

Notes from First Reconciliation/First Communion Meeting 2024



St. Joan of Arc Church
OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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*** We have general information and other helpful resources here, including videos on both Sacraments made for us by Fr. JM**

Overview of the meeting content:

- General information about the Sacraments
- Practical aspects of the Sacramental Celebrations/FAQ

What is in the packet?

- [Application for the Reception of First Communion](#) - Submitting this application affirms that you want your child to receive the Sacraments. This was distributed in hard copy at the meetings, and you can download from the link above or from our site.
 - Please submit this in hard copy format, and we have hard copies in the office if you would like one. If you need to email the application, please do so in PDF format only (**no .png or .jpg files please**) to rem@stjoans.org.
- **Sacrament Schedule for both First Reconciliation and First Communion**
 - Distributed at the meetings, and will be emailed directly to parents. *We do not post this on our site in order to protect privacy.*
- [Guide to First Reconciliation for Parents](#)
- [Basic Catholic Prayers for children to know - Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory](#)

First Reconciliation

- General Info:

- Reconciliation is often associated with Communion, but it is closer theologically to the Anointing of the Sick, because both are Sacraments of Healing
- First Reconciliation is sometimes called “First Penance” or “First Confession.”
Confession, Penance, and Reconciliation are all vital parts of the Sacrament, but we call

it “First Reconciliation” to emphasize the celebration of God’s love and mercy which we associate with reconciling with Him.

- Why do children receive the Sacrament in or around the age of 7/8?
 - The Church considers this age “the age of reason” - in other words, children at this age in general can discern between right and wrong.
 - Reconciliation also allows us to be in a state of grace for when we receive Communion, which they will do a couple of months later.
- **Main points in what we teach the children about Reconciliation:**
 - No matter what we do, God always loves us more than we can even imagine and there is nothing we can do that puts us beyond His love.
 - A healthy and appropriate understanding of what sin is, i.e. that it has to be a choice we made intentionally, not a mistake or accident
 - God is all goodness, and we were made in His own image, so we are made to be good too and Reconciliation helps us to do that with His grace
 - When we sin, we distance ourselves from our friendship with God (although He never stops loving us)
 - Reconciliation strengthens our friendship with God, helps us to be closer to Him, and gives us the grace we need to do better in the future
- **How we celebrate First Reconciliation**
 - Within the context of a liturgy, i.e., we have readings, music, Msgr. Rich or Fr. JM offers a homily, etc. This reflects the celebratory nature of the Sacrament.
 - Catechists and teachers are there to help usher and guide the children to the confession stations.
 - In addition to Msgr. Rich and Fr. JM, we have multiple priests attending to help (this helps us keep the liturgy to about an hour or sometimes a little less) - We all pray the Act of Contrition, which will be printed in our program, together before the children go to confession. Please note that it is still important that children know and memorize this prayer. You can find the version of the Act of Contrition that we teach the children on page 3 of our First Reconciliation guide for parents [at this link](#), also linked on our website..
 - If circumstances necessitate that your child is unable to attend as scheduled, we can easily reschedule for a regular Saturday confession time; if you need to reschedule, please contact the office at 856-983-7575 or rem@stjoans.org

First Communion

- The most important thing for children (and all Catholics!) to understand about the Eucharist is that when the priest says the special prayers of consecration, the host and the wine truly become the Body and Blood of Christ. Communion for us is not a sign or a symbol; it is the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.
 - This is one of the greatest miracles and deepest mysteries of our faith, which no human being can fully understand, so we do not expect the children to completely understand it!
 - A recent survey of Catholics showed that almost 70% thought or believed that the consecrated host and wine are symbols/signs, and only around 30%

understood the actual Catholic belief. This makes it even more vital that our next generation understands what we believe about the Eucharist.

- Since this is a difficult teaching for children to understand, we explain that all of the love that Jesus has for each of us is in the Eucharist.
- Since the Eucharist is so sacred, we also emphasize to the children the importance of treating the Host with care, reverence, and respect when we receive it. This means consuming the Host immediately after we receive it.

How do we help to prepare the children for the Sacraments at St. Joan of Arc?

- **Parochial School and Religious Education classes - our catechists and teachers do a lot to prepare the children throughout the year**
- **Retreats:**
 - First Reconciliation Retreat: Saturday, February 8th 9:30 am - 11:00 am.
 - First Communion Retreat: Saturday, March 22, 9:30 am - 11:00 am.
- Retreats are drop-off/pick-up, unless you are staying to volunteer.
- We will need volunteers for our retreat!. Volunteers are given information in advance about what they will be doing at the retreat. You can find the volunteer sign-ups [on our website](#).
- **Additional preparation opportunities:**
 - **Virtual “brush-up” sessions before both Sacraments**
 - Brief reviews of Reconciliation and Communion, where we go through the basics, including the practical steps
 - ALL children are invited to these virtual sessions and they are totally optional
 - Dates/times and links to be sent after the new year

