



Catholic Deanery of Eastbourne & St Leonards

Families & Youth : Autumn 2026

"For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." Matthew 18:20 (ESV)

Special edition for children and families including those served by Sacred Heart, St Mary Magdalene, St Mary Star of the Sea and St Thomas a Becket Primary Schools, and St Richard's Catholic College

Welcome from the clergy

Dear Parents and Carers,

As we return from the summer another school year begins and we warmly welcome children, young people and families into the life of our Catholic Deanery, spanning from Eastbourne to Rye and up to Hailsham and Battle. Some of you will be returning to our schools, others joining anew, and whether you are Catholic, belong to another Christian denomination, practise another faith, or are simply open and curious, you are all very much welcome among us.

Our deanery has four Catholic primary schools and St Richard's Catholic College, our senior school, they are all either voluntary aided through our diocese or more recently have become part of the Bosco Catholic Education Trust. As faith based schools, they are here to support families not only in

exceptional education, but also in worship, prayer and spiritual growth, helping us all to discover the joy of faith and to face the challenges of everyday life together.

In these pages you will find opportunities for prayer, children's liturgy, sacramental preparation, youth involvement and a very special invitation to FLAME 2027.

This newsletter has a Catholic focus, reflecting the faith at the heart of our schools and parishes, but our welcome is for everyone. Faith is something we discover and live together, and we hope these pages will encourage you on your journey and help you find a next step, whether for your child, your young person or your whole family.

With every good wish and prayer,
Fr Kevin

On behalf of all the deanery's clergy

Walking in Faith Together

Faith grows through the ordinary things we do together. For Catholic families, the Eucharist remains at the heart of Catholic life with our Sunday obligation to attend Mass, together with attending on Holy Days of Obligation. But our faith is not confined to the church building, it is also lived in our homes and our schools and in the way we treat and serve one another. Prayer, talking about the Gospel, acts of kindness, service and making time for each other are all part of it. As parents and

teachers of the faith, we have the privilege and responsibility of helping our children discover what it means to follow Christ.

Faith is lived and nurtured in the years between the sacraments. Through our schools and parishes, there are many opportunities for children, young people and families to grow in faith together — and we encourage parents to support their children and join in too.

Children's Liturgy of the Word

Children's Liturgy of the Word helps children from around five years old to First Communion hear and explore the Sunday Gospel through stories, activities and prayer; in many churches younger children are welcome with parental supervision.



Godly Play is one way of providing a liturgy for children, but each church has their own programme.

Check your church newsletter for details of how Children's Liturgy is provided in your church. If Children's Liturgy is not currently available at your church, speak to your priest — a small group of parents can get one started with support and training.

Helping and Volunteering: A Role for Parents

Youth Sacramental formation and Children's Liturgy is made possible entirely through the dedication of volunteers — and there's no one better suited for this than parents!

Parents are often the best leaders and role models in this setting, as they already understand the needs, attention spans, and spiritual curiosity of children. Whether you have experience or are simply willing to learn, we would love you to come along, see a session in



action, and consider joining the team.

New helpers are always welcome, and full support and training will be offered. It's a rewarding way to deepen your own faith while helping children grow in theirs.

Youth in Action — Take your next step!

Has your child made their First Holy Communion? Now is a great time to encourage them to become more involved in parish life. Serving can help young people grow in confidence, discover their gifts and live out their faith, while also contributing towards awards such as the **Duke of Edinburgh Award** or **Faith in Action**.

There are many ways to get involved:

- Altar serving
- Music ministry
- Reading at Mass
- Welcoming, with parents
- Helping at Children's Liturgy
- And much more!

Talk with your child about where they might like to serve, then speak to your priest or parish team to find out more. Whatever their next step, we look forward to walking in faith together.

Let us pray at the start of the school year:

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.

O God, who have taught the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant that in the same Spirit we may be truly wise and ever rejoice in his consolation. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

First Reconciliation & First Holy Communion 2025/2026 — A beautiful step in faith

First Holy Communion is one of the most special moments in a child's faith journey — when they receive Jesus in the Eucharist for the very first time. Along with the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession), it marks a joyful and grace-filled stage in growing closer to God and becoming more fully part of the Church. This preparation is for baptised Catholic children in Year 3 and above, and it's not just about learning facts — it's about discovering the love of Jesus, learning how to pray, and becoming more aware of God's presence in everyday life.

Families are encouraged to attend Sunday Mass regularly, as this helps children grow into the rhythm of faith and feel at home in the worshipping community. Parents also play a vital role throughout the programme by supporting their child's prayer and understanding at home.

