

Visitation of Our Lady Parish



First Reconciliation and First Communion 2024 Preparation Handbook

First Reconciliation, Wednesday, January 27th, at 7:00 pm

Communion Practice, Wednesday, May 1st, at 6:30 pm

First Holy Communion, Saturday, May 4th, at 11:00 am

Crowning of Mary, Sunday, May 5th, at 12:00 pm Mass

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I. General Information for Parents

Your child's second grade year or sacramental year is an opportunity for parents to reaffirm their commitment to the Catholic faith and to become refreshed and renewed in their own faith life. This renewed commitment involves developing a 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 labor on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.
2. Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a year, especially if aware of committing a mortal sin.
3. Receive Holy Communion at least during the Easter Season.
4. To observe the fast days (Ash Wednesday and Good Friday – only one full meal for Catholics 18 through 59) and abstinence days (no meat eaten on Ash Wednesday and all of the Fridays during Lent for all Catholics 14 and older) established by the Church.
5. To help provide for the needs of the Church.

II. About the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church #1486-1498

The forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism is conferred by the Sacrament of conversion, confession, penance, or reconciliation. No evil is graver than sin. The sinner wounds God's honor and love, his own human dignity, and the spiritual well-being of the Church.

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

recommended to do so anyway. **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).

Sacramental confession has the following effects:

- Recovers grace for the penitent through reconciliation with God
- Reconciles the penitent to the Church
- Remits the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins
- Partially remits the temporal punishment resulting from sin
- Provides peace of mind and a 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 said during sacramental confession, and many priests throughout the world have chosen to be imprisoned or killed rather than violate this sacred seal.

III. Child's Preparation for Reconciliation

A. Classroom Preparation

All students discuss Reconciliation in their classroom sessions and typically involve role-playing a mock confession. The Director of Religious Education will visit with the students as well to discuss Reconciliation and to assure students that priests cannot discuss what anyone confesses.

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? Remind your child to

complete an Examination of Conscience to be aware of the sins s/he has committed.

C. 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.) **These are my sins.**

The penitent now lists the sins that s/he can remember, especially all mortal sins and tells the priest when s/he is done.

The priest will counsel you and perhaps give you advice for how to avoid these sins in the future. He will give you a penance, which will be either an action to do or some prayers to say. Ordinarily, he will then ask you to make an Act of Contrition. During first Reconciliation if you need help reading or reciting, the priest will pray with you.

Penitent: (Pray the Act of Contrition)

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You, and I detest all my sins because of Your just punishments, but most of all because they offend You, my God, Who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of Your grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin. Amen.

*The priest then pronounces the Words of Absolution, and the penitent makes the Sign of the Cross and says: **Amen.***

The penitent thanks the priest, and goes out to do the penance.

IV. Celebration of First Reconciliation

Date, Time, Location: Wednesday, Jan. 27, 2024 at 7 pm in the Church

Arrival: Please arrive between 6:30 pm and no later than 6:45 pm so that we may begin on time. Parents will be seated with their child and seats will be assigned.

Dress Code: Dress for First Reconciliation is “Sunday best” clothing (no jeans, no spaghetti straps). Do NOT wear First Communion outfits. Please dispose of gum before entering the church.

Procedure: Teachers and catechists will direct the children to one of the priests for their Reconciliation. They may choose to confess face to face or to confess anonymously by kneeling behind the screen or behind the priest. Parents will wait outside of the confessional for their child or in a designated place near the altar. After their child is done, they will be allowed to quietly leave. **Please consider writing a “Letter of Love” to your child to let them know how much you love them and how much God loves them too – there is no sin too great for God to forgive.** This letter would be a perfect ending to a very exciting night.

Reminders: Please refrain from taking any videos or pictures during First Reconciliation – respect the privacy of each child. Turn off all electronic devices while inside the Church– these tend to be a disruption to the students around you. Please do not have general conversations with other nearby parents – as you wait with your children, please quietly pray with them and reassure them. If any parents would like to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we ask that they wait until all of the students are done. You may take photos of your child by the statue of the Risen Jesus in the vestibule (foyer) of the Church. However, please do not stop to talk in this

area – the doors will be opening often as the families leave and any noise will carry into the church. Thank you!

