



First Sacraments

Parent & Child Handbook

2025-2026

Welcome Message

Dear Parents,

We are truly blessed and consider it a great joy to support and accompany you in preparing your child for the reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Communion for the *first* time.

Preparation for these sacraments began before your child was even presented at church for Baptism. It has been fostered by every prayer spoken, nourished at every meal shared, told in every Bible story proclaimed, found in every act of forgiveness, every act of charity and love shared, and every liturgy attended. All these acts of faith help children form a relationship with Jesus and with the Church.

The foundation built within your family is the *beginning* of this life-long experience of coming to know Jesus more and more and receiving countless opportunities for grace throughout your child's lifetime. This is why we say the preparation that began for your child with the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist are not complete and, in fact, will not ever be fully concluded until Jesus returns. The ongoing hope is that each of us, children and adults, will continue to grow in our understanding of the mystery of the Eucharist and in our own relationship with God.

St. Charles sacramental preparation is typically over the course of two years. If your child is a student in the parish school, this preparation begins in 1st grade and is completed in 2nd grade. If your child joins us in our after school Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program, this preparation often starts in 1st or 2nd grade and is then completed in 2nd or 3rd grade. If your child begins this process a little later than is typical, we will work with your family on an individual basis as well as have you register your child for one of our faith formation programs. No child will be compelled to receive the sacraments until he/she is ready.



Dear friends, there is no doubt that an unforgettable meeting with Jesus is First Holy Communion, a day to be remembered as one of life's most beautiful. The Eucharist, instituted by Christ at the Last Supper, on the night before his Passion, is a Sacrament of the New Covenant, rather, the greatest of the Sacraments. In this Sacrament, the Lord becomes food for the soul under the appearances of bread and wine. Children receive this Sacrament solemnly the first time in First Holy Communion and are encouraged to receive it afterwards as often as possible in order to remain in close friendship with Jesus.
-- St. Pope John Paul II

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Important Dates

Parent Orientation Meeting

October 13: 2pm *or* 6:30 pm

October 14, 15, 16: 4:45 pm

Blessing of the First Communicants (aka “Bread Ceremony”)

November 15 (5pm) & 16 (9am & 11am)

Sacramental Meditation Series

required for First Communicant and their adult

Parable of the True Vine

Monday, February 16, 2026, 7-8 p.m.

Parable of the Found Coin and the Found Sheep

Tuesday, February 24, 2026, 7-8 p.m.

Parable of the Forgiving Father

Wednesday, March 4, 2026, 7-8 p.m.

Healing of the Roman Centurion’s Servant

Thursday, March 12, 2026, 7-8 p.m.

First Reconciliation Retreat:

February 13, 6-8pm OR February 14, 9-11am

First Reconciliation Service

March 21, 10:00 am or 12:45 pm (for the whole family)

First Communion Retreat:

April 17, 6-8pm or April 18, 9-11am

First Communion Dates (*rehearsal required*)

April 26, 2026 at 2:00 p.m. (Rehearsal April 21, 4:30 or 6:00)

May 3, 2026 at 2:00 p.m. (Rehearsal 28, 4:30 or 6:00)

May Crowning May 13th 6:30 p.m.

Practicalities

01

Attend Parent Orientation

You will receive a link to sign up for one of our parent orientation meetings, October 13 at 2 or 6:30 p.m. or October 14, 15, or 16 at 4:45 p.m.

02

Complete Registration

You will receive a link for a Google Form (via email) after you have attended the parent orientation in October. Please complete this form carefully to ensure that your child's reception of the sacraments is properly recorded.

03

Submit Copy of Baptismal Certificate

Please email or mail a copy of your child's baptismal certificate to Shelly Buchan:

sbuchan@st.charleshartland.org or St. Charles Parish
313 Circle Drive
Hartland, WI 53029

04

First Communion Banners

While these are a lovely tradition at St. Charles and very much enjoyed by the entire parish, they are **not required**.

05

First Communion Attire

Appropriate attire for First Communion is age-appropriate, simple, and modest. Attire should not distract from the reception of the sacrament. The children should be dressed nicely while remembering that interior preparation is more important than external appearances. White is a lovely reminder of their Baptism and the beautiful risen light of Christ they first received that day.

Boys:

Shirt: White, full button dress shirt.

Pants: dress pants with appropriate belt

Tie: Required and suitable for the occasion: solid/stripe/ or subtle print

Shoes: Dark colored dress shoes with dark colored socks

Suit Jackets: encouraged but optional

Optional: boutonniere or special tie clip

Girls:

Dress: White, below or at the knee in length. Shoulders should be covered. No spaghetti straps.

Shoes and Socks: white, low-heeled dress shoes or sandals. *No high heels.* White ankle socks, tights or nude-colored hose.

Veil: A simple veil/ headpiece is welcome but optional.

No gloves, please, if your child will be receiving in the hand.

The Role of Parents in preparing your child for sacraments

Receive the Merciful Love of God

Before being able to extend merciful love to our children, we must open ourselves to receiving the merciful love of God our Father. Do you truly know that He sees you as His beloved, as beautiful and good? Do you also look on yourself with a merciful gaze of compassion? Do you extend that same gaze to your spouse and to your children?

Primary Educator

“Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children.” CCC #2223
Parents primarily catechize their children by living a Christian family life: pray together; eat meals together; delight in your children; enjoy spending time together; allow your children to see you treat others with love and hear you apologize; and allow them to see you kneel before the God who loves you so much.

Attend Mass every Sunday

Make it a family habit to attend Mass every weekend. Have discussions about what you hear, say, and see. Ask Father if you do not know the answers to the questions you have! We have many opportunities at St. Charles for weekend worship: Saturdays at 5pm, and Sundays at 7am, 9am, 11am, and usually 6pm.

