

ST. MARY OF THE
IMMACULATE CONCEPTION PARISH



FIRST RECONCILIATION &
FIRST COMMUNION
PREPARATION

FAMILY HANDBOOK
2025-2026

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I. General Information for Parents

First Holy Communion and Reconciliation are a continuing part of your child's journey of faith. As you look back on your child's baptism and forward to their Confirmation and active participation in the life of the church, it is our hope to accompany you. We desire to prepare your child to understand and appreciate the depth of love Christ shows them (and us) in the healing sacrament of Reconciliation and in the gift of His very self in the most Holy Eucharist.

We encourage you, as the parents and *primary educators of the faith*, to be involved in Sunday Mass, Parish life, in each of the family sessions, and to foster family conversations at home, based on faith. We hope also that you will reflect on your journey as parents, and renew your commitment to continue to grow your faith, love your children well and guide them as they grow in their own faith.



This renewed commitment involves developing a genuine desire to participate in the Eucharist and the sacramental life of the Church.

Parent Responsibilities: For our children to grow in their faith, it is vital that we as parents-

- Understand our *own* faith
- Grow in our relationship with God
- Live out the faith and setting a living example for our children
- Explain the importance of the sacraments to our children and share our own experiences so our children understand the sacraments on a personal level
- Support our children to attend class and scheduled sacramental preparation.

In addition to our family-centered monthly sessions, St. Mary will provide support for your journey with your child in the form of two special family retreat times – one before First Reconciliation and one before First Communion. We hope these times will help you reflect upon the truths about each sacrament, rekindle your own relationship with Christ, and give you teaching points for talking with your child about their journey of faith.



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
- intends to make reparation.

The priest performs three actions:

- offers counsel
- proposes a penance (actions or prayers to demonstrate the penitent's repentance)
- gives absolution (forgives the sins in the name of the Holy Trinity).

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

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 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 uttered 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. Monthly Sessions

Students and parents will learn about the Sacrament of Reconciliation in our monthly family sessions. The priests will visit our sessions as they are able, to reinforce discussion and to assure students that priests can never 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 even scared before First Reconciliation, but they typically feel extremely peaceful and relieved afterward. For practice, please see the information following, and share your own experiences of Reconciliation: How did you feel the first time you went? How do you feel when you go now? If possible, go to Reconciliation as a family. While your child does not need to participate before the retreat, observing their parents or older siblings partaking in the sacrament can be very powerful. You and your family will be invited to the reconciliation time offered during the retreat as well.

C. Familiarity with the Rite of Penance

Children 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 – 2 weeks, 2 months, etc.] 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 advice 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. You can pray this “Prayer of Sorrow” from memory, from a card or pray from the heart with your own words. Your heart and mind need to be sincere in the words that you say.

Penitent: (Pray the Act of Contrition / Prayer of Sorrow) O my God, I am sorry for my sins with all 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 pronounces the Words of Absolution, and the penitent makes the Sign of the Cross.

Thank the priest, and go do your penance.



IV. Celebration of First Reconciliation

December 13, 2025 First Reconciliation Day- Open to families

9:00-9:30

Welcome; coffee and sweets - Parish Hall

9:30-10:00

What is Reconciliation and why do we do it? - Parish Hall

10:00-

Upstairs in Church- Prayer Service and Examination of Conscience followed by invitation for Reconciliation. *(No formal dismissal time)*

Format: Teachers and catechists will direct the children to one of the priests for their Reconciliation. After all the children have finished, siblings and parents will be encouraged to participate in reconciliation. There will be no formal dismissal; you may leave quietly and prayerfully as your family is done. A small memento for your child will be available after Reconciliation.

Please refrain from taking any videos/ pictures during First Reconciliation.



