Family Catechesis

at St John Fisher, North Harrow

Growing in Faith Together



Dear families,

Welcome to Family Catechesis at St John Fisher.-Family Catechesis is part of our wider Parish Renewal which has at its heart the missional forming of disciples. We want to help you as a family to **G**row **I**n **F**aith **T**ogether,

Rather than a simple 'one size fits all model' we accompany individual families in their journey of faith not simply focussing on preparation for a single Sacrament.

We hope you will find family catechesis a joyful experience of faith, family and community here at St John Fisher.

Every blessing

Fr Graham Stokes (parish priest) & **Jan Bennett** (parish catechist)
Spring 2026

Your Role as a Parent

Being a parent is an enormous privilege and when we bring our children for baptism we promise to teach them the Catholic faith and bring them up in the church. We are the first and best teachers of our children.

Family Catechesis

Family catechesis assists parents and children to grow in their faith together rather than teaching children without, or separately from their parents.

Our Family Catechesis pathway is for all families with children between the ages of 5 and 12 wherever you are in your faith journey. Some of you may already be regular attenders at Sunday Mass but others may not yet be as engaged as you would like. GIFT endeavours to help you as families grow in your faith together with the support of our priests and parishioners who have already journeyed or are currently journeying with their own families and will welcome you and share their experience.

We want to encourage you to participate in the life of the church. Gathering with the parish community to worship God in the celebration of the Mass is a key part of living our faith in addition to times at home when you pray together and talk about what we believe as a family as well as other parish activities you participate in. In this way we express our desire to be full members of the community and for our faith to grow. We want to provide a place where as a family you can learn what engaging with your faith looks like and then to give you the confidence to live that faith day by day.

How 'GIFT' works

We offer **monthly family sessions on Saturday mornings** to which all families are invited. GIFT is not a programme and so has no beginning or end date. We start with Mass at 10.00am where the topic of the morning will be introduced and then move to the parish centre where together we will engage in structured activities and conversations which will help us to reflect on what faith means to all of us, recognising that we are all on a separate journey towards God.

We also offer **parents'-only sessions once each half term** so that you too can grow in your own understanding of our faith and to help you explain this at home.

GIFT – the gateway to the sacraments.

As we journey together, and participate fully in the life of the church, families will begin to think about celebrating milestones on their children's faith journey such as First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion. Discerning when children are ready to receive these sacraments is an important factor in any family's faith journey. The church also has a role in discerning readiness. Receiving sacraments is not about someone reaching a certain age – it is about recognising the child's and the wider

family's understanding of what it means to live a life of faith in the church and participate fully in that.

When we agree that your child is ready to receive the sacraments we will offer additional separate preparation. Families will prepare firstly to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation and then later the family will prepare for the child to receive the Eucharist for the first time. Each family will have a catechist mentor to journey with them during the period of preparation. We will celebrate the reception of the sacraments at different times throughout the year. Hopefully small numbers of children will be ready to receive the sacraments together so that they can share that celebration with one another and their families and the wider parish community. Once the sacraments have been celebrated for the first time, families will continue to come to Mass and attend GIFT.

Joining the Family Catechesis Pathway

Fr Graham or Jan are happy to discuss this with you after Mass and to provide you with more information on what is involved. You can complete a registration form so that you can let us know your family's names and the ages of your children. Details of the various sessions being offered are publicised in the newsletter, on the parish website and on the GIFT noticeboard at the back of the church.

FAQs

Q1. Is this another First Holy Communion Programme?

No. GIFT is designed to help parents to deepen their own faith and be ready to pass on the faith to their children. So, while preparation for First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion can be part of this process, it is so much more as it involves the whole family.

Q2. Is it only for parents with children in year 3 / FHC age?

No - GIFT is for all families with children aged between 5 and 12. You might already be engaged with your faith and the Church and be looking to deepen your understanding for the sake of your child, or you might not yet be as engaged as you would like to be and hence seeking the sacraments for your child is your motivation.

There is no set number of sessions but rather an encouragement to become engaged in the parish and in your faith, and so help you to pass the faith on to your children.

Q3. Do I have to come to all of the sessions?

We all have many demands on our time and different family dynamics; we recognise this and occasionally clashes will occur. However, growing faith is important for both parents and children. Therefore, we expect regular attendance, but, more importantly engagement.

Q4. What is expected of us as parents?

GIFT should to enable you as parents to fulfil the commitment you made when you asked for your child to be baptised; to bring them up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us.

GIFT will help you to deepen your faith and engage with the Church more fully and to be able to keep the commitment you made. In terms of duration, ideally all families with children between the ages of 5 and 12 will be engaged with GIFT.

Q5. How do I know when my child is ready to receive the sacraments?

Not everyone will be ready at the same time and part of the journey in the faith is to discern the readiness of your child, irrespective of age. When the time comes parents and parish will together discern and agree their readiness.

Q6. When will I know the date of my child's FHC.

There is no set date for the celebration of the sacraments and so there is a lot of flexibility as to when this will take place. When it is discerned by both parents and the parish that your child is ready, a separate and additional sacramental preparation programme can begin and a convenient date can be set thereafter.

Q7. Can our children celebrate their FHC with their friends?

Of course. It would be wonderful if small groups of children and their families would prepare together and then celebrate together. Our experience so far has shown that between 3 and 5 children have celebrated the sacraments together as part of the regular parish Mass.

Q8. When does GIFT start?

GIFT has been running now for a couple of years Dates are advised via the parish newsletter and website and are also posted on the GIFT noticeboard at the back of the church.

Q9. How much does this cost?

There is a cost for the resources and facilities so we suggest an annual donation of £25 per child. We would never want the cost to be a barrier and so please let us know if this might be the case. When you complete a registration form there will be information about how to contribute. Separate donations will apply when you begin sacramental preparation to cover the cost of the workbooks.

Q10. How do I register for the pathway?

The registration form can be accessed from the QR Code at the back of the church on the GIFT Noticeboard. Please see Fr Graham or Jan at Mass if you have any questions. Once you are registered you will receive regular updates about times and sessions.