



CATHOLIC PARISH  
— Elm Grove —

**2023 - 2024**

# **First Reconciliation and First Communion Preparation Handbook**

<i>Event</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Location</i>
<i>1<sup>st</sup> Reconciliation Rehearsal</i>	Tuesday	January 16	6:15 - 7:30PM	Church
<i>1<sup>st</sup> Reconciliation</i>	Saturday	January 20	10 - 11AM	Church
<i>Bread of Life Day Retreat</i>	Saturday	April 20	10 - 11:30AM	Church
<i>1<sup>st</sup> Eucharist Rehearsal</i>	Tuesday	April 30	6:15 - 7:30PM	Church
<i>1<sup>st</sup> Eucharist</i>	Sunday	May 7	9 & 10:30 AM	Church

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## I. General Information for Parents

Your child's second grade year is an opportunity for parents to reaffirm their commitment to the Catholic faith and to become refreshed and renewed in their faith life. This renewed commitment involves developing genuine desire to participate in the Eucharist and the sacramental life of the Church as well as a commitment to uphold the **Precepts of the Church**.

1. To attend Mass and rest from servile labor on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation
2. To receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a year, especially if aware of committing a mortal sin.
3. To receive Holy Communion at least once a year, between the First Sunday of Lent and Trinity Sunday.
4. To observe the fast and abstinence days established by the Church.
5. To contribute to the material support of the Church

## II. About the Sacrament of Reconciliation

**From the Catechism of the Catholic Church #1486-1498**

To the eyes of faith, **there is no evil worse than sin**, which wounds God's honor and love. The forgiveness of sins is conferred by the Sacrament of conversion, confession, penance, or reconciliation.

The penitent (the one confessing) performs three actions: repents of sins with contrition (feels sorrow for having done wrong and resolves not to commit those sins again), confesses sins to the priest, and intends to make reparation. The priest performs three actions: offers counsel, proposes a penance (actions or prayers to demonstrate the penitent's repentance), and gives absolution (forgives the sins in the name of the Holy Trinity). Each time we are given absolution, we receive grace (gift to transform us to be more of Christ). We need to remind our children that like all the Sacraments, Reconciliation was given to us by Christ because we need grace to become more like Christ.

We should try to examine our conscience at the end of each day and go to Reconciliation as often as we can. Going to seek forgiveness often helps us not to forget something we need to say I'm sorry for. If you do forget a sin, you do not need to rush back to confession right away, unless it is a mortal sin.

We are all imperfect and fall into sin. It doesn't mean we are bad. We are children of God and are made in His image and likeness. It means we need Jesus to help us become less imperfect and more like Him.

We are chosen by Christ to be His followers. If we decide to walk away from Jesus, He will not stop us. He is sad when we walk away from Him. He is always ready to welcome us back no matter how long or far we were away from Him. ALWAYS!

Reconciliation is a healing Sacrament. It goes deeper than any physical healing. Reconciliation heals our souls, our very spirit in which makes us one with God.

God the Father sent us Jesus, His only son, to die for our sins and rise from the dead to open the gates of heaven. Through His death and resurrection, we are given hope that eternal life with God is possible. The gates of heaven will always be open to those who follow the way of Jesus. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Sin takes us off the path to heaven and leads us away from God. We must be sorry for the sins we commit and seek His divine grace to get back on the right path. Jesus freely gives us His grace time and time again, no matter how many times we sin.

We run back into God's arms through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. (This is a good visual to help children understand that saying "I'm sorry" to God and seeking His forgiveness in the confessional is a wonderful gift, a sacred or sacramental gift from God!)

All **grave (mortal)** sins must be confessed. **Lesser (venial)** sins do not need to be confessed, but it is recommended to do so anyway.