Make Confession a Family Habit

It is a great gift to your children to show them you are not perfect, that you are willing to admit that you are wrong and say “I am sorry,” and that you know you are still greatly loved by God. Make Confession a regular or even monthly family outing (mandatory for all to go to the church, but each family member should be free to choose whether to receive the sacrament) - maybe followed by ice cream cones to celebrate the gift you received! We have two opportunities for reconciliation: Thursdays at 5:00pm and Saturdays at 9:30 a.m.

Live the Precepts of the Church

- 1.Attendance at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.
- 2.Confession of sins at least once per year.
- 3.Receive the Eucharist at least once per year.
- 4.Observe the days of fasting and abstinence.
- 5.Provide for the needs of the Church.

Resources to Use at Home

Sacraments are moments and means of encountering God and becoming ever more united with Him by the action of the Holy Spirit and through Christ. The work of preparation does not belong to your Church community alone but is also shared by the family, including your child, and the Holy Spirit. In this time remaining before your child receives the sacraments for the first time, you may ask yourself, “What can I or should I be doing at home right now?” The answer will be as varied as there are children and families preparing. You will want to reflect on your own families’ situation as to what this preparation may look like. It may consist of ritual experiences & expressions, prayer, reading of Sacred Scripture, Liturgical Formation, and reflection. Rest in knowing that some of these elements will occur prior to your child’s celebration of the sacrament, but much of it will occur following the actual celebration of the sacrament for the first time. **What is important for your child before the sacramental celebration is to have a *desire* to receive communion and to *know and recognize* the bread and wine as the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.** Your role is to help them grow in this desire and knowledge/understanding through relationship and formational experiences. Please remember, it is not about *information*; rather, it is about *relationship* - with Jesus Christ.

You may want to consider the following as you continue to explore the Mystery of God with your child at home:

- Describe to your child the day of his/her baptism and why that was such an important and wonderful day for you.
- Tell your child how you chose his/her baptismal name and also how you chose their godparents.
- Share memories about your own first Eucharist and confession.
- Give glory to God together for the gifts He gives you each day.
- Forgive and seek forgiveness. We begin our worship by asking for God’s mercy. Our life at home is sweetened when we “forgive those who trespass against us.”
- Pray in daily life. It prepares us to respond to the celebrant’s call at Mass, “Let us pray.” Use the siren of an ambulance, firetruck or police car to trigger an invitation to pray together for the safety of the person in need or the first responder. Pray for a safe trip when you get in the car or thank God every time you arrive safely at your destination. Say a brief prayer when you pass a Catholic Church, acknowledging Jesus’ particular presence there.

Prayers to Know

While there is great beauty in your child offering praise, thanksgiving, and petitions to God in their own words, it is also a gift to your child to be introduced to a prayer language that enables them to pray together with others and to pray in the moments when words fail them. Rather than focusing on memorizing these prayers, pick one to pray as a family each day for a month.

Does your family already pray these prayers? Look to the liturgies of the Church and the Psalms for more options to pray as a family.

The 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.

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.

Nightly Examen

A nightly examen helps us to grow closer to Jesus by reflecting on our day with Him. We praise God for the many gifts received, consider what went well, as well as our mistakes and sins, and ask Jesus to help us follow him more closely tomorrow.

Create Silence:

We quiet our hearts and our bodies, thanking Jesus for being with us today and opening our hearts to His presence. You can use the following words or perhaps you have your own:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. God, I know you are with me and you love me. Help me to see your love clearly.

Gratitude:

Replay your day through your head like a movie:

What gifts of God did I receive today? Where did I feel joy?

All these moments were gifts from you, God. Thank you for helping me to know how much you love me and for helping me to receive the fullness of your life and joy.

Spirit of Truth:

Come, Holy Spirit. You are wanted. You are needed. Help me to see my day through you so I can know how much you love me and how to follow you better.

Review:

Replay your day through your head like a movie once more:

What went well? What moments could I have lived better?

What was the happiest moment? What was the most frustrating? What gifts of love did I give to others? What was a really difficult thing today? When did I choose not to love?

Pray the Day:

What do you think Jesus says about your day? What do you want to say to Jesus about your day? How can you live tomorrow better? Make your resolution actionable*!

Jesus, I love you. Thank you for the gifts of this day. I am sorry for the moments when I chose not to love. Help me to follow you more closely tomorrow by...

*An actionable resolution is specific and concrete. "I will smile and say hello to my teacher" or "I will not run at lunchtime" is better than "I'll be good tomorrow."

Reconciliation Resources

Turn to Jesus with great trust and allow yourself to be loved by Him. The past belongs to His mercy, the future to His providence, and the present to His love. -Mother Teresa of Calcutta

We prepare carefully for and even celebrate a child's first time receiving this beautiful Sacrament of Reconciliation with God, but let's not forget that we call this "first" reconciliation, clearly indicating that we do not receive this gift just once. In fact, the Church requires Catholics to go to Reconciliation at least once a year, but it is strongly recommended we receive this sacrament on a monthly basis. Our regular times for Reconciliation at St. Charles are Saturday 9:30am – 10:30am and Thursday 5:00pm – 6:00pm.

When and how did this Sacrament begin?

Because we are human, we struggle with sin. When we sin, we hurt ourselves and others and damage our relationship with God and with each other. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we acknowledge our sins before God and the Church, we express our sorrow in a meaningful way, we make some reparation for what we have done, and we resolve to do better in the future. In return we receive the forgiveness of Christ and His Church and God's abundant grace and mercy.

God sent His Son to reconcile the world to Himself. You are probably familiar with the Biblical reference "John 3:16," which often shows up at sporting events. Have you read it recently? It is really the heart of the matter.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. John 3:16-17

The Bible tells us that Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Reconciliation on the evening of His Resurrection.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." John 20:19-23

This authority given to the Apostles to forgive sins has been passed on through the generations by the laying on of hands in the ordination of bishops and priests. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation the priest acts as a representative of Christ and the entire Christian community, enabling us to be forgiven of our sins and reconciled with God, with the Church, and with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Why does this one Sacrament have so many names?

