

January 27, 2017

Dear Parents:

In a few months, we will be celebrating First Communion. This event is one of happiness, not only for your child and for you as parents, but also for our whole parish community, which the Eucharist unites in the bond of Jesus' self-giving love.

All the dates of events and some of the other information found in this letter were given to you in the September letter. This letter can also be found on the new St. Mary's website: www.stmarysvanwert.com. Please go to *Religious Education* and then to *Sacramental Preparation Parent Letters*.

First Communion Date

First Communion will be celebrated at 1 PM on Sunday, April 30, 2017.

Parents' Class

The fundamental influence of parents in the total Christian formation of their children is recognized by the bishops of the world and by religious educators. In keeping with diocesan and parish guidelines, there will be a **class for parents on Sunday, February 12, from 1-3 PM in the school library. All parents are invited; however, those parents whose first child is receiving the sacrament are required to attend. I am not planning to hold a make-up class on another date, so please come on February 12.**

Practice/Retreat

The children's Practice/Retreat is scheduled for Thursday, April 27, from 8:15 AM to 2:30 PM. It is not necessary that parents attend the Practice/Retreat although parents may come for the day if they wish. Please call me first. There may be some requirements to fulfill through the diocesan program, VIRTUS, for adults working with children.

Public School Children and the Practice/Retreat

Attendance at the Practice/Retreat is expected. Parents of a public school child, will need to make arrangements to bring their child **to the gym at St. Mary's by 8:15 AM. Dismissal will be at 2:30 P.M.** The principals of the various schools have been notified about this First Communion Practice/Retreat. **A permission slip from you to your child's school is necessary by April 26, to give your child an excused absence for the day of April 27.** The excused absence is still counted as an absence; however, it is accepted as an absence for a good reason.

Check with your child's school to determine how bus transportation to St. Mary's School is made possible in your area. **If you want your child to ride a school bus to and from St. Mary's School, you**

must make arrangements by phone and by letter to your child's school by April 26. I am not able nor am I authorized to arrange bus transportation, so please allow yourself time to make these arrangements.

On the morning of April 27, please let us know in writing how your child is getting home. Are you parking in the Jennings Road parking lot and picking your child up from the gym? Is your child being picked up from the gym by someone else? Are you using the drive-up at the bell tower? Is your child riding a bus? If so, which school and bus number?

Your child may pack a lunch or order a hot lunch through the cafeteria. The cost of the hot lunch is \$2.60. Closer to the date of the Practice/Retreat, I will give you the menu for the day. There is no plan in place to provide lunch for children, who do not have money or have not packed. Since St. Mary's School cafeteria operates under the supervision of the State of Ohio, charges are not allowed; and the cafeteria cannot accept the free or reduced lunch arrangements provided to some children. That program is arranged for the child through the child's own school. Be assured, however, that no child will go hungry if a lunch is truly forgotten.

First Communion Attire

Church supply companies sometimes send us catalogs or flyers to send home to parents. These catalogs and flyers have First Communion apparel as well as gifts. We will send home whatever we receive. Most companies would prefer that you check out their web sites. If you wish to place orders, may I suggest that you do so early. Be sure to stop by Laudick's Jewelry. They have always carried lovely gifts. The Bridge has some traditional First Communion gift items. All Saints Religious Goods Store at 8808 Coldwater Road in Ft. Wayne has a large variety of First Communion apparel and gifts. They have dresses, veils, ties, etc. available now. Major retailers such as JC Penneys, Macy's, etc. also have First Communion apparel.

Here is the clothing guide as given in the September letter:

Girls: It has been customary for girls to wear white dresses and veils. Some girls have worn a decorated headband, flowers or a simple bow in their hair rather than a veil. 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, 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 the steps to the altar. Can your child do this in a long dress 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 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 have to 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 climbing and descending steps. Prayer books, gloves, rosaries, or other items will not be carried by the children in procession; however, they may be held by parents during Mass for the individual photographs.

Boys: Boys usually 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 by the parents for individual photographs after Mass. Please do not ask your child to keep these in a pocket. Children become excited about the special gifts loved ones have given them. The items rarely stay in the pocket and become a distraction during Mass.

Although I do not know of any item at this time, once in a while, a family will tell 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.