Sacramental confession has the following effects:

- Restores the penitent to God
- Reconciles the penitent to the Church

- Remits the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins, (at least partially remits the temporal punishment resulting from sin (also occurs through purgatory))
- Provides peace of mind and clear conscience
- Increases spiritual strength for Christian living

Priests take very seriously the seal of the confessional. Canon law strictly prohibits any priest from discussing anything uttered during sacramental confession, and many priests throughout the world have chosen to be imprisoned or killed rather than violate the sacred seal.

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### **III. Child's Preparation for Reconciliation**

#### **A. Classroom Preparation**

All Second Grade Students discuss Reconciliation in their classroom sessions, which typically involve mock confession. The parish priest will visit the classrooms as well to discuss Reconciliation and to assure students that priests cannot discuss what anyone confesses.

If a child did not receive formal Catholic Formation in school or Catholic Formation classes prior to the second grade, parents are to contact the parish Child Minister to discuss next steps.

#### **B. Preparation at Home**

Take some time to talk with your child about Reconciliation. It is very common for children to be nervous or scared before First Reconciliation, but they typically feel extremely peaceful and relieved afterward. Share your own experiences of Reconciliation: How did you feel the first time you went? How do you feel when you go now?

**Word of Life by Augustine Institute:** teaching materials are available for *Catholic Formation classes* through St. Mary's Visitation Parish. St. Mary's Visitation School utilizes *God's Love* by Loyola Press.

## **Familiarity with the Rite of Penance**

Students should be familiar with the Rite of Penance in order to feel more comfortable during their first confession.

### **Rite of Penance**

*Penitent:* Bless me Father, for I have sinned. This is my first Reconciliation. (In future confessions, say, "It has been [approximate length of time] since my last confession.)

*The penitent now lists the sins that s/he can remember, especially, all mortal sins.*

*The priest will counsel you and perhaps give you advise for how to avoid these sins in the future. He will give you a penance, which will be either an action or some prayers. Ordinarily, he will then ask you to make an Act of Contrition. During first Reconciliation, we will pray this prayer (the Prayer of Sorrow) together.*

*Penitent:* (Pray the Act of Contrition/Prayer of Sorrow) O my God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good. I have sinned against you, whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with the help of your grace, to sin no more and to avoid whatever leads to sin Amen.

*The priest then and pronounces the Word of Absolution, and the penitent makes the Sign of the Cross.*

Thank the priest, and go do your penance.

## IV. Rehearsal for First Reconciliation

**Date, Time Location:** *TBD by catechist/teacher*

**Arrival:** *A parent should accompany their son/daughter*

**Procedure:** Parents will be given a Reconciliation guide to rehearse the process of preparing, confessing and saying penance. Each parent and child can rehearse the Rite of Reconciliation in a pew.

## V. Celebration of First Reconciliation

**Date, Time Location:** Saturday, January 20, 2023 at 10:00 a.m. in the church

**Arrival:** Please arrive and plan to be in your seats by 9:50 a.m. so that we can begin on time. There are no assigned seats.

**Dress Code:** Dress for First Reconciliation is dress-casual (no jeans). Please dispose of gum before entering the church.

**Procedure:** After the opening of the prayer service, the priest will instruct the children as to where the priests are waiting to hear their First Reconciliation. The children will be asked to change lines only if there is an extraordinarily long line for one or two priests. When the child returns from receiving absolution, parents are asked to hug their son/daughter and remind him/her to say the assigned penance. Please leave the church quietly after the penance has been said. It is important that we are reverend and respectful to others in church preparing for, receiving or praying after Reconciliation.

## VI. About the Eucharist

### From the Catechism of the Catholic Church #1407-1419

The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life; it is Jesus himself. In this sacrament, we become what we receive: the Body of Christ. At Mass, Jesus acts through the ministry of the priest to offer the sacrifice of our salvation.

“Transubstantiation” is a theological term that describes the complete change of the substance (what something is in its deepest being) of bread into the substance of Jesus Christ. Because of this change in substance, it is proper to offer the Eucharist worship.

