

January 26, 2011

Dear Parents:

In a few months, we will be celebrating First Communion. This event is one of happiness, not only for your child and for you as parents, but also for our whole parish community, which the Eucharist unites in the bond of Jesus' self-giving love.

Some of the following information was given to you in the September letter. I hope that, by breaking down this letter into segments, the information will be easy to find at a glance.

First Communion Date

First Communion will be celebrated at 1 PM on Sunday, May 8.

Parents' Class

The fundamental influence of parents in the total Christian formation of their children is recognized by the bishops of the world and by religious educators. In keeping with diocesan and parish guidelines, there will be a **class for parents on Sunday, February 13, from 1-3 PM in the school library**. All parents are invited; however, **those parents whose first child is receiving the sacrament are required to attend. I am not planning to hold this meeting on another date, so please come on February 13.**

Practice/Retreat

The children's Practice/Retreat is scheduled for Thursday, May 5, from 8:30 AM to 2:30 PM. The Practice/Retreat will not be necessary for parents although parents may come for the day if they wish.

Public School Children

Attendance at the Practice/Retreat is expected. As the parent of a public school child, you will need to make arrangements to bring your child **to the gym at St. Mary's by 8:25 AM. Dismissal will be at 2:30 P.M.** The principals of the various schools will be notified about this

First Communion Practice/Retreat. A **permission slip from you to your child's school is necessary by May 4 to give your child an excused absence** for the day of May 5.

Check with your child's school to determine how bus transportation to St. Mary's School is made possible in your area. **If you want your child to ride a school bus to and from St. Mary's School, you must make arrangements by phone and by letter to your child's school by May 4.** I am not able nor authorized to arrange bus transportation myself, so please allow yourself time to make these arrangements. **On the morning of May 5, please let us know in writing if your child will be a bus rider and the number of the bus.**

If you will be transporting your child yourself, please park in the Jennings Road parking lot. Your child will need to use the School entrance facing the parking lot to enter the building. At the end of the day, you may either, park in the Jennings Road parking lot and enter through the School entrance to pick up your child from the gym or you can drive up at the bell tower. **Please let us know in writing if you will pick up your child from the gym or if you plan to drive up at the bell tower.**

Your child may pack a lunch or order a hot lunch through the cafeteria. The cost of the hot lunch is \$2.25. Closer to the date of the Practice/Retreat, I will give you the menu for the day. **There is no plan in place to provide lunch for children, who do not have money or have not packed. Since St. Mary's School cafeteria operates under the supervision of the State, charges are not allowed; and the cafeteria cannot accept the free or reduced lunch arrangements provided to some children. That program is arranged for your child through your child's own school. Be assured, however, that no child will go hungry if a lunch is truly forgotten.**

First Communion Attire

First Communion catalogs will be sent home with your child in the next couple of weeks. These catalogs feature veils, prayer books, rosaries, and many other gift and party items. If you wish to place catalog orders, may I suggest that you do so early. Be sure to stop by Laudick's Jewelry and Derry Drugs. They carry lovely gifts. The Bridge also has some traditional First Communion gift items.

Here is the clothing guide as given in the September letter:

Girls: It has been customary for girls to wear white dresses and veils. Some girls have worn decorated headbands, flowers or simple bows in their hair. Since some dresses are purchased in bridal shops and are actually designed as miniature bride dresses rather than First Communion dresses, keep in mind that the dress should be modest with no sundress or spaghetti straps unless an appropriate shrug, bolero, sweater, or jacket is worn over the shoulders. The dress should not be too short. If a long dress is chosen, the hem of the skirt must be at least a couple of inches from the top of the shoes. Remember that your child will be walking up and down steps. Can your child do this in a long dress with her hands folded? Is there even a chance that your child might step on the dress? Stepping

on a dress, on carpet but especially on a terrazzo floor, could be dangerous. Simple jewelry may be worn. Gloves can be worn for photos only. Gloves are not to be worn during Mass. Tights, knee socks, or anklets with dress shoes are fine—no flip flops, not even wedding flip flops. Please make sure your child's shoes fit properly so that she does not need to shuffle her feet to keep them on. If the shoes have a French heel or, actually, any kind of heel other than the kind your child wears every day, she should practice in them, walking on smooth, shiny surfaces, and climbing and descending steps. Prayer books, gloves, rosaries, or other items will not be carried by the children in procession; however, they may be held for individual photographs. It is best if parents hold these items for their child during Mass.