Banners

As part of the preparation for First Communion, you are invited, as a family, to make a banner, which will be hung in church for the First Communion Mass. The banner should be a reflection of the Sacrament of Eucharist. The material may be felt, burlap, satin, or any other suitable fabric; and it may be embellished as you desire. **Please, keep the banner to the dimensions as described on the diagram**, which has been enclosed with this letter. Another diagram can be found at www.stmarysvanwert.com with the Sacramental Preparation Parent Letters.

The banner will be placed in a constructed display along the sides of the church. You may take the banner home with you after the First Communion Mass so that it can be a part of your home celebration.

Please **do not put the banner on a rod or otherwise sew the top closed**. Velcro is used to enclose the top. **The Velcro should be the plain kind with no adhesive. Hand stitch through** rather than simply using the adhesive Velcro. The adhesive makes it very difficult to sew by hand and impossible to sew by machine without gumming up the needle. Do not rely on adhesive Velcro. Although the glue seems really sticky, too often the glue is not sufficient to hold the weight of the banner and we discover that the banner must be pinned—sometimes at the last minute. Several years ago, there were two banners, which had fallen into the aisle mere seconds before the children were to process down that very aisle before Mass. How disappointing, for the children whose banners fell.

Please **attach your child's name** to the back of the banner to help us return a banner to any child who might forget to take it home after Mass. Your child's name should be added in a way that does not show through to the front. Be especially careful in the use of markers.

The banner should be brought to School or to SOR by April 26. We would like to have the banners in place for the Practice/Retreat for all the children to enjoy.

Whether your child and your child's family wish to make one banner for the children in the family to hand down or your family wishes to make a banner for each child so each has his or her own, this banner is meant to be an opportunity for your child and family to express the sacredness and joy of this occasion. Please, it is not necessary nor desirable to borrow a banner from another family.

Seating for First Communion

The First Holy Communion class will enter the church in procession with reserved seating for them in the front pews on each side of the center aisle. The children will be seated according to the particular reading/gift bearer part for which they are responsible.

The line-up for the procession on First Communion Day will take place in the gym. Children should be in the gym ready to go at 12:45 PM. So all restroom visits and hair and tie adjustments should be made by then. If your child is not in the gym and ready to go at 12:45, your child's particular part may be given to another child.

There will be no reserved seating for parents. Parents may sit in any section in the church on a first come, first served basis. This will enable you to be with other members of your family. Only those who videotape the Mass should sit in the choir loft.

Photography and Videography

Mr. Doug Heckler is our photographer. I hope you are familiar with his work. He does such a lovely job. Your child will receive a photo envelope at the Practice/Retreat. At this time, I do not know all the possible individual photos. These will be listed with the envelope. However, a group photo will be taken immediately after the Mass. The children will stand on the steps in front of the altar, so please do not leave your pews after Mass until the children have taken their places for the photo. All the children are part of the group photo, whether you wish to purchase the photo or not. Individual photos will be taken, only if indicated on the order form and envelope. On the order form, please list the following: St. Mary's First Communion, child's name, parent's name, address, and telephone number. These envelopes should be turned in as your child comes to the gym for our gathering and line-up before Mass. Photos will be mailed to your home.

You will have the opportunity to take photos on your own, so we ask that you please be kind to our photographer and allow him to set up the group so that the best photo can be taken and to allow him to get the best first shots. We try to line up the children at the Practice/Retreat so everyone can be seen easily, but sometimes adjustments need to be made that day.

Flash photos are not allowed during Mass. Please, do not stand in the aisles for photo taking or at any place on the altar platform or steps, nor in the immediate area around the steps. A couple of instances in previous years have brought up the question as to whether or not individuals should be allowed to take photographs during Mass at all. Some dioceses and individual parishes have adopted the policy of no photographs at all during Mass. I would like to see the opportunity to take photographs continue, but the courtesy and respect of everyone will determine what happens in the future.

We will not have a professional videographer. You are welcome to videotape the Mass—no lights. Video cameras on stands must be set up in the choir loft. Only the persons actually videotaping should be in the choir loft. Other family members should sit in the main body of the church. This will help reduce unnecessary noise that can spoil the recording. Anyone who sets up video equipment any place other than in the choir loft will be asked to remove his or her equipment.

Please keep this letter handy and please share the information about the recessional, photography and videography with family and friends, who will be attending. If there are any questions, please call the Religious Education Office at 419-238-3079.

Yours in Christ,

Cheryl L. Freewalt
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