith of the children and parents in Penance and the Eucharist, the two long-term lifelines of Christian adulthood; and we would gain a significant amount of time both to strengthen the first two Sacraments and to prepare the children for Confirmation. Importantly, it would give a more even workload to our teachers and catechists. It would also bring our Archdiocese into correspondence with

other dioceses in Scotland who, also having tried our present system, are returning to celebrating Confirmation towards the end of Primary School. Finally, it would give us an opportunity to embrace more effectively the Pope Francis Awards presently on offer from SCES in Primary 6 and 7, to deepen the grasp of Confirmation's importance.

Having discussed the matter with the Council of Priests, I have therefore decided that from August 2017 onwards, our schools and parishes will return to the practice of our Primary 3 children being prepared for First Penance and Reconciliation; the same children, in their Primary 4 year, will celebrate First Holy Communion; while Confirmation for them will be celebrated in Primary 7. I have also spoken to our Pastoral Resources Office, which will arrange a meeting for head teachers and Sacraments teachers to look into the practicalities of the transition, and which is beginning work to readjust the workbooks for teachers, catechists and pastors. All should be ready for August this year.

As it is traditional in the West, as well as an important pastoral opportunity, for the foreseeable future I also intend to continue to confer this Sacrament on all our children, with only occasional exceptions. I would also like pastors and teachers to note that, as the *confirmandi* will now be a number of years older, I expect all children, including those of Polish origin, normally to be confirmed in line with this system. For obvious reasons, the Rite of Confirmation for such young people will be celebrated from 2021 within Mass, unless truly extraordinary circumstances suggest otherwise.

Let me finish by reiterating my deep gratitude for all the cooperation already existing between parishes and schools, families and catechists. I sincerely hope that I can look forward to your good will and cooperation in what I now propose, which will undoubtedly demand some effort and patience from us all in the next few years. I also hope, however, that much good will come of taking more time to instruct Catholic families in the Church's sacramental life, to the benefit of us all, but especially to that of our children who are the Church's future.

With every good wish, I remain

Yours sincerely in Christ,



✠Leo Cushley
Archbishop of St Andrews & Edinburgh