

Parent Preparation Handbook

First Reconciliation and First Communion 2017-2018



St. Luke Church
7575 Holliday Drive E.
Indianapolis IN 46260
Tel. 317-259-4373

Sister Diane Carollo, S.G.L., Director of Religious Education
Tel. 317-259-4373, ext 256
dcarollo@stluke.org

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Confession is an act of honesty and courage – an act of entrusting ourselves, beyond sin, to the mercy of a loving and forgiving God. Pope St. John Paul II

Only through the Eucharist is it possible to live the heroic virtues of Christianity: charity, to the point of forgiving one's enemies; love for those who make us suffer; chastity in every age and situation of life; patience in suffering and when one is shocked by the silence of God in the tragedies of history or of one's own personal existence. You must always be Eucharistic souls in order to be authentic Christians. Pope St. John Paul II

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE PELICAN

The mother pelican feeding her baby pelicans depicted on the front cover of this handbook is rooted in an ancient legend that existed before Christianity. The legend says that in times of famine, the mother pelican struck her breast repeatedly with her own beak until she bled. She would then feed her young with her own blood to prevent them from starving.

In another version of the legend, the mother pelican fed her dying baby pelicans with her own blood to keep them alive, but she would lose her own life in the process.

With this rich symbolism, it is no wonder that the early Christians adapted it to represent or symbolize Jesus Christ, our Lord. The pelican symbolizes that Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer, gave His life to save us from sin and death. The new life we possess comes through His death on the cross and the pouring out of His Precious Blood.

As you prepare your child for First Penance and First Communion, you may want to teach your child about the legend of the pelican. It should serve as a reminder that Jesus suffered and died for us so that we may gain eternal life. In a totally selfless act of love, our Lord accepted an agonizing death for each and every one of us.

The Eucharist, of course, is connected to Christ's sacrifice on the cross. It is not merely an image of Christ's sacrifice on the cross; it truly is Christ's sacrifice! The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that the same Christ Who offered Himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and offered in an unbloody manner on the altar in the Mass (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1367).

I. General Information

During your child's second grade year, he or she will be prepared for the sacraments of Reconciliation (Penance) and Eucharist. You will also be asked to attend two orientation meetings on the sacraments as well as sessions on the theology of the sacraments. See the calendar on page 10 for the meeting dates.

This time also provides parents with the opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to the practice of the Catholic Faith, and to deepen their relationship with Christ. This renewed commitment necessarily involves participation at Mass and the reception of the sacraments. It also signals a commitment to uphold the **Precepts of the Church**. If you've never heard about them, see the list below.

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 days and abstinence days established by the Church.
5. To contribute to the material support of the Church.

II. The Church's teachings on Reconciliation

A. From the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

In the paragraphs below from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, we learn the following:

1485 "On the evening of that day, the first day of the week," Jesus showed himself to his apostles. "He breathed on them, and said to them: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'" (Jn 20:19,22-23).

1486 The forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism is conferred by a particular sacrament called the sacrament of conversion, confession, penance, or reconciliation.

1487 The sinner wounds God's honor and love, his own human dignity as a man called to be a son of God, and the spiritual well-being of the Church, of which each Christian ought to be a living stone.

1488 To the eyes of faith no evil is graver than sin and nothing has worse consequences for sinners themselves, for the Church, and for the whole world.

1490 The movement of return to God, called conversion and repentance, entails sorrow for and abhorrence of sins committed, and the firm purpose of sinning no more in the future. Conversion touches the past and the future and is nourished by hope in God's mercy.

1491 The sacrament of Penance is a whole consisting in three actions of the penitent and the priest's absolution. the penitent's acts are repentance, confession or disclosure of sins to the priest, and the intention to make reparation and do works of reparation.

1493 One who desires to obtain reconciliation with God and with the Church, must confess to a priest all the unconfessed grave sins he remembers after having carefully examined his conscience. the confession of venial faults, without being necessary in itself, is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church.

