November 7, 2017

Dear Parents:

 Due to Bishop Thomas’ Decree of December, 2016, and the expected Decree implementation over the next two years, there will be some changes to our preparation for Confirmation. Bishop’s Decree came from his personal meetings with Confirmation Candidates throughout the Diocese over the last two years, and he has great concerns that, in a number of cases, the sacramental preparation conducted by parishes and within families are not adequate for the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, and Reconciliation, too, since Reconciliation comes before First Communion.

As Bishop, it is his responsibility to care for the souls of all in his Diocese—Catholic and not Catholic. His main responsibilities are to teach, govern, and sanctify. He takes his responsibilities very seriously, and so he made the Decree.

I want to emphasize that, in Bishop’s letter to us following Confirmation last year, he was very complimentary of our Candidates (Confirmandi) and specifically said that he thought they were well prepared. However, as members of the Diocese, we are bound to the Decree as well as any other parish. The changes have not all been made and so some will be implemented at different times. Change is not always fun nor particularly easy; however, it is not always bad, either. In fact, it is our hope that these changes will only better the sacramental lives of our children.

# Dates of Classes and the Celebration of Confirmation

**Imminent Preparation (Focus Classes) and Retreat**

 We have not yet received the invitation to have Confirmation added to the Bishop’s calendar. We are hoping for spring of 2018. The invitation will come a little later in the year. However, we are going to begin our sacramental prep this year, and there are some dates we can give you.

 Dates for the block of focus classes for the imminent preparation for Confirmation and the retreat will be determined as soon as we know the date of Confirmation. The Confirmation textbooks will be given to the Candidates right before the focus classes begin.

 The retreat is and always has been a part of the preparation. As of now, a Candidate not be allowed to attend a retreat at another parish due to a conflict with the date of our retreat.

Excellent attendance at all SOR classes is expected throughout the year, every year, in addition to the Confirmation classes. Please check the SOR Handbook or the parish website at [www.stmarysvanwert.com](http://www.stmarysvanwert.com) to be reminded of this year’s dates. All letters concerning Confirmation, including this letter, will also be posted on the parish website.

# Confirmation Sponsor

 Enclosed with this letter is a Sponsor Form. Over the next several weeks, please consider who will be asked to be Sponsor. The following are the Canon Law requirements for a Sponsor.

 1. A Sponsor is a Roman Catholic who stands for the Catholic Church. A Sponsor is someone who walks in faith with us. In order to do this honestly, a Sponsor must be a *practicing* Catholic. That means someone who keeps the precepts of the Church, attends Mass regularly (not just here or there throughout the year), and who demonstrates the Gospel by the actions of his or her life.

 2. The Sponsor must be at least sixteen years of age and have already received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

 3. The Sponsor must not be laboring under a penalty of Church law (example: married outside the Church).

 4. The Sponsor must not be the father or the mother of the one to be confirmed.

 According to diocesan policy, a Candidate has only one Sponsor for Confirmation. It is desirable that one of the Catholic Sponsors at the time of Baptism also be a Sponsor for Confirmation. Since that is not always possible, another person may be asked to act as Sponsor for Confirmation. A Sponsor need not be the same gender as the Candidate. A Sponsor’s availability to their Candidate is an important consideration since the Candidate is expected to meet with their Sponsor at least once a month during the eighth grade year. Questions for reflection and discussion between the Candidate and the Sponsor will be given to the Candidates and Sponsors next fall.

 Although a non-Catholic may be a Christian Witness along with a Catholic Sponsor for Baptism (with both, the Sponsor and Christian Witness, affectionately called, “godparents”), the Sponsor for Confirmation must be a Catholic. This is different from a wedding at which the Best Man and Maid of Honor act as witnesses—not Sponsors—and therefore, need not be Catholic.

If the Sponsor is not a parishioner of St. Mary’s, Van Wert, the priest of the home parish of the Sponsor must sign the Sponsor form. ***The enclosed Sponsor form should be completed and returned by the first SOR class of the New Year—January 3. The form is completed even if the Sponsor is a member of St. Mary’s, Van Wert.***

# Parents and Sponsors Meeting

 A Parents and Sponsors meeting will be held on Sunday afternoon, ***March 4, 2017, from 1-3:30 PM***  ***in the St. Mary’s School library.*** ***This meeting is mandatory for all parents whose first child will be receiving the sacrament. Sponsors are to attend if at all possible.***

**Inscription Promise Sunday**

 The Wednesday following the Parents and Sponsors meeting, March 7, the Candidates will have their first class. They will receive their Confirmation packets at that time. The packet has questions, a list of websites for saint name research, and more. As mentioned earlier, The Candidate/Sponsor book will be given in the fall and the Confirmation textbook will be given just before the imminent preparation classes begin.

