

Bringing children to Mass

Reassurance and practical guidance for parents

Coming to Mass

Please know that you are welcome to come to any Mass in the parish, and to bring your children with you. Please choose which Sunday Mass best suits your needs as a family.

You and your family are welcome at which every Mass suits you best.

Introducing younger children to 'church'

A time does come when children are able to take responsibility for how they behave at Mass. Until then the responsibility lies with the parents. It is a matter for parents to decide what is helpful by way of getting their children used to coming to Mass, and learning how to take part.

Long before children are able to understand the words we use at Mass, or why the Mass is important they can learn to respond to the prayerfulness of what we do. They can learn to make the sign of the Cross, and to pray. They can learn reverence for the church building, and learn how to sit quietly, with their parish family.

Many parents take the plunge straight away and bring their children to Mass weekly from their first week of life. Others decide to bring their children once a month. Still others might begin by bringing the children to weekday Mass when things are quieter and so it is easier for them to get used to the church.

Some parents find it helpful, during their children's earlier years, to take it in turns to stay at home looking after their child(ren), so each gets a chance to experience a relatively peaceful Sunday Mass.

However, there is no one way that suits everyone. Each family needs what is best for them. However there are two things to keep working at:

- Make sure that you yourself are able to come to Mass each Sunday.
- Helping the children take part in the Mass as they are able. Certainly by the time they are aged 3 1/2 or 4, the children should join



ing with us in the actions of the Mass, making the Sign of the Cross with us, becoming familiar with the songs and melodies of the Mass, kneeling when we kneel, standing when we stand, and so on. Often, with the right support and encouragement, these are things children take will show signs of learning at any even earlier age.

Making your child comfortable in church.

Younger children will often sit more quietly if they bring a toy to church with them. *Please make sure this is a soft toy which does not make loud noises when dropped or banged on the bench (it happens!). If they bring a book, try to make sure it is a book of bible stories or about the Mass, so you can make connections between what we hear and do at Mass, and what is in their book.*

Please do not give food and drink to your children in church. It generally makes a mess, which there is little time for you to clear up before the next Mass begins. It also makes it difficult for parents of other children to explain why they are not allowed to 'snack' in church too.

Children will generally find it much easier to engage with what takes place at Mass when the family sits right towards the front of the church or in the transept chapels. This makes it much easier for children to see what is happening and hear, and to be in eye contact with the ministers. Sitting further back there are many more distractions for the children, and they can often see very little.

When your child starts to cry or make a noise

Dealing with a noisy child is perhaps the most difficult thing for a parent to deal with during Mass. Especially if you get disapproving looks from people around you, or hear 'tut-tuts' while you are trying to do your best, the temptation might be to pick up your child and never come back again!

But be assured you *are* welcome and so is your child. It is *your* church as well as ours!