The effects of receiving the Eucharist are:

- An increased and deepened union with Jesus
- Forgiveness of venial (lesser sins)
- A strengthening to avoid future moral (serious sins)
- A reinforced union with all other believers, who are the Church
- A preparation of the body for bodily resurrection

The church encourages the faithful to receive the Eucharist every time they attend Mass. Anyone aware of having committed mortal sin must go to **sacramental confession before receiving Jesus** in the Eucharist.

Out of respect and reverence for Jesus in the Eucharist, there are several small ways to prepare for Mass. The Church proscribes a **one-hour fast** (this includes gum and coffee) before receiving the Eucharist as a way to remind ourselves that we are about to receive the Son of God. Another way to keep in mind that importance of the Eucharist is to wear respectful clothing to church. Dress appropriately for the King of Kings!



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## VII. Child's Preparation for First Communion

### A. Formal Preparation

All Second Grade students will discuss the meaning of the Eucharist in their classroom sessions. They will also practice how to receive the Eucharist.

#### **First Communion Retreat – Bread of Life Day**

Bread of Life Day will be held on Saturday, April 20, 10:00 AM-11:30AM in the church. Each child is to be accompanied by a parent to prayerfully prepare for First Holy Communion.

#### **First Communion Rehearsal**

**Date, Time Location:** Tuesday, April 30, 6:15PM in church

**Arrival:** *A parent should accompany their son/daughter and arrive by 6:10PM*

### B. Preparation at Home

Take time to talk with your child about the Eucharist. Ask what s/he is learning in the classroom. Ask what s/he thinks about it. Share your own memories of your First Communion.

**Word of Life by Augustine Institute:** teaching materials are available to you online and in books for Catholic Formation classes through St. Mary's Visitation Parish. St. Mary's Visitation School utilizes **God's Love** by Loyola Press.

It is helpful to prepare for Mass by talking about the gospel coming up on Sunday. Perhaps you can tie the message from Jesus into a family event to make the gospel story come alive. It will mean so much more to your child when they hear it again on Sunday.

Take your family to Mass every Sunday and talk about it afterward. Did you look at Jesus when He was raised from the altar and the bells rang? Did you tell Jesus how much you love Him and want to be close to Him always?

## **Communion Rite**

The Communion Rite follows the Eucharistic Prayer, leading the faithful to the Eucharistic table.

The **rite begins with the Lord's Prayer**. Jesus taught this prayer to his disciples when they asked how to pray (cf. Mt 6:9-13, Lk 11:2-4). In this prayer, the people join their voices to pray for the coming of God's kingdom and to ask God to provide for our needs, forgive our sins, and bring us to the joy of heaven.

**The Rite of Peace follows**. The celebrant prays that the peace of Christ will fill our hearts, our families, our Church, our communities, and our world. As a sign of hope, the people extend to those around them a sign of peace.

In the **Fraction Rite**, the celebrant breaks the consecrated bread as the people sing the *Agnus Dei* or "Lamb of God." John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). The action of breaking the bread recalls the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper, when he broke the bread before giving it to his disciples. One of the earliest names for the Eucharistic celebration is the breaking of the bread (Lk 24:35; Acts 2:42, 46).

Before receiving Holy Communion, the celebrant and assembly acknowledge their unworthiness to receive so great a gift. The celebrant receives Holy Communion first and then the people come forward.

Those who receive Holy Communion should be prepared to receive so great a gift. They should fast (except for medicines) for at least one hour before receiving the Eucharist and should not be conscious of having committed serious sin.

Because sharing at the Eucharistic Table is a sign of unity in the Body of Christ, **only those in communion with the Catholic Church may receive Holy**

**Communion.** To invite others present to receive Holy Communion implies a unity which does not exist. Those who do not receive Holy Communion still participate in this rite by praying for unity with Christ and with each other.