 One of the forms they will receive in their packet is an Inscription Promise. Inscription Promise Sunday will be held ***Sunday*, *March 11, during the 10:30 AM Mass.*** This is an opportunity to bring the new Candidates before the Church as they commit to their best efforts in the next several months and to ask for the parish’s supportive prayers. Please mark the date and time on your calendar. ***We will*** ***meet in the gym no later than 10:15 AM*** that day and will attend Mass together as a group.

**Works of Mercy**

 Rather than the one service project over a period of 12 weeks, Bishop Thomas prefers 14 Works of Mercy covering the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy. More will be explained at the Parents and Sponsors class.

**Questions**

 It is expected that Candidates have adequate knowledge of the faith they profess. A total of 50 questions, covering very basic beliefs, will be given to the Candidates. These questions will be broken down into segments of seven or eight. Although Candidates can begin their written answers over the summer, a date will be assigned to each segment of seven or eight questions with the answers turned in on the assigned dates during the eighth grade year. These questions are certainly not the extent of knowledge a Christian should have, but they are representative. If your child is unsure of the answer to a question, encourage him or her to look in the index and glossary of their SOR textbook, the Bible, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, etc.. A few questions come from Scripture or even from the front of the parish Sunday bulletin. These questions may be worked on by Candidates and Sponsors together. Please do not write a pages-long answer for one question. Precise, concise, and succinct is fine. However, every answer is read, so parents are asked to check their child’s answers to be sure they are accurate and that they make sense. I have had to return papers to Candidates from time to time and the Candidates and their parents have not been happy. However, this is not the time to give a very poor or incorrect answer, especially since these questions have all been covered in their years of SOR.

**Confirmation Name**

 The Candidates will be asked to choose a Confirmation name. A canonized saint’s name is expected. It is preferable that one of the saint names given at the time of Baptism be used. However, a Candidate may choose another saint name. The name need not be the same gender as the Candidate.

 The Candidate is asked to write a one-page essay on the saint they choose as their patron. The essay should tell something of the life of the saint and also why the name was chosen. What qualities and attributes did the saint possess that the Candidate would like to emulate?

**Conferences (Interviews)**

Conferences with the pastor or his delegate and the Candidates will take place twice in the eighth grade year. The manner for conducting the conferences nor the dates have been determined.

**Attire for Confirmation**

I know how early in the year some families shop for special occasion clothing, and there are always Candidates, who vocalize their disappointment with the manner of dress expected for Confirmation because they had purchased something else. In some previous years, we have had Sponsors wear shorts and flip flops, so these guidelines apply to Sponsors, too. This is a special occasion, and the attire chosen should reflect it. These guidelines will be given now and given again next school year.

***Those to be confirmed and their sponsors are to be appropriately dressed for the occasion of Confirmation.*** The U.S. Bishops state that “as Christians we should dress in a modest manner, wearing clothes that reflect our reverence for God and that manifest our respect for the dignity of the liturgy and for one another” (*Happy Are Those Who Are Called to His Supper*, page 15).

 Jeans, shorts, athletic shoes, spiked-heeled shoes and flip-flops—even wedding flip-flops--are not appropriate. Boys should wear dress slacks, collared shirt and tie. Jackets are not required but are certainly appropriate. Girls should wear modest dresses or skirts and blouses. There should be no plunging necklines, too-short skirts, prom or nightclub dresses. No bare midriffs or bare shoulders. If a girl wears a sleeveless, strapless, or ‘spaghetti strap” dress, then she should wear a sweater, bolero, shrug, etc., as well.

# Fees

 Due to the added cost of the Confirmation program materials, an additional $10 is requested of each Candidate. You paid this extra $10 at the time of SOR registration this year. This does not cover the total expense of materials, but it does help, and we thank you.

 Don’t forget about the return of the Sponsor Form by January 3 and the Parents and Sponsors class on March 4.

 Yours in Christ,

 Cheryl L. Freewalt

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