Each name emphasizes a different aspect of this great sacrament of forgiveness and healing.

Confession – Admitting our sins to a priest.

Penance – A prayer or task the priest assigns us to help us turn towards God and away from sin.

Reconciliation – Being made right with God and others.

We favor the term “Reconciliation” (even though it’s the longest word) because it paints a more complete picture of what this Sacrament is about.

Why do the children receive this Sacrament for the first time right now?

Children at about this age (which the Church identifies as reaching “the age of reason”) are beginning to struggle with temptations to do wrong, which can be difficult, confusing and even scary as well as potentially leading them to make bad choices.

What we do in preparing them for this beautiful Sacrament, and what the Sacrament itself provides, is offer them tools to deal with these struggles in a happy, healthy and holy way.

God made us in His image and likeness with a free will and the ability to choose good or evil. Because of our fallen nature, we struggle with evil and need God’s help. Children at this age definitely understand that God doesn’t force us to do good or control us like puppets. They know that if he did treat us like that he wouldn’t actually be a good God.

God’s love for us is everlasting. We are always in the process of growing, and in the process, we stumble and need forgiveness and the chance to start over again. He delights in helping us when we ask Him for help, but He won’t force Himself upon us.

Getting in the habit of examining ourselves and seeking forgiveness, even for smaller or venial sins, will help keep us from committing more serious or mortal sins in the future.

Important Note:

Because we are only able to be in communion with Jesus (literally – in union with) after we are reconciled (or in right relationship) with Him, the children are supposed to receive First Reconciliation before their First Holy Communion. There was a relatively short period in our Archdiocese where switching the order of these sacraments was experimented with, which was the experience of a number of our parents. Please reach out if you have any questions or concerns about this.

Children at this age are beginning to develop the capacity for the following*:

- Recognize the difference between accidents, mistakes, and deliberate wrong.
- Understand the need to say “I’m sorry” when they hurt another person.
- Forgive others.
- Accept personal responsibility for decisions regarding right and wrong (and the consequences).
- Realize that they must try to change selfish, unloving behavior.
- Understand that God is always forgiving, but expects them to forgive others in return.
- Understand that the priest and the Church have a special role in bringing us God’s forgiveness.

**(We are not talking about mastery of these things, rather we are referring to the beginning of what we all know to be a lifelong process for each of us.)*

What do the children need to know about sin?

Your child needs to know that people easily fall into sin because of Original Sin (that is, the sin of Adam and Eve). Children of this age aren't likely to commit serious (or mortal) sin, so it's good to focus on the beauty and goodness of staying close to God and acknowledging that sin is selfishly and deliberately failing to love God or others. Sin blocks happiness, peace, and joy because it gets in the way of God's grace.

We hold two things in tension here:

1. Some choices are wrong and need to be addressed.
2. We are all human and struggle with this. Parents are in an ideal position to both recognize the need for limits and consequences and be able to empathize with the challenges the child is going through.

Note: One really helpful suggestion in working through the struggles of moral formation with your children is to ask clarifying questions before jumping to conclusions. Even if an act is objectively wrong, context can be a big help.

It is important for your child to understand the conditions necessary for sin:

- A person must know that something is wrong and
- He/she choose to do it anyway and/or refuses to do something that is right

Serious sin cuts us off from God and *requires* the Sacrament of Reconciliation to repair. But the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not just for serious sins, it's a healthy and essential habit that helps us avoid getting into serious sin in the first place. Here's what the Catechism of the Catholic Church says about confessing our smaller sins:

...the regular confession of everyday faults (venial sins) is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church. Indeed the regular confession of our venial sins helps us form our conscience, fight against evil tendencies, let ourselves be healed by Christ and progress in the life of the Spirit. By receiving more frequently through this sacrament the gift of the Father's mercy, we are spurred to be merciful as he is merciful.

--- The Catechism of the Catholic Church #1458

Helping our children make the Sacrament of Reconciliation a normal and habitual part of their lives is a bit like teaching our children habits of hygiene for the sake of their health, peace, comfort and social consciousness. We don't teach our children to shower only if they've fallen in the mud, nor do we have them reserve this beautiful Sacrament only for mortal sin.

Note: We have a First Reconciliation Tutorial Video that's intended to help children prepare for the Sacrament. Please make sure that the children understand that this is a pretend Confession – we would never record a real one. You can find it using this QR Code or clicking the link below:



[First Reconciliation
Tutorial Video](#)

Preparing for First Reconciliation

Some Topics to Ponder, Discuss and Apply at Home

God's Great Love for Us: The most important thing to remember about the Sacrament of Reconciliation is often forgotten: it actually *starts* with God's great love for us and His desire for us to be united with Him forever. God gives us the free will to choose between good and evil because we are not robots – but He also delights in helping us when we acknowledge that we struggle with sin and ask for His help. Children tend to understand God's love through their experiences of love in their own family. Work to make simple expressions of love a habit, such as ending family phone calls with “I love you.”

We Need God:

An essential part of Reconciliation is acknowledging that evil is a problem for all of us and that we need God's help to overcome it. This is a beautiful time to develop this habit in your family by stopping to pray for any kind of need or struggle – including the struggle to do good – as well as making the Sacrament of Reconciliation a regular part of your family's life together.

Gratitude:

We should be grateful when we realize how much God loves us. Gratitude makes us happier and more prepared to accept God's graces. Here are some ways to encourage gratitude in your home:

- Cultivate an atmosphere of appreciation by thanking God and each other on a regular basis.
- Include “Thank you God today for...” in your bedtime prayers (and share your answers out loud).
- Individually or as a family make lists of things that you are grateful for.

