

Notes from First Reconciliation/First Communion Meeting 2023



Mrs. Jessica Donohue, Director
Mrs. Debbie Galamb, Administrative Assistant
Office Phone: 856-983-7575
Office Email: rem@stjoans.org

Website: [First Reconciliation and First Communion](#)

*** We have general information and other helpful resources here, including videos on both Sacraments made for us by Fr. JM**

Overview of the meeting content:

- General information about the Sacraments
- Practical aspects of the Sacramental Celebrations/FAQ

Important Scheduling and Dates:

- First Reconciliation and First Communion Schedule - Please see email from RE Office (we do not publish Sacrament schedules online).
- Sacrament Retreats: First Reconciliation Retreat: Saturday, February 3, 9:30 am - 11:00 am - We will need volunteers for our retreat! [You can sign up here](#). Volunteers are given information in advance about what they will be doing at the retreat. - First Communion Retreat: Saturday, March 16, 9:30 am - 11:00 am. You can sign up to volunteer for the [Communion retreat here](#).
- [First Communion Application](#) - due March 1, 2024 - you can find the Application [here](#) or on our website.
 - *We prefer that you submit this in hard copy format, and we have hard copies in the office if you would like one. If you need to email the application, please do so in PDF format only (**no .png or .jpg files please**) to rem@stjoans.org.
- May Crowning - A Sunday in May 2024 - exact date to be communicated.
Children who recently received First Communion are traditionally invited to this beautiful celebration. Info to come!

First Reconciliation

- Reconciliation is often associated with Communion, but it is closer theologically to the Anointing of the Sick, because both are Sacraments of Healing
- First Reconciliation is sometimes called “First Penance” or “First Confession.”
Confession, Penance, and Reconciliation are all vital parts of the Sacrament, but we call it “First Reconciliation” to emphasize the celebration of God’s love and mercy which we associate with reconciling with Him.
- Why do children receive the Sacrament in or around the age of 7/8?
 - The Church considers this age “the age of reason” - in other words, children at this age in general can discern between right and wrong.
 - Reconciliation also allows us to be in a state of grace for when we receive Communion, which they will do a couple of months later.
- What we teach our children about Reconciliation
 - No matter what we do, God always loves us more than we can even imagine and there is nothing we can do that puts us beyond His love.
 - A healthy and appropriate understanding of what sin is, i.e. that it has to be a choice we made intentionally, not a mistake or accident
 - God is all goodness, and we were made in His own image, so we are made to be good too and helps us to do that with His grace
 - When we sin, we distance ourselves from our friendship with God (although He never stops loving us)
 - Reconciliation strengthens our friendship with God, helps us to be closer to Him, and gives us the grace we need to do better in the future
- How we celebrate First Reconciliation
 - Within the context of a liturgy, i.e., we have readings, music, Msgr. Rich offers a homily, etc. This reflects the celebratory nature of the Sacrament.
 - Catechists and teachers are there to help usher and guide the children to the confession stations.
 - In addition to Msgr. Rich and Fr. JM, we have multiple priests attending to help (this helps us keep the liturgy to about an hour or sometimes a little less) - We all pray the Act of Contrition, which will be printed in our program, together before the children go to confession. Please note that it is still important that children know and memorize this prayer. You can find the version of the Act of Contrition that we teach the children on page 3 of our First Reconciliation guide for parents [at this link](#), also linked on our website..
 - If circumstances necessitate that your child is unable to attend as scheduled, we can easily reschedule for a regular Saturday confession time; if you need to reschedule, please contact the office at 856-983-7575 or rem@stjoans.org

First Communion

- The most important thing for children (and all Catholics!) to understand about the Eucharist is that when the priests says the special prayers of consecration, the host and

the wine truly become the Body and Blood of Christ. Communion for us is not a sign or a symbol; it is the real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

- This is one of the greatest miracles and deepest mysteries of our faith, which no human being can fully understand, so we do not expect the children to completely understand it!
- A recent survey of Catholics showed that almost 70% thought or believed that the the consecrated host and wine are symbols/signs, and only around 30% understood the actual Catholic belief. This makes it even more vital that our next generation understands what we believe about the Eucharist.
- Since this is a difficult teaching for children to understand, we explain that all of the love that Jesus has for each of us is in the Eucharist.
- Since the Eucharist is so sacred, we also emphasize to the children the importance of treating the Host with care, reverence, and respect when we receive it. This means consuming the Host immediately after we receive it.