V. About the Eucharist

Based on 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. While the substance changes, the accidents (external features) remain the same—what looks like bread, tastes like bread, and crumbles like bread is actually Jesus.

The effects of receiving the Eucharist are:

- An increased and deepened union with Jesus
- Forgiveness of venial (lesser) sins
- A strengthening to avoid future mortal (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. Strictly speaking, receiving the Eucharist is only “required” at least once a year. Anyone aware of having committed mortal sin must go to **sacramental confession before receiving Jesus** in the Eucharist.

Out of deepest respect and reverence for Jesus in the Eucharist, there are several small ways to prepare ourselves for Mass. The Church prescribes a minimum **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. Other ways to keep in mind the importance of the

Eucharist is to wear respectful clothing to church and to participate fully in the prayers, responses and songs.

VI. Child's Preparation for First Communion

A. Formal Preparation

All students will discuss the meaning of the Eucharist in their classroom sessions. They will complete a formal sacramental preparation using the program *Spirit of Truth*. They will also practice how to receive the Eucharist for their First Communion Mass both by hand and by mouth.

First Communion Practices

All VOL CCD second grade students, VOL Special Sacrament students and VOL School second grade students will need to attend a practice as a group on Wednesday, May 1st, at 6:30 pm in the Church.

All other practices will be held during the school day or on a CCD class night. No additional practices should be needed.

B. Preparation at Home

Take some 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. Take your family to Mass every Sunday and talk about it afterward. What did you notice about the music, the homily, or the readings?

VII. First Communion Mass

First Holy Communion Celebration:

*All **students** will attend the First Holy Communion Mass celebration on **Saturday, May 4th, 2024 at 11:00 am** in the Church.

Arrival:

- **If you are not having pictures taken** by Barberito in the cafeteria, please have your child ready and in the cry room 15 minutes prior to mass.
- **If you are having pictures taken** by Barberito in the cafeteria, please have your child here **at least** an hour prior to Mass.
- All students will be lined up 15 minutes prior to the start of Mass for the procession – please do not be late.

Professional Pictures – Barberito Photography

Barberito Photography will be contacting you directly with picture information and forms for individual and class photos within a few weeks of the Mass. Please bring the form and payment to the photographer before the Mass. We ask that you remain seated and wait until s/he has finished all of the group picture takes before you take any yourself.

Personal Pictures

Please do not take any pictures or videos during the Mass. Remain seated when your child is receiving Communion for the first time as this is very distracting to the priests and the children. As noted above, please remain seated and wait until the photographer has taken a formal group picture after Mass – the children will look around rather than look at the photographer if people are moving.

Videographer – Classic Video by Lenny

The DVD will include the First Communion Mass and a slide show of pictures taken by Classic Video of the students by the Visitation of Our Lady statue outside the church prior to their First Communion Mass and additional pictures taken with friends and family following the mass. Please look for the roaming photographer in our Shrine to the Unborn prayer garden. First Communion DVD order forms will be available closer to the date and will be available on the day of Mass too. No orders will be placed without accompanying payment (typically about \$25 for a DVD).

Seating

The First Communicants will be seated in two sections of the church on either side of the center aisle and the front row behind each of those sections. Their seats will be reserved. Families may sit in the remaining pews. **You may not “save” seats for your entire party** – however, a parent can save one spot for a spouse who may be with the child or parking a vehicle before celebration begins. **Depending on what phase we are in due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there will be a limited number of those each student can invite.** This will be determined closer to the Mass date. Please note that we will do our best to accommodate the maximum amount of people that we are legally permitted to allow in the Church.

Parking

Arrive early to avoid parking problems and a long walk. Carpool if you can. No parking in any of the red fire zones by order of the Fire Marshall. No parking at any nearby business places – cars towed at the owner’s expense – additional parking available in the VOL Padre Hall II gym lot.