Empathy:

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. Your child is old enough to be aware of how others feel and how their actions affect others. These ideas can help:

- Invite your child to imagine being one of the characters in a book or movie. Ask, “What would you do if you were there?”
- Stop your child if he or she is being unkind. Review the situation together and try to imagine how the other person feels. Do the same when your child's feelings have been hurt by someone else.
- Talk about situations in your life at work and your child's life at school that call for empathy and compassion.

Self-Awareness:

When children grow up in an atmosphere that is both attentive and nurturing, their self-awareness will naturally expand. Here are some more ways you can help this happen:

- Have a gentle conversation after your child has made a bad choice to help you both understand the child's motives. “What were you hoping would happen?” is a way to discover motives that might otherwise remain unclear. (Taking time to ask questions before reacting can be really helpful.)
- Encourage silent prayer in addition to “out loud” prayers and informal prayers in their own words in addition to memorized prayers. Ask your child to consider how he or she feels about the day and what thoughts are stuck in their head.
- Find ways to show love for each other, whether it's greeting each other with a hug in the morning or remembering to say “I love you” at the end of a phone conversation.

Taking Responsibility:

Children learn right from wrong primarily and especially in the midst of everyday family life. Parents intervene in many small ways to guide their children's behavior, which increases their ability to make good moral choices.

Accepting responsibility places in your child's hands the power to act differently the next time, rather than finding someone else to blame. Here are a few suggestions to nourish this skill:

- Try to provide a shame-free environment in which both you and your child can take responsibility for mistakes and wrongdoing.
- Acknowledge your child's honesty and courage when they admit a mistake or wrongdoing.
- If you see your child involved in an argument with someone, stop the action and ask each person to tell—"What's my part in this situation?"
- If your child has trouble acknowledging a poor choice, "brainstorm" alternatives by asking, "What else might you have done when that happened?"

Apologizing:

Because healing and reconciliation come through an honest admission of our own behavior and its consequences, we owe it to our children to gently coach them in the beautiful and very necessary skill of apologizing.

Here are three steps necessary to any apology:

- I admit what I've done.
- I say I'm sorry.
- I do something to make up for the wrong I have done.

There are no "buts" included in an apology. We don't say, "I'm sorry that I teased you, BUT you made me angry." An apology is the time to acknowledge and accept that your actions have hurt others and to express your sincere sorrow for what you've done. Apologies strengthen relationships with others. It takes a lifetime to learn the skill of making apologies!

Conscience:

The word conscience is rather abstract for children of this age. Developing one's conscience is a lifetime task. Parents can help their children get off to a good start by:

- Talk about your own values in light of the entertainment choices your family makes—books, games, TV programs etc.
- Read Bible stories with your children such as the Good Samaritan, the Good Shepherd, Jesus calming the storm, and the Prodigal Son.
- Talk about what it means to listen to this inner voice that God gives us to help guide us.

Forgiveness:

It's good that our children learn to develop a sense of right and wrong and to know when they have committed a sin. It is also necessary in their moral development to grow in the ability to accept and receive the gift of God's forgiveness and to, in turn, forgive those who ask them for forgiveness.

Here are some ways you can help your child grow in this ability:

- Some children are more likely to hang on to guilt and self-blame. Keep working with your child to ask for forgiveness and then let go. Help them not to hold grudges against others!
- Allow for fresh starts and forgive cleanly. Don't hold previous mistakes over your child's head by bringing them up over and over again.
- Pray the "Our Father" together and emphasize the phrase "Forgive us our trespasses." (Jesus taught us to confidently ask God for forgiveness.)
- Talk about how God's grace and forgiveness are always there. Each time you wash your hands, think of God's love flowing over you like the water. Encourage your child to say thank you to God for this endless supply of love.

Examination of Conscience for Children

In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus tells us about two Great Commandments to help us to do what is good and to live the way that God wants us to live. He says,”

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength. This is the greatest and the first commandment.*

The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Use the following questions to help you examine your conscience as you prepare for Reconciliation. You can also consider Jesus’ Maxims on the following pages and how you have or have not lived according to Jesus’ commandments.

Love God with All Your Heart:

- Do I think about God and pray to God every day?
- Do I ask for God’s help when I am tempted to sin?
- Do I think it is important to go to church and pray with other members of the Christian community?
- Do I say God’s name with love rather than using God’s name carelessly or in anger?
- Do I thank God because He loves me and because He gives me many people who love and care for me?
- Do I ask God to forgive me when I sin or make unloving choices?

Love Your Neighbor:

- Do I love, respect, and obey my parents by not talking back to them and doing what they ask?
- Do I follow my parents’ rules even when they can’t see me?
- Do I respect and obey my teachers?
- Do I share with my brothers, sisters, and friends and speak kindly to them?
- Do I always tell the truth and not lie even though I might get scolded or punished for something I have done wrong?
- Am I honest about doing my own homework rather than copying from my friends?
- Do I play games fairly and not cheat just to win?
- Do I respect what belongs to others and not feel jealous because someone has something that I want?
- Do I keep my temper and not be angry or say rude things to others?
- Am I kind to others and not hurtful?
- Do I ask others to forgive me when I have hurt them, and do I forgive others when they ask me?

Love Yourself:

- Do I take good care of my body by eating good food, trying to get enough sleep, and being active?
- Do I do my best at home and school?
- Do I love myself because I know that God loves me?

Examination of Conscience Using Jesus' Maxims

The “maxims” along with the Summary of the Law in Matthew 22:37-39 are meant to be a resource for you and your child. In Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, we do not focus on the 10 Commandments when preparing for First Reconciliation. Instead, we look to the “maxims” – sayings of Jesus which encapsulate all that is contained within the 10 Commandments...plus so much more! We will work with the maxims in the atrium. These maxims are not guidelines but commands. He says that we “must” be perfect. But this doesn’t mean “we” must do it. We must ask Jesus to help us live the light we received from Him at our Baptism so that HE can make us perfect in love, and so His light might shine brightly in us. (That maxim is the most intimidating – the most difficult to understand. If you have questions on other maxims, please do not hesitate to ask about them.) The children will use these maxims as their examination of conscience before their first Reconciliation. It is a gift to them to be familiar with them.