1494 The confessor proposes the performance of certain acts of "satisfaction" or "penance" to be performed by the penitent in order to repair the harm caused by sin and to re-establish habits befitting a disciple of Christ.

1495 Only priests who have received the faculty of absolving from the authority of the Church can forgive sins in the name of Christ.

1496 The spiritual effects of the sacrament of Penance are: - reconciliation with God by which the penitent recovers grace; - reconciliation with the Church; - remission of the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins; - remission, at least in part, of temporal punishments resulting from sin; - peace and serenity of conscience, and spiritual consolation; - an increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle.

B. Not all sins are equal

- ❖ When a person goes to confession, all mortal (grave) sins must be confessed. Venial (lesser) sins do not need to be confessed, but it is recommended to do so. When only venial sins are confessed, the person is making a devotional confession.

C. Other practical spiritual benefits from going to confession

❖ It helps us to grow in self-knowledge.

St. Augustine and many other saints and doctors of the Church have taught that knowing ourselves is essential to having a healthy spiritual life. Self-knowledge helps us to appreciate our need for God's ongoing help and grace in our lives. Frequent Confession reminds us that we need to depend on God in order to overcome temptations and sin.

❖ It helps us to overcome bad habits and sin in our lives.

The grace we receive from the sacrament helps us to win the battle against bad habits or vices. Bad habits are acquired with the repetition of bad actions. Bad habits may be broken more quickly and effectively when we go to confession regularly.

❖ The conscience is purified

The conscience, if well formed, teaches us what is right or wrong. Sin often distorts the conscience or makes it insensitive to the truth. Confession purifies our conscience so that we can recognize God's will in the circumstances of our daily lives. Confession enlightens and purifies our conscience.

❖ It helps us become more like Christ.

It imparts grace to our souls. Grace strengthens us to become more conformed to Jesus Christ in word and deed. Every canonized saint in the Church went to confession not only with the desire to overcome sin and sinful tendencies, but also to become more loving and Christ-like. Confession is the launching pad for a life of authentic holiness.

❖ It strengthens our will.

God strengthens our will with his grace. Through confession, we gain self-control and grow in our desire and commitment to resist the temptations that cross our path in life. We become more determined to do God's will and not our own. Self-will, self-absorption and self-seeking are the road map to sin that leads us away from the Will of God.

III. Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

- ❖ **First Confessions** for the second grade is on **Saturday, December 16, at 11:00 a.m.** in the church. Arrival: Please arrive no later than 10:40 a.m. and be seated in church by 10:50 a.m. A brief Penance Service will be conducted before the children go to confession.

- ❖ Please note that the teachers and catechists will assist the children as they go to the priests. Since there will be numerous priests hearing confessions, we encourage parents to avail themselves of the opportunity to go to confession after all the children have finished.

IV. The Church's teachings on the Eucharist

A. From the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

From the paragraphs below in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, we learn the following:

1324 The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life." The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch."

1337 The Lord, having loved those who were his own, loved them to the end. Knowing that the hour had come to leave this world and return to the Father, in the course of a meal he washed their feet and gave them the commandment of love.¹⁶³ In order to leave them a pledge of this love, in order never to depart from his own and to make them sharers in his Passover, he instituted the Eucharist as the memorial of his death and Resurrection, and commanded his apostles to celebrate it until his return; "thereby he constituted them priests of the New Testament."¹⁶⁴

1338 The three synoptic Gospels and St. Paul have handed on to us the account of the institution of the Eucharist; St. John, for his part, reports the words of Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum that prepare for the institution of the Eucharist: Christ calls himself the bread of life, come down from heaven.¹⁶⁵

1339 Jesus chose the time of Passover to fulfill what he had announced at Capernaum: giving his disciples his Body and his Blood:

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the passover meal for us, that we may eat it. . . ." They went . . . and prepared the passover. And when the hour came, he sat at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." . . . And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after supper, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood."¹⁶⁶

1340 By celebrating the Last Supper with his apostles in the course of the Passover meal, Jesus gave the Jewish Passover its definitive meaning. Jesus' passing over to his father by his death and Resurrection, the new Passover, is anticipated in the Supper and celebrated in the Eucharist, which fulfills the Jewish Passover and anticipates the final Passover of the Church in the glory of the kingdom.