Dress Code

Girls – shop early, retailers are always a season ahead

- Solid White Dress*
- White Dress Shoes (flat or low chunky kitten heels)
- White Veil or Wreath (optional)

*White Dress must be regular knee length to tea length - NO long dresses (no dresses to the ankle or floor) are allowed. NO rosaries, gloves or purses are carried in the Mass. Dresses can be sleeveless, but it should not bare the shoulders - NO spaghetti straps

Boys

- Black Dress Pants**
- Solid White Long- or Short-Sleeved Button-Down Dress Shirt (with collar)
- Solid Black Socks
- Black Dress Shoes
- Solid Black Tie*** (can be ordered/bought from religious stores)

**If a suit is purchased, please note that the jacket and/or vest cannot be worn during the ceremony. Belts are optional and should be black if worn.

***The tie can be a solid flat black color or it can have a subtle design or imprint, but it must be only black in color.

The Symbolism of First Communion Attire

The traditional color of First Communion attire—gowns and suits—is white. For girls, First Communion is one of three major events that can 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 your 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 soul that results 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 the suit are holy and symbolic objects and should modestly reflect their lofty purpose.

Other Notes Regarding First Communion

- **Please observe all reserved seating areas.** These will be clearly marked with signs on both ends of the pews or with a sign on the seat cushion for reserved single seats.
- If your child has a sibling who is a VOL altar server, please contact me to arrange for the server to help with this special mass. Servers will also be in our group picture and will be able to stand next to their siblings.
- **The children will walk up to Father to receive their First Communion;** please remain at your pews – the congregation will wait to receive communion when the children are done.
- Please be certain you have handed in your child's **Birth and Baptismal Certificates** if s/he was not baptized at VOL. And if your child was **baptized Christian but not Catholic**, you must contact one of our priests at the Pastoral Center to arrange a day and time for your child to state a Profession of Faith prior to receive any sacraments in the Catholic Church. This can often be scheduled after school.
- Teachers, Catechists, and the Director of Religious Education will choose children to read and bring up the gifts during First Communion Masses; please let us know if this is something your child may want to do, but be aware that we **always** have more volunteers than we have spots to fill.
- Please make sure your child has had a good night's sleep the evening before First Communion and a healthy breakfast that morning prior to the minimum one-hour fast before Mass.
- **No gum** chewing or candy in the church—children and adults.
- Please do not have conversations with nearby parents – we are preparing for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass – please use the last 15 minutes before Mass to pray, prepare yourself, and thank God for wonderful days like these.
- Remember to take home your child's **First Communion Certificate**, which will be with your child's teacher/catechist following Mass.

VIII. May Crowning – Sunday, May 5th, 12:00 pm Mass

We invite our First Communion students to wear their First Communion attire to the Noon Mass on Sunday, May 5th, to be recognized in the mass for having received their First Communion. At the beginning of the 12:00 pm Children's Mass, the May Crowning ceremony will take place. Prior to this Mass, two of our students (usually a boy and a girl) will be chosen to carry a wreath of flowers in the procession and place the wreath upon the head of Mary. Another four students will be invited to bring up the gifts at Offertory time. If your child would like to participate, please call Christie Bourg in the Pastoral Center. Keep in mind that we may have more volunteers than we have spots.

IX. Some Religious Gift Stores

There are many great Catholic stores in our area and online. Feel free to shop anywhere you like. Here are a few suggestions:

Westbank Religious Supply House, Inc.

5100 Westbank Expressway Suite 8
Marrero, LA 70072
(504) 341-6558
westbankreligious@att.net

Pauline Books & Media

4403 Veterans Memorial Blvd
Metairie, LA 70006
(504) 887-7631

Mule's Religious Books & Gifts

2627 David Dr.
Metairie, LA 70003
(504) 889-1708

Church Supply House

3605 Division St.

Metairie, LA 70002

(504) 456-0663