Please use these maxims in your home. Perhaps you might incorporate them into your bedtime or dinner routine. Read one maxim each night and have a short discussion about how to live that maxim well...or better yet, let your child talk about how to live out that maxim. You might be surprised at the depth of their understanding! You might choose to focus on one maxim per week – revisiting it each night in light of the day’s events, or you could choose a new maxim each day, repeating them until your child (and you!) know many of them by heart. If you have a Bible in your home, you and your child could also look these up together.

As you spend time reflecting on the maxims, you might find one of them coming to mind as you reflect on situations in your day. THIS IS THE GOAL! On the following pages, you will find some questions to help guide your discussions of these maxims.

A Special Note:

We know that your lives are filled with many pressing needs and your time is so very limited. However, I cannot overemphasize the importance of your help in preparing your child for his/her First Reconciliation and First Communion. Your time with your children is so very valuable, and you as their parents are the ones that they will use as models for their lives. Please make this a priority during these next few weeks and months...so that they will make it a priority throughout their lives! Thank you for your understanding and assistance, and thank you for allowing us to help you in your spiritual formation of your children!

Discussion Points on Jesus' "Laws of Love," The Maxims:

When Jesus lived on earth, someone asked him what the most important of the Ten Commandments was. He answered with what we often call the Laws of Love (which has two parts):

You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind.
(Matthew 22:37)

How can we love God with our whole heart? What kind of things might get in the way? How can we love God with our whole soul? What is a soul? (*the deepest part of you*) How can we love God with our whole mind? (*you decide to do that, you make the choice*) Could you choose things worthy of your intelligence? Are there things that we could put in our mind that would keep us from loving God with our mind? Are there things we might put in our minds that would keep us away from God? What do you think it would be like if everyone loved God in this way? Would you like to be in a place like that?

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:39b)

What do you think that means? Who is your neighbor? Does this include your family?

In the Bible we can read some of the things Jesus told us about how we can love God and how we can love our neighbor. We call these "Maxims."

Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:48)

How is God perfect? (In his love – this verse is in the context of "Love your enemies.") So, what is Jesus saying here? (Love like your Father loves.) Do you think Jesus would ask us to do something we can't do? Would Jesus tell us we must do something when He knows that we can't? Do you think Jesus knows us? Do you think maybe He will help us to do this if we ask Him?

Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 6:19)

Who made your body? What good things can you do with your body? Can you say things with your body? (*gestures, like waving hello or a thumbs-up*) How can you say good things with your body? What is a temple? Why do you think Jesus calls our body a temple? Do you think you could pray with your body?

When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret.
(Matthew 6:6a)

Do you think this means that you can never pray with other people? Can you pray in your heart when other people are around? Do you think this means that you can only pray if you have your own bedroom? I wonder what He means by "inner room?" Do you think this might connect with the last maxim: "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?" How? What do you think the word "secret" means here? What does it mean to pray? What is the difference between praying and saying a prayer? Do you have to use certain words when you pray? Is praying only about talking to God? How can we listen to God? Is there something we can do with our body to help us listen better? Why is praying important?

Forgive... not seven times but seventy-seven times. (Matthew 18:21b-22)

What does it mean to forgive? Do we ever do wrong things and have to say sorry or ask for forgiveness? When you are sorry for doing something wrong, do you feel better after someone forgives you? Does God forgive us? I wonder why He forgives us? Do you think Jesus wants us to count or keep track of how many times we forgive?

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. (Matthew 7:7)

What do you think Jesus is saying here? Jesus is telling us to do something. What is He telling us to do? For each action (ask, seek, knock): What does that mean? How do we do it? What will happen when we do it? I wonder if these are some of the ways that we can talk to God?

Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. (Matthew 7:12)

What kinds of things do you want others to do to you? Why? Do you think this might be hard sometimes? Is it worth it? What would it be like to live in a world where everyone did this? What would your home or your school be like if everyone did this?

Love your enemies. (Matthew 5:44a)

Who is your enemy? (This could be as simple as someone who is hard for them to love or someone who can't love them back, like an annoying younger sibling, or someone that frustrates them a lot.) How can you love your enemy? Is it ever okay to do something bad just because someone else is doing something bad? Would it help in any way to do that? What is Jesus saying we should do? Do you have to like your enemies in order to love them? What do you think could happen if you love your enemy? What would it be like if all of us loved our enemies? Would you like to be in a place where everyone loved their enemies?

I give you a new commandment: love one another as I have loved you. (John 13:34)

How does God love us? How does He see us? How can we love more like God loves us? How did God show His love for us? Is it possible for us to love this much? Why would Jesus ask us to do this? How does He make it possible for us?

Do good to those who hate you. (Luke 6:27b)

What good things can you do for those who hate you? Why?

Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on the one who wants to borrow. (Matthew 5:42)

What are some of the gifts that God has given you? Do you have any gifts that aren't really from God? What do you think God wants us to do with those gifts? Would God like it if we cared more about our gifts than about other people?

When you give alms, do not blow your trumpet before you. (Matthew 6:2a)

What are alms? What does it mean to blow a trumpet before you? What kinds of things could you give as alms? Do you think God would want you to brag when you did something nice for someone else? Why not? Why would God care about this? What would it be like if there were no bragging and people just did good things to do good things? Wouldn't that be beautiful?

Let your 'yes' mean 'yes', and your 'no' mean 'no'. (Matthew 5:37a)

How can my yes mean yes and my no mean no? What happens when I don't follow this maxim? I wonder why it's so important to tell the truth?

CONFESSION MADE EASY

YOU | PRIEST

In the name of the
Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit

*As you make the sign
of the Cross*

May the Lord be in your heart
and help you to confess your
sins with true sorrow

1



Bless me Father for I have sinned.
It has been... weeks/months/years
since my last confession

*Approximate, if you don't
remember*

My sins are...