Boys: Boys usually wear a neat suit of any color, or dress slacks and blazer, white shirt, and tie and appropriate dress shoes. Some people prefer bow ties, and these are fine also. If your son does not own a blazer, a nice dress shirt and tie is certainly all right. Prayer books, rosaries, or other items will not be carried by the children in procession; however, they may be held for individual photographs. It is best if parents hold these items for their child during Mass rather than asking the child to keep them in a pocket. They rarely stay in the pocket and become a distraction during Mass.

Once in a while, a family tells me that they have a used suit or dress to sell or to donate. If you have a need, please call me. Perhaps such an item will be available.

Banners

As part of the preparation for First Communion, you are invited as a family to make a banner, which will be hung in church for the First Communion Mass. The banner should be a reflection of the Sacrament of Eucharist. The material may be felt, burlap, satin, or any other suitable fabric; and it may be embellished as you desire. **Please, keep the banner to the dimensions as described on the diagram**, which has been enclosed with this letter.

The banner will be placed in a constructed display along the sides of the church. You may take the banner home with you after the First Communion Mass so that it can be a part of your home celebration.

Please **do not put the banner on a rod or otherwise sew the top closed**. Velcro will be used to enclose the top. **The Velcro should be stitched through** rather than simply glued on. Do not rely on pre-glued Velcro. Although the glue seems really sticky, too often the glue is not sufficient to hold the weight of the banner and we discover that the banner must be pinned—sometimes at the last minute. A few years ago, there were two banners, which had fallen into the aisle mere seconds before the children were to process down that very aisle before Mass.

Please **attach your child's name** to the back of the banner to help us return a banner to any child who might forget to take it home after Mass. Your child's name should be added in a way that does not show through to the front. Be especially careful in the use of markers.

The banner should be brought to School or to SOR no later than May 4. We would like to have the banners in place for the Practice/Retreat.

Whether your child and your child's family wish to make one banner for each member of the family to use or your child will have his or her own banner, this banner is meant to be an opportunity for your child and family to express the sacredness and joy of this occasion. It is not necessary to borrow a banner from another family.

Seating for First Communion

The First Holy Communion class will enter the church alone as a group with reserved seating for them in the front pews on each side of the center aisle.

There will be no reserved seating for parents. Parents may sit in any section in the church on a first come, first served basis. This will enable you to be with other members of your family. Only those who videotape the Mass should sit in the choir loft.

Photography and Videography

A group photo will be taken immediately after the First Communion Mass. Individual photos will also be taken, if indicated on the order form and envelope, which will be sent home with your child on the day of the Practice/Retreat. On the order form, please list the following: St. Mary's First Communion, child's name, parent's name, address, and telephone number. These envelopes should be turned in before the First Communion Mass as we gather in the gym. Photos will be mailed to your home.

You will have the opportunity to take photos on your own, so we ask that you please be respectful of our photographer and allow him to set up the group so that the best photo can be taken and to allow him to get the first shots. We try to line up the children at the Practice/Retreat so everyone can be seen easily, but sometimes adjustments need to be made that day.

Flash photos are not allowed during Mass. Please, do not stand in the aisles for photo taking or at any place on the altar platform or steps, nor in the immediate area around the steps. A couple of instances in previous years have brought up the question as to whether or not individuals should be allowed to take photographs during Mass at all. Some parishes have adopted the policy of no photographs during Mass. I would like to see the opportunity to take photographs continue, but the courtesy and respect of everyone will determine what happens in the future.

We will not have a professional videographer. You are welcome to videotape the Mass—no lights. Video cameras on stands must be set up in the choir loft. Only the persons actually videotaping should be in the choir loft. Other family members should sit in the main body of the church. This will also help reduce unnecessary noise that can spoil the taping.

Anyone who sets up video equipment any place other than in the choir loft will be asked to remove his or her equipment.

Please keep this letter handy and mark your calendars with these important dates and times. And please share the information about photography and videography with family and friends, who will be attending. If you should misplace this letter or banner diagram, copies can be found on our parish website at www.stmarysvanwert.com.

Yours in Christ,

Cheryl L. Freewalt
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