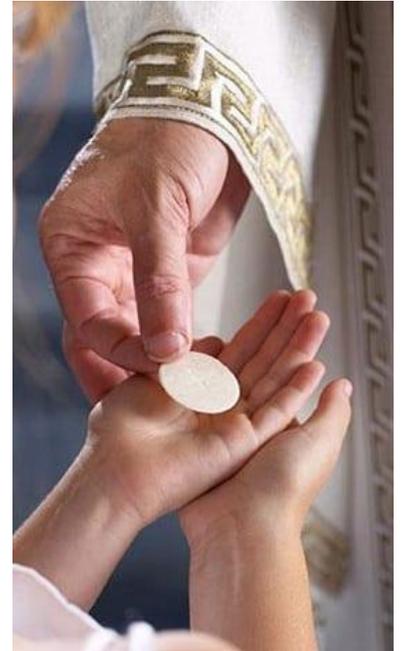
V. About the Eucharist

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.

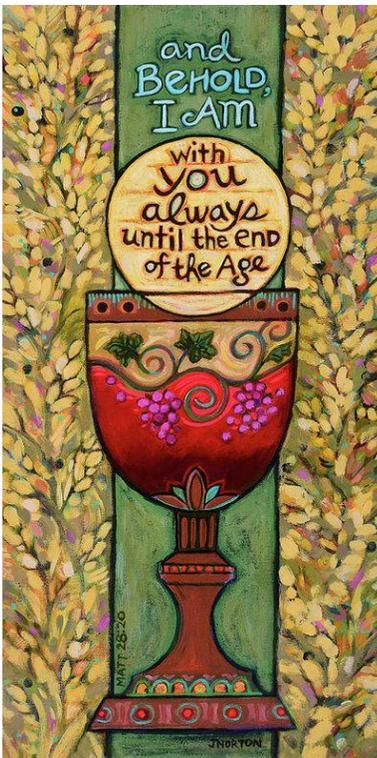


“**Transubstantiation**” is a theological term that describes the complete change of the substance (what something is in its deepest being) of bread into the substance of Jesus Christ. While the substance changes, the accidents (external features) remain the same—what looks like bread, tastes like bread, and crumbles like bread is actually Jesus. 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
- Strengthening to avoid future mortal (serious) sins
- Reinforced union with all other believers, who are the Church
- 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 sets 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 the importance of the Eucharist is to wear respectful clothing to church. As we prepare our bodies to receive Jesus, we can also prepare our hearts. We can read the readings for Mass that day and think of Jesus and pray.

VI. Child's Preparation for First Communion

A. Monthly Sessions

Students in our religious education programs begin learning about Jesus in the Eucharist in preschool. In our monthly family sessions, we will continue learning about the significance of the Eucharist and deepening our love of the sacrament. **Much effort is taken so students understand it is Jesus they receive and how to prepare their hearts and minds to receive him.** They will also practice how to receive the Eucharist in their hands or on their tongue.



Additional parts of our parish preparation for First Communion:

Eucharistic Retreat - Saturday, April 25, 2026

An afternoon of reflection for First Communicants and their parents. First Communion banners will be created during the retreat.

12:00-3:00 Parish Hall/School Gym

First Communion Rehearsal and Professional Pictures – Sunday, April 26, 2026

6:30 p.m. Individual Pictures Offered (more details will be given closer to the date)

7:00 p.m. Group Picture

7:15-7:45 p.m. - Practice for 1st Holy Communion



**Blessing of religious articles will be done at the end of practice if desired.*

B. Preparation at Home/within your family

From the moment of your child's baptism you have been teaching your child by your words and actions about your relationship with God. **You teach more by what you ARE and what you do DO than by what you say.** Take some time to talk with your child about Jesus, the Eucharist. Share together in the appreciation of God's Word and introduce or add ways and times for family prayer. Start faith conversations regularly with all of your children. Ask what s/he is learning in the classroom. Ask what s/he thinks about it. Share

your own memories of your First Communion.

Make weekly Mass a family priority and talk about it afterward. What did you see or understand?