*Then confess your sins,
simply and sincerely*

2



3

Priest gives some advice



*He gives you a penance,
which is usually to recite
a prayer*

You express contrition saying

Lord Jesus, Son of God,
have mercy on me a sinner

*Or you can say an act of
contrition you may know*

4



*In Jesus' name,
the priest then says*

5



I absolve you from your sins in
the name of the Father, and of
the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

*He then invites you to go in peace,
having been forgiven by God.*



OUR LADY
QUEEN OF PEACE

Merrion Road, Dublin 4 Ireland
Tel: +353 (0)1 269 1825

Guide for First Reconciliation

Steps for First Reconciliation:

1. Sit in the chair across from the priest and say “Good Morning” or “Good Afternoon.”
2. Make the Sign of the Cross with him.
3. Say “Bless me Father for I have sinned” and tell him your sins.
4. Listen to the priest and remember the penance he gives you.
5. Pray the Act of Contrition when asked (see below).
6. Make the Sign of the Cross at the end of the prayer that the priest says.
7. Say “Thank you!”

The 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



[First Reconciliation Tutorial Video Link](#)

Holy Communion Resources

Although we have a large celebration for a child's first time receiving Holy Communion, unlike Baptism, which can only happen once, receiving Holy Communion is intended to be a part of the regular celebration every week at Mass. Catholics are required to attend Mass every Sunday (or Saturday evening) and all Holy Days of Obligation and receive Holy Communion at least once a year.

What does the Bible say about the Eucharist?

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.

– Matthew 26:26-28

"I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.

"Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him."

– John 6: 48-51, 53-56

This "Bread of Life Discourse" from the Gospel of John was a hard teaching for some of his disciples. A little later in the same chapter, John writes that "As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him."

What does the Catholic Church teach about the Eucharist?

The Eucharist is not just a symbol. It is the actual Body and Blood of Jesus, which still retains the appearance and taste of bread and wine. The Eucharist is a beautiful gift from God. Through it we receive God's grace, have minor sins forgiven, grow more like Him and are more united to each other.

Jesus is present body, blood, soul and divinity, in both species (bread and wine), which is why even a sensitive celiac, who can only receive from the chalice, is not sacramentally short-changed in any way. The same thing is true if you were to receive only part of a host. You still receive all of Jesus. It's part of the mystery.

Because we are worshipping and receiving Jesus, we need to treat the Eucharist with the utmost respect. We do this by:

- Attending Mass on all Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. Because Jesus is giving us the greatest gift of Himself, this obligation and this gift need to be treated with the utmost priority and respect.
- Having our hearts prepared for Communion by regularly receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Serious sin requires going to Reconciliation before receiving Holy Communion, but it's a good practice to receive Reconciliation on a regular basis.

- Carefully preparing children to receive the Sacrament.
- Giving the Eucharist a place of honor in every Catholic Church – called the tabernacle – with Christ’s presence indicated by the glow of the sanctuary lamp. (Children particularly love this – so maybe take a little time before or after Mass to take a closer look.)
- Fasting (no food or drink except for water) for an hour before Communion so that we are hungry for Jesus!
- Dressing and behaving with respect – including not chewing gum in Church!
- Using reverent gestures, such as blessing ourselves when we come and go from Church, genuflecting towards the tabernacle and receiving the Eucharist in a reverent manner.

The Holy Mass is such a beautiful and rich event that we can never exhaust what it has to offer. That doesn’t mean that we always feel like we are getting something out of it. We are there to worship our God. When we start out simply coming every week out of gratitude for the many gifts that God has given us and persist even when it’s boring or inconvenient (or the kids are really challenging), it changes us, and it’s a really good opportunity for our children to see that the world doesn’t revolve around us – that there’s something greater than what the world has to offer.

Taking your child to Sunday Mass is one of the most important ways that you can fulfill the promise you made to God at your child’s Baptism. Sunday Mass is a requirement for all Catholics.

At St. Charles this includes five different options each weekend –

Saturdays at 5 pm

Sundays at 7 am, 9 am, 11 am

Sundays at 6pm (with a few exceptions)

We are excused from Mass when we are sick (or when caring for a child who is sick). Livestreaming of Masses is a beautiful gift for Catholics who can’t attend Sunday Mass because they are sick or homebound or for those who can’t attend a wedding or funeral because of the distance. However, **watching Mass on Livestream does not fulfill our obligation to attend Sunday Mass.**

What is Eucharistic Adoration?

Many parishes set aside prayer times, called Eucharistic Adoration, where the host that is Jesus is placed in a special ornamental holder (called a monstrance) for people to pray near. Adoration takes place in the Adoration Chapel almost 24/7. For more information about Eucharistic Adoration or to sign up for a time to be a regular adorer, visit the [St. Charles website here](#).

What does the Catechism of the Catholic Church say about the Eucharist?

At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet ‘in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.’ – Catechism of the Catholic Church #1323

The Eucharist, the sacrament of our salvation accomplished by Christ on the cross, is also a sacrifice of praise in thanksgiving for the work of creation. In the Eucharistic sacrifice the whole of creation loved by God is presented to the Father through the death and the Resurrection of Christ. Through Christ the Church can offer the sacrifice of praise in thanksgiving for all that God has made good, beautiful, and just in creation and in humanity. – Catechism of the Catholic Church #1359

What does my child need to know to be ready for First Holy Communion?

There is a lot we can, should, and will do to help children grow in their faith during their time of Sacramental preparation, but there are two pieces that are particularly crucial.

1. Your child needs to believe that the Eucharist is truly Jesus.

There will likely be some clarifying of their understanding during this process. Sometimes they think the Eucharist will taste like body and blood, so it can be a relief for them to learn that the bread and wine still look, taste and smell like bread and wine even after they have become Jesus. It's okay if your child has weird questions. That's normal for this age and this process. Feel free to reach out if you need any help answering their questions.