"Do this in memory of me"

1341 The command of Jesus to repeat his actions and words "until he comes" does not only ask us to remember Jesus and what he did. It is directed at the liturgical celebration, by the apostles and their successors, of the *memorial* of Christ, of his life, of his death, of his Resurrection, and of his intercession in the presence of the Father.¹⁶⁷

1342 From the beginning the Church has been faithful to the Lord's command. Of the Church of Jerusalem it is written: They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. . . . Day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts.¹⁶⁸

1343 It was above all on "the first day of the week," Sunday, the day of Jesus' resurrection, that the Christians met "to break bread."¹⁶⁹ From that time on down to our own day the celebration of the Eucharist has been continued so that today we encounter it everywhere in the Church with the same fundamental structure. It remains the center of the Church's life.

1406 Jesus said: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; . . . he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and . . . abides in me, and I in him" (Jn 6:51, 54, 56).

B. Understanding Transubstantiation

- ❖ "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 a wafer, tastes like a wafer, and breaks apart like an ordinary wafer is actually the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ.

C. Effects of the Eucharist in the life of Catholic

- ❖ 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

V. Celebration of the Sacrament of the Eucharist

A. First Holy Communion Retreat

On **Saturday, March 3, from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 p.m.** there will be a retreat for the children preparing for Communion. At least one parent should participate with their child. The retreat will begin in church at 9:00 a.m. It ends with Benediction in church.

B. Date of First Communions

- ❖ First Holy Communions will be celebrated on **Saturday, April 21**. The two Masses are at 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Forms to select a Mass will be distributed at the Eucharist Orientation meeting on **Sunday, January 21**. Other forms regarding participation of priests, deacons, and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion will also be distributed.

C. Photography

- ❖ Each year we have professional photographers at the First Communion Masses. Individual photos and group photos will be offered to parents. The details and pricing will be provided at the Eucharist Orientation on **Sunday, January 21**.
- ❖ Parents, family members and friends should not take flash photos during the Communion Mass. No one may leave the pew to “get a shot.” Our professional photographers provide their services during the Mass and are respectful of the liturgy.

D. First Communion Banners

- ❖ Each child will create a banner that will be displayed in the church at the First Communion Masses. Directions on how to design the banner will be distributed at the Eucharist Orientation meeting on **January 21**. The banners should be completed and returned at the **First Holy Communion Retreat on March 3**.

E. Practices

There will be two practices for First Holy Communion on **Thursday, April 20**. Depending on the Mass selected, the practices will be conducted at 6:15 p.m. or 7:15 p.m. The practices are not interchangeable.

F. Dress Code

Girls

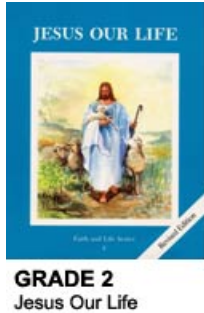
- ❖ White dress
- ❖ White veils or floral wreathes
- ❖ No purses or gloves during Mass

Boys

- ❖ Suits or sports coats are appropriate
- ❖ Dress shirt and tie, or dress shirt and vest
- ❖ No prayer books, rosaries or objects during Mass

G. Seating

- ❖ The children will march in at the beginning of Mass and sit on either side of the center aisle. Following the Sign of Peace, they will be seated with their parents. **Parents and First Communicants will be assigned pews.** Only 12 people per pew are permitted. *Older siblings, relatives and friends are to be seated behind all the First Communicants and their families. At the practice, the seats will be assigned.*