If you have a child who is ready to take this step, we invite you to register for your church's First Communion programme. It's a beautiful opportunity for the whole family to grow in faith together.

Programmes running in the Deanery's West Hub:

- St George's, Polegate & St Wilfrid's, Hailsham – Deadline: Friday 18 September



- Our Lady of Ransom, St Gregory's & St Agnes, Eastbourne – Deadline: Friday 18 September
- Christ the King, Langney & St Joachim's, Hampden Park – Deadline: Sunday 27 September

West Hub application forms are available in church or from church offices

Programmes running in the Deanery's East Hub:

- St Mary Magdalene Bexhill and St Martha's Little Common – applications for this year are now closed
- St Thomas of Canterbury & the English Martyrs and Holy Redeemer St Leonards – Deadline: Friday 18 September
- St Mary Star of the Sea Hastings—Deadline to be confirmed, but apply as soon as possible
- Our Lady Immaculate & St Michael or St Teresa of Lisieux—contact Fr Richard direct

St Leonards & Hastings application forms are available in church or from the church offices

Confirmation 2026/2027 — Say Yes to the Holy Spirit

Confirmation is one of the great Sacraments of the Church — a moment when young people are strengthened by the Holy Spirit to live their faith with confidence, courage, and purpose.

For baptised Catholics, Confirmation is not just a “next step” — it's a personal “Yes” to the gifts received at Baptism. It deepens their relationship with God and prepares them to live as adult Christians in the world.

Young people preparing for Confirmation should already be attending Mass regularly and

have a willingness to explore their faith more fully. The preparation journey is not just about learning — it's about growing in relationship with Jesus, discovering what it means to be part of the Church, and being open to the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.



If you have a child who is in Year 10 or above, now is the time to consider enrolling them in this year's preparation programme. It's a chance to ask big questions, grow in faith, and step more deeply into the life God is calling them to.

A combined programme runs in the Deanery's West Hub:

- Lumen Christi – Deadline: Saturday 3 October

Programmes running in the Deanery's East Hub:

- St Mary Magdelene Bexhill and St Martha's Little Common – Applications will soon be open: check the newsletter in church
- St Thomas of Canterbury & the English Martyrs and Holy Redeemer St Leonards and St Mary Star of the Sea Hastings – Deadline: Friday 25 September
- Our Lady Immaculate & St Michael and St Teresa of Lisieux: Please speak to Fr Richard as soon as possible: he will direct you to the appropriate programme .

Application forms for each Hub's programmes are available, or will be soon, in church or from your church office.

flame CYMFED 2027

Saturday 6 March · Wembley

FLAME is the largest Catholic Youth Congress in England and Wales held every other year at Wembley Arena. It is a day where 10,800 young people come together for music, inspiring Catholic artists and guest speakers (Bear Grylls was at 2025), testimony, prayer, worship and celebration of our faith. All the Bishops of England and Wales attend this high-energy faith-packed day.

Watch the trailer!



For Flame 2027 we have 100 places reserved for our deanery youth school year 9–13 alongside youth leaders in two privately-hired coaches to this already sold-out event.

Cost: £35, including ticket, diocesan T-shirt and return coach travel. Places are first come, first served — register your expression of interest: youth@eastbourne-stleonards.org.uk

*A day to encounter. A day to celebrate.
A day to remember.*

Becoming a Catholic

Infant Baptism — Ages 0–6

All our parishes offer preparation for the baptism of infants and young children. Please see your parish newsletter and/or website or speak to your priest for details. Preparation can begin before your child is born, allowing families to plan for baptism in the early months of their child's life.

Children — Ages 7–17

Children who have reached the age of reason and are not yet baptised or have been baptised in another Christian tradition and wish to become Catholic will need to follow individual preparation appropriate to

their age and understanding. If your child or young person wishes to explore and journey towards the Catholic faith, please speak to your parish priest.

For those in Years 3–8, this should be before the First Holy Communion programme deadlines; for Years 10–13, before the Confirmation programme deadlines. This will allow the priest to consider with you the most appropriate formation pathway, including preparation for Baptism and the other sacraments of Christian initiation.

RCIA – The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

The RCIA is the process by which adults are welcomed into the Catholic Church. It's for anyone who is:

- Not baptised, but interested in exploring the Catholic faith
- Baptised in another Christian tradition, and wishes to become Catholic
- Baptised Catholic, but never received First Communion or Confirmation

This journey is not a course or class in the usual sense — it's a time of discovery, prayer, and personal reflection. You'll have the chance to learn more about the Catholic faith, ask questions, and grow in relationship with God in a supportive, welcoming environment.

