

September 14, 2017

Dear Parents:

Your child will soon begin preparing for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. To mark the beginning of this preparation—not only for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but also for First Communion in the spring—we ask your child to sign an Inscription Promise and have it witnessed by a parent. Then in a special presentation after the homily at the **10:30 AM Mass on Sunday, September 24, the children will be called forward to offer their Inscription Promises to Father and to the parish.** We hope that the children will find this to be a special beginning to a special year.

We will meet in the gym no later than 10:15 AM that morning to line up. Please bring the enclosed Inscription Promise, signed by your child and witnessed by you. We will have pews reserved for the children in church. Parents may sit anywhere they like.

Since parents are the first religious educators of their children, are instrumental in their moral development, and the first witnesses of their growth in faith, we will hold a parent class for parents whose first child is receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation on Sunday, October 15, from 1 to 3 PM in the St. Mary's School library.

Although this is a mandatory parent class for the Sacrament of Reconciliation if this is your first child, I am asking that all parents come to this meeting. Bishop Thomas has decreed that some changes be made in the preparation of the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) and since First Reconciliation comes before First Communion, the changes include preparation for First Reconciliation. Bishop has expressed several times that he has been disappointed in the level of preparation for the sacraments as he has witnessed throughout the Diocese. May I emphasize that Bishop has never said that he was disappointed in St. Mary's. In fact, his after-Confirmation letter to us was very complimentary. However, as a successor to the Apostles, with his main responsibility as teacher, and with those of us in parish work throughout the Diocese as his helpers, he feels we need to expect better in the way we prepare our children for reception of the sacraments, so they can better live the sacramental life we are all called to live and to enjoy.

First Reconciliation will take place in January. Father wishes to hear the confessions himself, without a visiting priest, and he would like to be able to spend as much time with each child as the child needs, so the class will be divided between two dates. First Reconciliation will be held in the church at 1 PM on the following Sundays:

January 21—Children with last names beginning A-J

January 28—Children with last names beginning K-Z

If there is a conflict on the date for your family, you may come the other Sunday. Other family members are invited to come also. This Reconciliation service will be an excellent opportunity for parents and other family members to go to confession. It is good for children to see that we, too, say, “I’m sorry.”

I know that many of you are wondering about First Communion. First Communion will be held on Sunday, April 29, at 1 PM. The mandatory parents’ class, for parents whose first child is preparing for the reception of the sacrament, will be held on Sunday, February 4, from 1-3 PM in the library. The First Communion Practice/Retreat for the children will be held on Thursday, April 26, from 8:15 AM to 2:30 PM.

More information about First Communion will be mailed to you in January; however, since some parents purchase First Communion clothing early in the year, the following are the clothing guidelines:

Girls: It has been customary for girls to wear white dresses and veils. Some girls have worn decorated headbands, flowers or simple bows in their hair. Since some dresses are purchased in bridal shops and are actually designed as miniature bride dresses rather than First Communion dresses, keep in mind that the dress should be modest. No sleeveless, spaghetti straps or halter neckline dress unless an appropriate shrug, bolero, sweater, cape or jacket is worn over the shoulders. The sweater or shrug, etc. remains over the shoulders for the group photo at the end of Mass. The dress should not be too short. If a long dress is chosen, the hem of the skirt must be at least a couple of inches from the top of the shoes. Remember that your child will be walking up and down steps. Can your child do this in a long dress in, most likely, new shoes with her hands folded? Is there even a chance that your child might step on the dress and stumble? Stepping on a dress, especially on a terrazzo floor, could be more than embarrassing—it could be dangerous.

Simple jewelry may be worn. Gloves can be worn for individual photos only—not during Mass or for the group photo. Tights, knee socks, or anklets with dress shoes are fine. No flip flops, not even “wedding” flip flops. Please make sure your child’s shoes fit properly so that she does not shuffle her feet to keep them on. If the shoes have a small French heel or, actually, any kind of heel other than

the kind your child wears every day, she should practice in them, walking on smooth surfaces, and ascending and descending steps. Prayer books, gloves, rosaries, or other items will not be carried by the children in procession; however, they may be held for individual photographs. It is best if parents hold these items for their child during Mass.

Boys: It has been customary for boys to wear a neat suit of any color, or dress slacks and blazer, white shirt, tie and appropriate dress shoes. Some people prefer bow ties, and these are fine also. If your son does not own a blazer, a nice dress shirt and tie is certainly all right. Prayer books, rosaries, or other items will not be carried by the children in procession; however, they may be held for individual photographs. It is best if parents hold these items for their child during Mass rather than to ask the child to keep them in a pocket. Children usually are excited to receive such a fine gift from special people in their lives, and the item rarely stays in the pocket; and so it becomes a distraction during Mass.

Once in a while, a family tells me that they have a used suit or dress to sell or to donate. If you have a need, please call me. Perhaps such an item will be available. We recently received, from a parishioner, several packages of invitations and thank you cards for First Communion and Confirmation. These packages are free, and are offered to the first, who ask. Stop by the Religious Education Office, and I will show you what is available.

Again, more information concerning First Communion will be mailed to you in January.

Letters for families looking forward to Confirmation in 2019 will be mailed soon.

In the meantime, we look forward to the Sacrament of Reconciliation—the Sacrament of assured forgiveness and the grace to avoid whatever we find to be a stumbling block in our lives.

Yours in Christ,

Cheryl L. Freewalt
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