It is also important that your child desires to receive Holy Communion. This is best nurtured by bringing them to Mass with you every Sunday.

2. Your child needs to be able to receive the Eucharist reverently.

The mechanics of receiving Holy Communion can be challenging for a child in 2nd or 3rd grade. Again, the best preparation for receiving reverently is to attend Mass weekly. Your child can walk up to communion with you with their hands folded. This is a good opportunity for them to practice walking up reverently, but they can also observe the other steps in the process.

It's okay if they make mistakes. We're really looking to prepare them the best we can, and we're looking for a reasonable amount of cooperation on their part.

During our First Communion rehearsals, the children will have an opportunity to thoroughly practice the important steps of receiving Holy Communion, including practicing receiving an unconsecrated host. We also have a video on our main First Communion page that helpfully illustrates the process.

Note: If you've been away from the Sacraments for awhile (which is not uncommon), this is a perfect year to get back on board. Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions about how to do this, if you're missing some Sacraments, or if you or your spouse are not Catholic and have questions or interest in learning more.



[Video Link “How to Receive Holy Communion”](#)

An Overview of the Mass

The Mass is the most important and sacred act of worship in the Catholic Church. Going to Mass is the only way a Catholic can fulfill the Third Commandment to keep holy the Sabbath day and provides the only regular opportunity to receive the Holy Eucharist.

The Mass incorporates the Bible, prayer, sacrifice, hymns, symbols, gestures, sacred food for the soul, and directions on how to live a Catholic life — all in one ceremony.

There are two main parts of the Mass: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Penitential Rite: After the priest and his attendants process to the altar, the priest and congregation participate in a simple acknowledgement that everyone is a sinner, has sinned to some degree over the last week, and needs God's help to do better. Next is the Kyrie (Lord Have Mercy), which asks for God's loving and healing mercy. ([Click here to read more about the meaning of this phrase.](#))

The **Gloria** (or "Glory to God") contains the joyful words of the angels announcing the birth of the Savior Jesus to the Shepherds on the First Christmas. It is a hymn of adoration to God that is generally sung on Sundays and special feast days.

Scripture Readings: What follows are four pieces from the Bible. The First Reading is taken from the Old Testament and is followed by the Psalm (which is generally sung). The Second Reading is from the Acts of the Apostles or one of the Letters of the New Testament. Following these readings, the congregation, which has been sitting, stands while the priest or deacon reads the Holy Gospel, which contains the very words and deeds of Christ and requires the respect shown by standing. The readings have been carefully selected by the Church not only to fit with the seasons and themes but also to connect with each other in some ways. There are often striking similarities between the First Reading (from the Old Testament) and the Gospel.

Homily: The congregation sits and listens to the homily, which is an explanation and reflection on the Word of God. The priest or deacon connects the Scripture readings to the daily lives of the people, the teachings of the Church, or the particular celebration at hand.

Creed: The homily is followed by the Profession of Faith, or Creed, which succinctly sums up all the teachings of the Church.

General Intercessions: We pray for specific intentions, always including the pope, the Church, our country, current concerns, and a special intention for that particular Mass. The response is generally "Lord, hear our prayer."

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Offertory: As the Liturgy of the Eucharist begins, everyone is seated as the altar is prepared by the servers, baskets are passed to collect monetary offerings to help run the parish, and members of the congregation bring up our offerings of bread and wine that will become the Body and Blood of Jesus. We offer ourselves to God, along with the other gifts, that “we may come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.”

The deacon or priest pours wine into the chalice and adds a few drops of water to symbolize our union with Christ. The priest lifts the host above the altar as an offering to God, then does the same with the wine-filled chalice.

After the ***Sanctus*** (Holy, Holy) is sung, the congregation kneels for the first time for the holiest part of the Mass, the Eucharistic Prayer – which includes the Consecration, when the Bread and Wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus.

There are two things to take special note of here.

The Epiclesis: The priest holds his hands out over the Bread and Wine and asks the Holy Spirit to come down upon these gifts to make them holy. The bells will ring at this point. (We teach the children that the bells tell them to pay attention.)

The Consecration: Here the priest uses the words of Jesus at the Last Supper:

Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my Body, which will be given up for you.

When the priest holds up the host and the bells ring, we know that he is now holding the Body of Christ. Similarly with the wine, the priest again uses the words of Jesus:

Take this, all of you, and drink from it, for this is the chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.

When the priest holds up the chalice and the bells ring, we know that the chalice he is holding now contains the Blood of Christ.

Our Father and Sign of Peace: We pray the Our Father and then offer those near to us a sign of peace before the real and most intimate sign of unity that we receive in Holy Communion.

The ***Agnus Dei*** (Lamb of God): This prayer asks God for mercy and peace, after which the people kneel in prayer before lining up to receive the Holy Eucharist.



[Video Link “How to Receive Holy Communion”](#)

Reception of Holy Communion: Catholics who are in a state of grace approach the priest or Eucharistic minister, make a sign of reverence (bow of the head, sign of the cross, genuflection or kneeling) and then receive Holy Communion.

When presenting the consecrated Host, the priest, deacon or extraordinary minister says “**the Body of Christ**” to which the recipient replies “**Amen,**” signifying, “Yes, I do believe it is Jesus.” If the Precious Blood is offered, the communicant may go to the person holding it who says, “**the Blood of Christ,**” and reply again, “**Amen.**”

After receiving Holy Communion, the faithful return to their pews, kneel and pray silently.

The Mass ends with the priest blessing the congregation and sending them forth to spread the Word of God and put it into practice.