Many parents begin this journey because they want to understand their child's faith more deeply, or because they were never Confirmed and feel called to take the next step.

If you're curious, interested, or feel a gentle nudge to find out more, we warmly invite you to speak to your parish priest. There's no pressure — just a chance to explore what God might be saying to you at this moment in your life.

Our Deanery: A Community of Communities

We cover a large geographical area of East Sussex, from Eastbourne to Rye, consisting of fifteen churches, five schools, and around 3000 parishioners. We are one deanery but work in two centres (Hubs), the West Hub in Eastbourne and the East Hub in St Leonard's.

See our Deanery Website for details of all the churches and other information about the Parish:
www.eastbourne-stleonards.org.uk

Our Clergy

East Hub: Fr Max McKeown, Deacon Simon South (Rye); Fr Michael Muhia, Deacon Duncan Brown (Hastings); Fr Mícheál Beatty, Deacon Ian Moon (St Leonards); Fr Richard Blythen (Battle & Northiam); Fr Stephen O'Brien, Deacon Simon Kirkdale (Bexhill)

West Hub: Fr Kevin Dring, Fr Charles Ezejide (Eastbourne); Fr Neil Chatfield, Deacon Eugene Adams, Deacon Neil Taylor (Langney & Hampden Park); Fr Rory Kelly (Polegate & Hailsham)

Our Leadership Teams

Fr Kevin Dring is the Moderator of the Clergy Team (Team Leader) and in each Hub the clergy work closely with a representative group of lay people (Hub Pastoral Council) drawn from across the churches and schools. See the Parish Website for further details:
www.eastbourne-stleonards.org.uk

Our Parish Schools

We are blessed with five wonderful schools, four Primary and one Secondary:

Primary: Sacred Heart (Hastings), St Mary Star of the Sea (St Leonards), St Mary Magdalene (Bexhill), St Thomas a Becket (Eastbourne);

Secondary: St Richard's Catholic College (Bexhill)

Our Diocese

We are part of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Arundel & Brighton, founded in 1965, awaiting the installation of Bishop-Elect Stephen Wang.

We cover the counties of East and West Sussex and part of Surrey. Soon this extensive area will be served by just eleven large parishes based on deaneries like ours.

Our Diocese is part of the worldwide Catholic Church under the spiritual leadership of Pope Leo XIV.

Useful contacts

Deanery:

www.eastbourne-stleonards.org.uk

Diocese: www.abdiocese.org.uk

Catholic Church in England &

Wales: www.cbcew.org.uk

Vatican: www.vatican.va

East Hub Secretary: Liz Fitch
stleonards@abdiocese.org.uk
01424 602077

West Hub Secretary: Cheryl Wood
eastbourneolor@abdiocese.org.uk
01323 723222

Churches in our two Hubs

St Agnes: 10 Whitley Road, Eastbourne BN22 8NJ: 01323 723222

St Anthony of Padua: Watchbell St, Rye TN31 7HB: 01797 222173

Christ the King: 3 Princes Road, Langney BN23 6HT: 01323 760048

St George's: Eastbourne Road, Polegate BN26 5DF: 01323 841504

St Gregory's: Victoria Drive, Eastbourne BN20 8QY: 01323 723222

Holy Redeemer: 24 Upr Church Rd, St Leonards TN37 7AS: 01424 602077

St Joachim's: 106 Broderick Road, Hampden Park BN22 9NY: 01323 760048

Our Lady Immaculate & St Michael: 14 Mount St, Battle TN33 0EG 01424 773125

Our Lady of Ransom: 2 Grange Rd, Eastbourne BN21 4EU: 01323 723222

St Mary Star of the Sea: 1 High St, Hastings TN34 3EY: 01424 421263

St Martha's: 77 Cooden Sea Road, Little Common TN39 4SL: 01424 210263

St Mary Magdalene's: Sea Road, Bexhill-on-Sea TN40 1RH: 01424 210263

St Teresa of Lisieux: Horns Cross, Northiam TN31 6JQ: 01424 773125

St Thomas of Canterbury: 31c Magdalen Rd, St Leonards-on-Sea TN37 6ET: 01424 602077

St Wilfrid's: South Road, Hailsham BN27 3JG: 01323 841504

Church websites are linked on
www.eastbourne-stleonards.org.uk

All are welcome at any church!



THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ARUNDEL & BRIGHTON

The Arundel & Brighton Diocesan Trust is a Charity registered in England, number 252878

Each church has its own safeguarding representative. The diocesan team can be contacted on 01293 651148