The people approach the altar and, bowing with reverence, receive Holy Communion. People may receive the Body of Christ either on the tongue or in the hand. The priest or other minister offers the Eucharist to each person saying, "The Body of Christ." The person receiving responds by saying, "Amen," a Hebrew word meaning, "So be it" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2856).

As the people receive Holy Communion, the communion chant/song is sung. The unity of voices echoes the unity the Eucharist brings. All may spend some time in silent prayer of thanksgiving as well.

The **Communion Rite ends with the Prayer after Communion** which asks that the benefits of the Eucharist will remain active in our daily lives.

## **VIII. First Communion Mass**

**2023** First Communion Mass is celebrated on Sunday, May 5<sup>th</sup> at 9:00AM or 10:30 AM in church. Children are assigned either Mass or one pew per family by lottery.

### **Arrival:**

Children coming for the 9:00 AM Mass should arrive by 8:40AM.

\*Children coming for the 10:30 Mass should arrive by 10:00\* AM.

**NOTE:** \*We are taking a group photo between the two Masses and need time to get the children lined up.

Each family is assigned one reserved pew. The family last name will be labeled on the outside ends of the pew.

Open seating is available in the church. Handicapped seating is available.

**Procedure:** Once all the children have received Jesus for the first time, the families will then come forward. All children will receive the consecrated host. They can choose to select on the tongue or in the hand.

## **Professional Photographs - School Pics Photography**

As part of the Sacrament fee you paid upon registering your child for First Eucharist, you will receive a photograph of him/her receiving Jesus for the first time! School Pics does an amazing job in snapping the photo at the right time as Father Peter is presenting Jesus to each child without taking away from this important time with Jesus.

We plan to take a group photo immediately after the 9:00 AM Mass. The children will remain seated in their pews after Mass and the photographer will bring each child forward to be placed for the group photo on the altar stairs.

Please, no one, other than the professional photographer, is to take photographs during Mass at any time.

## **Seating**

Seating is assigned by lottery.

Reserved handicapped seating is available by request.

Please call the parish office (262-782-4575) to request a handicap reservation for a family member if needed. It is important to know ahead of time how many will be in wheelchairs or sitting in a pew.

## **Dress Code:**

Girls:

- White or off-white/ivory
- Sleeveless dresses are ok; spaghetti straps, tank-top styles, or strapless tops will need to be covered with a sweater during Mass
- Socks or stockings should be worn with appropriate dress shoes
- No purses or gloves during Mass
- Veils or wreaths are acceptable; no hats, please

- Veils and/or ribbons from the headpiece should be manageable for your daughter, fingertip or shorter
- Warning: Sprayed in sparkles can flake into a girl's eyes and cause distress and tears
- Children should not carry anything (prayer books, rosary, ...) into church

## Boys

- A suit or suit coat is not required
- White or off-white/ivory dress shirt
- Dark color dress pants
- White, off-white/ivory or dark color tie
- Socks must be worn with appropriate dark color dress shoes
- It gets warm in church when it is filled with people. It is ok not to wear a t-shirt under the dress shirt and to take off a suit coat if your child becomes too warm
- Children should not carry anything into church

## The Symbolism of First Communion Attire

The traditional color of First Communion attire, gowns and shirts, is white. For girls, First Communion is one of the three major events that call for a white gown. All three are sacraments, holy events, in the Catholic Church: her baptismal day, her First Communion day and if she is called to marriage, her wedding day. So why do they all involve a white gown?

The baptismal gown that is given to boys and girls symbolizes purity, joy, and new life. The white color symbolizes that the newly baptized has put on Christ, and it also recalls John's vision in the Book of Revelation: "they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:13). The white also symbolizes one of the effects of Baptism, the washing away of all sins, including original sin. As God says through the Prophet Isaiah, "Though you sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; though they be crimson red, they may become white as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). So the color of the gown reminds us of God's incredible mercy and of the purity of the soul that result from Baptism.