The Importance of Mass

- ***Everything we teach in our Religious Education Program and our School presupposes that the child is attending and participating in Mass each Sunday.*** What we do in the classroom is actually just supplemental, because the Mass and faith practiced in the family is central to a child's education and formation in the Catholic faith.
- The Mass is also important for First Communion preparation in particular because it gives children a context for understanding what we are teaching them.

Frequently Asked Questions

- Q: Will there be a livestream?
 - A: We do plan on still livestreaming First Communion Masses. These streams will be via a private link, i.e. the Masses will not be streamed via the St. Joan's Facebook or YouTube accounts. You will receive the link about a week or two prior to your child's Mass, which you can then forward on to family and friends. ****Please note - due to the nature of Reconciliation as well as Diocesan guidelines, First Reconciliation services will **not** be streamed.**
- Q: Can we take pictures/videos during First Communion Masses?
 - A: No pictures or videos may be taken during the Masses. However, you are very welcome to take pictures before the Mass (as time allows) and/or after the Mass, in or outside the Church. Please note that pictures can be taken in front of, but not on, the altar, due to the sacred nature of this space.
We will also have designated people to take pictures during the Masses, and they will take a photo of each child as he/she receives. These photos will be uploaded to a private Snapfish account, and parents will receive login instructions. When you log in, you will be able to find and save your child's photo.
- Q: Do children need to wear white for First Communion?
 - A: Children do not need to wear white, and we do not really have a dress code as far

as clothing color goes. Girls can wear any dress color they wish, and veils and flowers are optional. We ask that if you purchase gloves, that you keep them with you during the Mass to avoid fidgeting. Boys can wear any color suit, or a jacket and pants, any color. We do ask that boys wear a button down shirt and tie (again, any color). Shoes should be comfortable, but we ask that children do not wear sneakers.

- Q: What do children wear for First Reconciliation?

- A: The dress is not as formal as First Communion, but children should be dressed as they would for a special occasion of a sacred nature. Girls may wear a dress or blouse and skirt or sweater and slacks, and boys may wear a button down shirt and slacks or a sweater and slacks, just for some examples.

- Q: Will children be able to try the host before First Communion?

- A: Yes, we give them the chance to do this in the classroom at some point prior to their Mass. *If your child requires a low-gluten host, please let us know in advance so we can coordinate this.

- Q: We have a priest/deacon in the family who will be at the First Communion Mass and would like to serve. Can they do this?

- A: Yes! If this is the case, please let us know. Priests and deacons who serve Masses outside of their own assigned parishes must provide a letter of suitability for ministry from their own Diocese. (If have a priest/deacon in the family and you mention this, they will know how to obtain it.)

- Q: Is there assigned seating for First Communion?

- A: Yes; we will assign each family a pew and will send pew assignments to you in advance. Pews are assigned randomly, and are intended to allow you to arrive to the church with one less thing to worry about! Please note that per Msgr. Rich, our First Communicants are seated together at the front of the Church for the Masses. **Important: Please note that pews are assigned one for each family, not for each child.

- Q: Is there accommodation for special seating?

- A: Yes, it is important to us that all of our guests are comfortable when joining us, so if you have a friend or family member who would benefit from special seating, please let us know and we will be glad to help. We appreciate as much advance notice as possible for special seating.

- Q: How long are the services/Masses?

- A: First Reconciliation tends to run about 45 minutes to an hour, and First Communion tends to run about an hour. For First Reconciliation, we ask you to be at the church 15-30 minutes prior to the beginning of your child's service. For First Communion, we ask that you arrive 30 minutes prior to the beginning of the Mass.

- Q: Is it important that my child attends First Communion practice?

- A: Yes, this is very important. The practices allow children to run through the Mass, including the procession of the children which begins the Mass. We ask that you make every effort to have your child attend his or her practice as scheduled.

- Q: We have a scheduling issue with First Communion, can we change our Mass? - A: If you need to do this, please contact the office as soon as possible. We do our best to accommodate requests, and it is much more likely we can grant the request when it is made early. March 15th is the deadline for making Mass scheduling requests, except in cases where there are serious extenuating/unforeseen circumstances which require a scheduling change.