JESUS OUR LIFE

The First Penance and First Eucharist text and activity books that are used in the sacrament program is *Jesus Our Life*, Book Two in the Faith and Life Series. *Faith and Life* is published by Ignatius Press. The USCCB (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) has listed Faith and Life among the catechetical books and series that are in conformity with the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Jesus Our Life

The students are prepared for the sacraments of Penance and First Holy Communion through studying the development of salvation history. As students learn about God's plan of love and mercy, they begin to understand that these sacraments are God's gift to us and that they too are part of God's loving plan. Special emphasis is given to preparation for and reception of these sacraments, as well as learning about the Mass.

Creed/Scripture Sacraments

Students develop an understanding of the mystery of Christ through age appropriate teachings on Church doctrine and scriptural references as listed below and in the teacher's manual.

Christian Living

Throughout the second grade, students develop their understanding of the dignity of the human person. Students learn to live out their faith and respond to what they learn by forming a moral conscience and by living out their call to justice and service through imitating the life of Jesus.

Prayer

Throughout the second grade, students continue their development of a prayer life that includes learning the basic traditional Catholic prayers and praying spontaneous prayers. They continue to learn that prayer is talking with God. Special emphasis is given to learning about the Mass as the perfect form of prayer.

Sacramental Preparation

Students will study the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion in preparation to receive them for the first time. They will learn about sin, God's mercy, confession of sins, reconciliation, the steps to a good confession, and the matter, form, effects, and minister of the Sacrament of Penance. They will also study the Passover, Last Supper, the institution of the Eucharist, transubstantiation, the priesthood, sacrifice, the order and parts of the Mass, personal union with Christ in Holy Communion, Eucharistic devotion, and the matter, form, effects, and minister of the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

The Sacrament of Penance is studied in chapters 17, 18, 19, 20, and 30.

The Sacrament of Holy Communion is studied in chapters 22, 25, 27, 28, 30, and 33.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR IMPORTANT DATES IN 2017-2018

N.B. Registration forms for the sacraments from St. Luke School Parents are due no later than September 5.

SMRE parents submit all registration forms by the first day of religion classes on August 13.

Sunday, September 24

Parent meeting on the guidelines for First Reconciliation will be on September 24 in the Parish Hall, from 10:45-11:20 a.m. Parents only.

October 12

“Theology of Reconciliation” will be on Thursday, October 12, from 7 to 8:00 p.m. in the Parish Hall. Parents only.

December 16

First Reconciliation. Children go to confession for the first time on **Saturday, December 16.** We start with a Penance Service. Arrive no later than 10:40 a.m. Sign in and go into the church with your child.

January 21

Parent meeting on the guidelines for First Holy Communion will be on Sunday, January 21 in the Parish Hall from 10:45-11:20 a.m. Parents only.

February 8

“Theology of the Eucharist” will be on Thursday, February 8, from 7 to 8:00 p.m. in the Parish Hall. Parents only.

March 3

First Holy Communion Retreat for children and parent(s) from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. Parent(s) and child gather in the church no later than 8:45 a.m.

April 19

First Holy Communion Practices – Thursday, April 19 at 6:15 p.m. or 7:15 p.m. Parent(s) and child meet in church. Practice time depends on the First Communion Mass time.

April 21

First Communions will be celebrated on Saturday, April 21 at the 10:00 a.m. Mass or 1 p.m. Mass.

T6

Miscellaneous Questions and Comments Regarding Sacramental Preparation**1. What role do parents play in the sacramental preparation of their children?**

Parents are the most important adult Catholics in the life of their child. At baptism you **promised** God that you would raise your son or daughter in the Catholic faith. Concretely, this means that you will provide the necessary religious education for your child in the faith. It also means that you will show your child that faith in God is something real and practical and part of everyday life. **The expectation is that you will bring your son or daughter to Mass every Sunday and holy day of obligation.**

2. How often should Catholics receive Holy Communion?

The Church encourages the faithful to receive Holy Communion at Mass. In other words, the Church encourages the faithful to receive the Eucharist faithfully and frequently.