First Communion gowns and shirts are white on purpose; they are meant to recall all the symbolism of the baptismal gown. First Communion is the second of three

Sacraments of Initiation, and so the links with Baptism are very important (white wedding gowns also are intended to recall the symbolism of both Baptism and First Communion). It is often pointed out that white First Communion attire also reminds us of the whiteness of the Eucharistic host that the children will receive.

In Catholic Liturgy, white is a color of celebration and triumph worn during the Christmas and Easter Seasons as well as during other special feast days. So the white attire finally symbolizes the excitement and celebration that should rightfully accompany a child's First Communion.

With all these elements in mind, you can see how deeply symbolic First Communion attire is. You are not just dressing up your child for a major life event; you are wrapping them up in deep symbolism to present them to their Creator for union with Him and for further initiation into His Church. The gown and shirt are holy symbolic objects and should modestly reflect their lofty purpose.

### **Other Notes Regarding First Communion**

- Children preparing for the Sacrament of First Holy Communion must be registered (form, copy of baptismal certificate and payment). This includes children who attend school at home or in a public or private school.
- If your child was not baptized at St. Mary's Visitation Parish, a copy of the baptismal record needs to be faxed (262-782-0677) or sent (St. Mary's Visitation Catholic Parish, 1260 Church Street, Elm Grove, WI 53122) to the parish office.
- Please take your child to Mass every Sunday, pray every day, (before meals, when you hear an ambulance or fire truck pass, when you are riding or walking past a Catholic church, when visiting the Adoration Chapel, at night before going to bed, ...) and take him/her to Reconciliation as often as possible.
- Sometime during the week prior to their First Eucharist, please take your child to Reconciliation. Remind your child to examine his/her conscience before going into the confessional.
- Please make sure your child has a good night's sleep the evening before First Communion and has a healthy meal no later than one hour prior to Mass.
- No gum chewing or candy in church-children and adults
- Remember to take home your child's First Communion Certificate and gift from St. Mary's Visitation Parish on the tables in the parish atrium after First Communion Mass is completed.

## **IX. May Crowning**

We welcome our First Communion class to wear their First Communion attire to the St. Mary's Visitation Parish May Crowning. We crown our Blessed Mother queen of heaven and earth after First Communion and close to Mother's Day. Please watch the parish bulletin for the date and time. Christian Women sponsor this event each year.

## **X. Sacrament Gift Stores- Please call before going to these stores in case store hours have changed.**

### **T. H. Stemper Co.**

1125 East Potter Avenue

Milwaukee, WI 53207

414-744-3610

1-800-686-3610

Monday-Friday 9am -5pm

Saturday 9am-1pm      Memorial Day to Labor Day

Saturday 9am-3pm      Labor Day to Memorial Day

Sundays – Closed

### **Catholic Books & Gifts**

7346 West Greenfield Avenue

Milwaukee, WI 53214

414-258-2665

Monday-Friday: 9:30am-5:30pm

Saturday: 9:30am-4:00pm

## **XI. Resources**

### **Text Book & Online Studies**

*Word of Life 2nd Grade* - The Augustine Institute

<https://thesignsofgrace.org/>

*God's Gift* - Loyola Press

<https://www.loyolapress.com/faith-formation/sacramental-preparation/gods-gift-2016>

**Examination of Conscience**

[An Examination of Conscience for Children Using the Beatitudes \(Matthew 5: 3–11\)](#)

Understanding the “Liturgy of the Eucharist”

<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/order-of-mass/liturgy-of-the-eucharist/index.cfm>

Special First Communion Novena with the Family

First Communion Novena

[http://letthelittleonescome.typepad.com/let\\_the\\_little\\_ones\\_come/2012/05/welcome-jesus-a-novena-to-prepare-for-first-holy-communion.html](http://letthelittleonescome.typepad.com/let_the_little_ones_come/2012/05/welcome-jesus-a-novena-to-prepare-for-first-holy-communion.html)