***Continue this on, long after your child's First Communion. It should be the first of many times that you share in the celebration of Jesus, the Eucharist, together.**



C. First Communion Banners

As part of our tradition of celebrating First Communion, we ask that you and your child create a banner to be displayed prior to their First Communion Mass for seating arrangements. These banners then come home with you and can be displayed in your home and kept as a keepsake. Banner kits will be provided and banners will be created at the Eucharistic Retreat on April 25. If you are unable to attend the retreat, please contact the Faith Formation Office at 330-264-5838; you may pick up your child's kit and create the banner at home.



VII. First Communion Masses

Our 2026 Group First Communion Masses will be Saturday, May 2 at 5:00 p.m. and Sunday, May 3 at 11:00 a.m. These Masses are filled on a first-come-first-served basis. To ensure that you are assigned to the Mass that you want, please speak to Leah McKee

in the Faith Formation Office as soon as you can. We will try to accommodate your first choice for times.

If you wish for your child to experience a family-centered First Holy Communion, these can be scheduled during a Mass after the last group date. Please indicate your preference to the Faith Formation Office.



Arrival:

- Please have your child to the Parish Hall at 10:30a.m. for the 11:00 a.m. Mass, or 4:30 p.m. for the 5:00 p.m. Mass.
- We will have the children line up in the Parish Hall and they will process with the Priest during the entrance rite.
- Children will then be seated with their families toward the front of church for the Mass.
- Your family will have one pew reserved with your banner. Each pew seats 8 adults. If you have additional friends and family, they will need to find additional seating.

Personal Pictures

Please do not take ANY pictures during the Mass, and please do not come forward to take a picture when your child is receiving Communion for the first time as this is very distracting to the priests and the children. You are welcome to take pictures after Mass.

Professional Pictures – April 26, 2026

Individual professional pictures are offered at 6:30 p.m. on April 26, before our rehearsal time. Picture order forms will be handed out at the Eucharistic Retreat. If you are not purchasing professional pictures, please still wear your First Communion Attire for the group picture.

First Communion Attire

While it is not the focus of this day, the traditional color of First Communion attire—gowns and suits—is white. For girls, First Communion is one of three major events that calls 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? First Communion gowns and suits/shirts/ties 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.

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). **The color of the gown reminds us of God's incredible mercy and of the purity of soul that results from Baptism.**

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 also symbolizes the excitement and celebration that should rightfully accompany a child's reception of 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.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The Faith Formation Office has several beautiful First Communion dresses available, in various sizes, if a need should arise. Please contact Sarah Nussbaum or Leah McKee for more information!

Dress Code

Girls

- White strongly encouraged but not mandatory
- Dresses with sleeves are encouraged for the sake of modesty during Mass; 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
- Students will not be permitted to carry anything (prayer books, rosary beads, etc.) into church

Boys

- Dress shirt and tie, or dress shirt and vest, or sweater and dress pants
- Suits or sport coats are optional, though most boys wear them
- Socks must be worn with appropriate dress shoes
- Students will not be permitted to carry anything (prayer books, rosary beads, etc.) into church

Other Notes Regarding First Communion

- Catechists will choose children to bring up the gifts during First Communion Masses; please allow them to handle this.
 - Please make sure your child has had a good night's sleep the evening before First Communion and a healthy breakfast that morning. Please observe the (minimum) 1-hour fast before Mass (water and medicine are permitted).
 - **No gum** chewing or candy in the church—children and adults.
 - **Please silence all cell phones and devices and maintain quiet and reverence before the Mass.**
 - Remember to take home your child's **First Communion Certificate**, which will be placed in your family's pew.
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VIII. Family May Crowning – Wednesday, May 13, 2026

- We welcome our First Communion class to wear their First Communion attire to Anchor on Wednesday, May 13, 2026 and to be recognized for making their First Communion. All families are invited to this special evening! A May Crowning service will take place during this, our final session of Faith Formation before summer break. More information will be forthcoming!

