

Ad Clerum 3a.3

The Preparation at school of candidates for confirmation

The nurturing of children and young people in the Christian faith is a high priority in the mission and ministry of the Church. We value the important work being done by clergy and lay people in parishes and schools. It is vital that we meet the challenge of teaching and supporting these young people whatever their church-going background. We urge that there is no sense of competition, but rather of collaboration, in rejoicing whenever young people are involved in Christian learning and participate in worship.

Sometimes we receive representations, particularly from parish clergy, about candidates prepared for confirmation at school without any contact with the parish priest. Most schools with full-time or part-time chaplains preparing candidates for confirmation take great care to link the young people with the parish priests in their home parishes.

To help school chaplains we have prepared the following guidelines as a code of good practice in this matter, and would ask you to follow it as far as possible.

1. At the point when a boy or girl is either asking to prepare for confirmation or is actually beginning classes, the chaplain or school should write to the parish priest or minister of the boy or girl's home parish, or the church they attend, to inform the priest or minister of this intention and asking for any comment or commendation from the parish priest concerned.
2. Some chaplains also like to write at this time to the parents. That is valuable in itself but it does not appear to be adequate to leave the parents to inform the parish priest, and the direct letter suggested in paragraph 1 is necessary.
3. It is increasingly common practice, and much to be commended, that each candidate should undertake some simple project on their home parish during a school holiday as an essential part of their confirmation preparation.
4. At an appropriate time later in the confirmation preparation a note should be sent to the parish priest giving the date, time and place of the confirmation, with, if practical, an invitation to attend, and in any case asking for the prayers of the parish concerned for the candidate.

We recognise that there are particular difficulties in cases where the candidate's parents live abroad, or when the candidate for other reasons has no settled address - e.g. when parents are divorced - but whenever possible the candidate should be linked with a parish priest, even if the contact will only be occasional.

The other side to this matter is the responsibility of the parish clergy to respond to school chaplains. A number of chaplains have reported the frustrating experience of getting negligible response from the parish clergy to whom they write. We would therefore urge parish clergy always to follow up commendations and reply to school chaplains giving what information they can about the candidate and his or her family.

Similarly when preparing confirmation candidates in a parish who attend a school which has a resident or part-time chaplain, it is an equal courtesy and helpful to the chaplain if the parish priest writes to the chaplain commending the boy or girl and saying that they are being prepared for confirmation in the parish and inviting the school chaplain to attend the confirmation in due course.

This is likely to be most applicable in schools with day pupils as well as boarders that have a chaplain and opportunities for worship in school.

We commend these guidelines to the attention of school chaplains and parish clergy, and we hope you will let us know if you experience any difficulty in this matter. We share with you our concern for the best possible pastoral care of these young people preparing for confirmation.

Revised April 2015.