How parents help to prepare their children for the Sacraments -

- Teaching the basic prayers, especially the Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be and the Act of Contrition (we reinforce them in class but assume that parents are working with children at home as well)
- Mass attendance - a vital aspect of our children’s Sacramental preparation and their general growth in our Catholic faith is fulfilled by participation in Mass and being part of the parish community. When we teach the children in the classroom, Mass attendance is assumed, so it’s also important to give the children a context for what they are learning.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **Q. Can we bring family to the First Reconciliation service?**
- A. Yes! Each child has to have at least one adult attend First Reconciliation, but we encourage and welcome you to bring immediate and extended family with you to the service.
- **Q: Will there be a livestream?**
- A: We do plan on continuing to livestream First Communion Masses. These streams will be via a private link, i.e. the Masses will not be streamed via the St.

Joan's Facebook or YouTube accounts. You will receive the link about a week or two prior to your child's Mass, which you can then forward on to family and friends. **Please note - due to the nature of Reconciliation as well as Diocesan guidelines, First Reconciliation services will **not** be streamed.

- Q: Can we take pictures/videos during First Communion Masses?

- A: No pictures or videos may be taken during the Masses. However, you are very welcome to take pictures before the Mass (as time allows) and/or after the Mass, in or outside the Church. Please note that pictures can be taken in front of, but not on, the altar, due to the sacred nature of this space.

We will also have designated people to take pictures during the Masses, and they will take a photo of each child as he/she receives. These photos will be uploaded to a private Snapfish account, and parents will receive the link of the album.

There are NO pictures or videos AT ALL during Reconciliation! We cannot livestream any type of service that includes confessions, so there is no livestream for this either. Pictures may be taken before the service, but no pictures may be taken in the church at any point from then on. (You are welcomed to take pictures outside after the service.)

- Q: Do children need to wear white for First Communion?

- A: Children do not need to wear white, and we do not really have a dress code as far as clothing color goes. Girls can wear any dress color they wish, and veils and flowers are optional. We ask that if you purchase gloves, that you keep them with you during the Mass to avoid fidgeting. Boys can wear any color suit, or a jacket and pants, any color. We do ask that boys wear a button down shirt and tie (again, any color). Shoes should be comfortable, but we ask that children do not wear sneakers.

- Q: What do children wear for First Reconciliation?

- A: The dress is not as formal as First Communion, but children should be dressed as they would for a special occasion of a sacred nature. Girls may wear a dress or blouse and skirt or sweater and slacks, and boys may wear a button down shirt and slacks or a sweater and slacks, just for some examples.

- Q: Will children be able to try the host before First Communion?

- A: Yes, we give them the chance to do this in the classroom at some point prior to their Mass. *If your child requires a low-gluten host, or if he or she has any other food-related issues, please let us know in advance so we can coordinate this.

- Q: We have a priest/deacon in the family who will be at the First Communion Mass and would like to serve. Can they do this?

- A: Yes! If this is the case, please let us know. Priests and deacons who serve Masses outside of their own assigned parishes must provide a letter of suitability for ministry from their own Diocese. (If you have a priest/deacon in the family and you mention this, they will know how to obtain it.)

- Q: Is there assigned seating for First Communion?

- A: Yes; we will assign each family a pew and will send pew assignments to you in advance. Pews are assigned randomly, and are intended to allow you to arrive to

the church with one less thing to worry about! Please note that per Msgr. Rich, our First Communicants are seated together at the front of the Church for the Masses. ****Important: Please note that pews are assigned one for each family, not for each child.**

- Q: Is there accommodation for special seating?

- A: Yes, it is important to us that all of our guests are comfortable when joining us, so if you have a friend or family member who would benefit from special seating, please let us know and we will be glad to help. We appreciate as much advance notice as possible for special seating.

- Q: How long are the services/Masses?

- A: First Reconciliation tends to run about 45 minutes to an hour, and First Communion tends to run about an hour. For First Reconciliation, we ask you to be at the church 15-30 minutes prior to the beginning of your child's service. For First Communion, we ask that you arrive 30 minutes prior to the beginning of the Mass.

- Q: Is it important that my child attends First Communion practice?

- A: Yes, this is very important. The practices allow children to run through the Mass, including the procession of the children which begins the Mass. We ask that you make every effort to have your child attend his or her practice as scheduled.

- Q: We have a scheduling issue with First Communion, can we change our Mass?

- A: Yes - If you need to do this, please contact the office as soon as possible. We do our best to accommodate requests, and it is much more likely we can grant the request when it is made early. March 15th is the deadline for making Mass scheduling requests, except in cases where there are serious extenuating/unforeseen circumstances which require a scheduling change.

Going forward -

Spring Virtual "Refresher" - At some point in late winter or early spring, we will have a virtual meeting where I'll go over reminders and answer any questions - scheduling and link for this meeting will be sent in early of 2025.