However, receiving the Eucharist is only “required” at least once a year. **If a person has committed mortal sin, he or she must go to sacramental confession before receiving Jesus in the Eucharist.**

3. Do adults and children need to fast before receiving Holy Communion?

The Church proscribes a **one-hour fast** before receiving the Eucharist. This means we don’t eat or drink. **No coffee, tea or other beverages should be consumed.** Unless there is a medical reason to do otherwise, the fast is obligatory. Note that it is also inappropriate to chew gum or eat candy in church.

Food and drink should never be consumed in church at any time! To do so would be to show disrespect to our Lord in the Tabernacle.

4. What prayers should I teach my child?

Special books with traditional Catholic prayers are distributed to St. Luke School and SMRE students each year. It is highly recommended that parents help their children memorize the prayers for their age group. A few basic prayers may be found on page 13 in the booklet.

At St. Luke, we have a **perpetual adoration chapel**. The Blessed Sacrament is exposed 24/7 for adoration. We encourage parents to bring their children for brief visits to adore our Lord.

5. What information do I need to submit before my child receives the sacraments?

We are required by the Church to obtain the **Baptismal information** before a child is allowed to receive the sacraments of Penance and Communion. Please obtain a copy of your child’s baptism certificate from the church in which he or she was baptized. If your child was baptized at St. Luke Parish, you need only provide us with the date of Baptism.

The registration forms for St. Luke School students or the SMRE students should be submitted at the time of registration in August. These forms may be found on the parish website. **Copies of Baptism certificates are due no later than October 9**

6. Is there a fee for classes?

The tuition fee for the program to prepare children for the sacraments in the SMRE program is \$85. This fee covers the cost of the student textbook, workbook and other materials needed in the program. Please check the religious education website for online donations.

St. Luke School covers the cost of materials used for sacramental preparation. No additional fees are required for St. Luke School parents. **However, the registration form needs to be submitted with the baptismal information!**

7. Why do young children need to be prepared for First Penance before First Eucharist?

It is the practice or the norm throughout the Church that children, before they receive their First Eucharist, first receive the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation.

The Church teaches that “children must go to the sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1457); and, “It is primarily the duty of parents, as well as the duty of pastors, to take care that the children who have reached the use of reason are prepared properly and, after they have a sacramental confession, are refreshed with this divine food” (Canon 914).

8. What is the age of reason and how is this related to the sacraments?

Children are prepared for Penance and Communion when they have reached the age of reason. Infants and small children lack sufficient maturity to distinguish between right and wrong and therefore are not considered responsible for their actions. “With the completion of the seventh year, a minor is presumed to have the use of reason” (Canon 97.2). Of course, this age is not exact. Some may arrive at this age earlier, others later or not at all, depending on intelligence and other critical factors.

Children who have reached the age of reason are able to think abstractly and apply general principles to specific life situations. Children who have reached the age of reason know the difference between good and evil.

9. When may my child wear his or her First Holy Communion outfit again?

We welcome the First Communicants to wear their outfits again on Sunday, April 22. The First Holy Communion Masses on Saturday, April 21 DO NOT FULFILL THE SUNDAY OBLIGATION. Therefore, please plan on going to Mass on Sunday with your children dressed in their special outfits. They will be recognized!

BASIC PRAYERS

Sign of the Cross

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Our Father

Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy Will be done, on earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Glory Be

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Prayer to My Guardian Angel

Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom His love commits me here, ever this night be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.

Act of Contrition

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 your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In His Name, my God, have mercy. Amen.

*It is recommended that you pray night with your children before they go to bed. A good practice to begin with your child is to pray The Act of Contrition together.