Further Reading for Parents:

- *A Devotional Journey into the Mass: How Mass Can Become a Time of Grace, Nourishment, and Devotion* by Christopher Carstens

Picture Books for Children:

- [The Illustrated Gospel for Children](#) by Jean-Francois Kieffer and Christine Ponsard
- [The Illustrated Acts of the Apostles for Children](#) by Jean-Francois Kieffer and Christine Ponsard

Even alongside some reading from a real Holy Bible, these comic-style illustrated picture books are a nice way to gain greater familiarity with the stories and interest in the person of Jesus and his Apostles. One way to help your children get more interested in a Bible story is to read it first from one of these books and then re-read the story from the real Bible afterwards. (References from the Bible are thoughtfully included at the beginning of each story.)

- [God the Father’s Loving Plan](#) by Jean Ann Sharpe

This is a beautifully illustrated overview of the story of Salvation History. So simple that they make it in a board book format as well as a softcover format (I recommend the latter); this has plenty of material for an adult to meditate on, as well. This would be a particularly lovely book for a First Communicant to enjoy with their parents.

- [Little Acts of Grace](#) by Rosemarie Gortler and Donna Piscitelli

This is a very sweet book which explains different ways that we can show our love and reverence for God. We did use this in the classroom, so you can show the picture to your child to see if they are interested in re-reading it or reading more of it.

- [Look and Be Grateful](#) by Tomie dePaola

This is simple and lovely picture book that illustrates the importance of taking time to pay attention to and be grateful for God’s gifts. It is perhaps just simple enough that it would be ideal for a First Communicant to read and enjoy with a younger sibling.

- [Miracles of Jesus](#) by Tomie dePaola

This lovely classic picture book from perhaps the greatest Catholic picture book author of all time offers a page-long story of many of Jesus’ beautiful miracles from the Bible. This is another book that we use in our Child Formation classes, so your child may already be familiar with it.

First Communion Banner Instructions

Note: First Communion Banners are a lovely tradition at St. Charles and very much enjoyed by the entire parish but are not required.

Instructions for Homemade Banners:

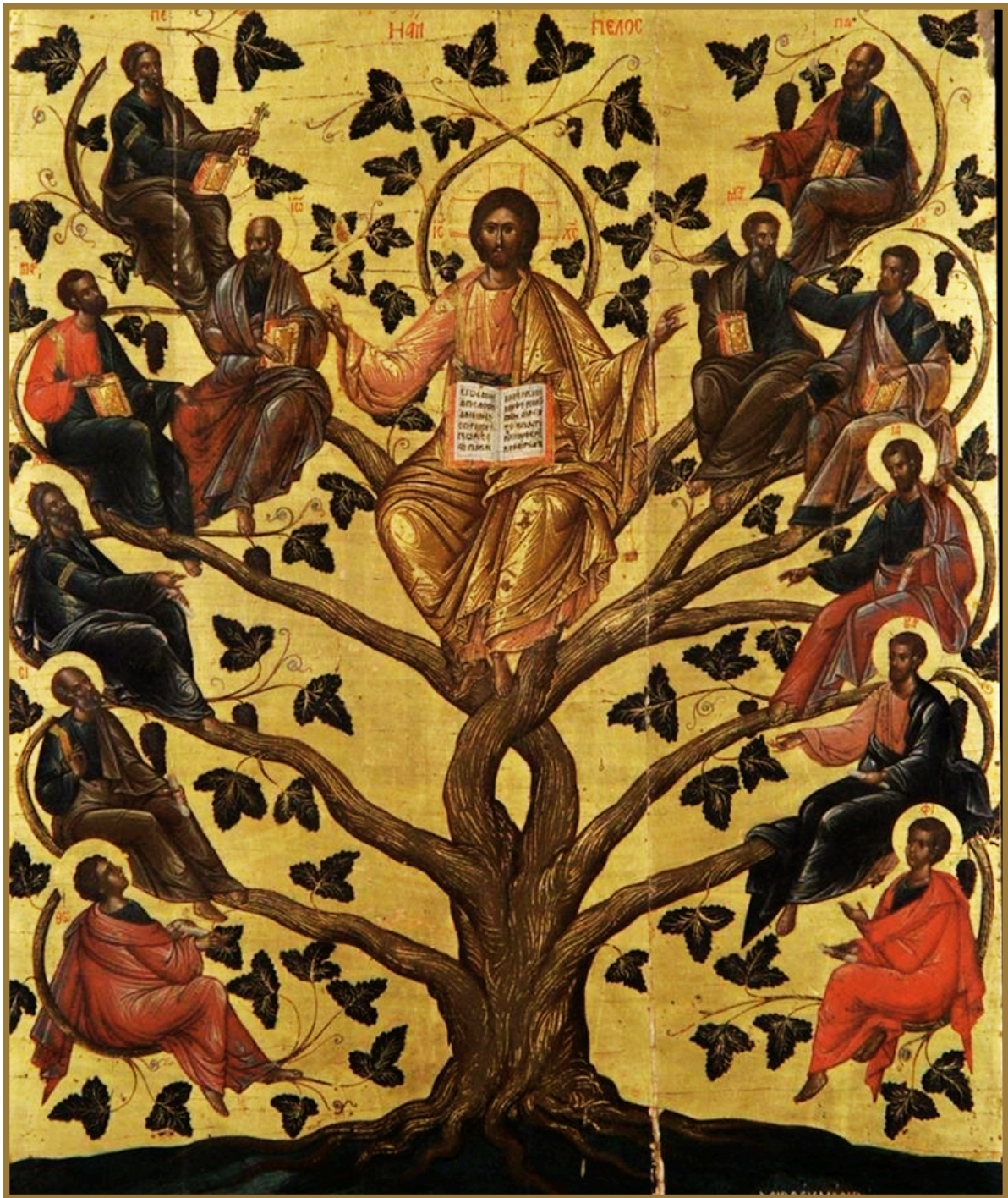
- Purchase a piece of fabric (e.g. felt) measuring 12 inches wide by 24 inches long. Please let your child pick the color.
- Sew a one-inch hem on each side and the bottom. Use a machine zig-zag or straight stitch or stitch by hand. (You can turn under $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, and then turn again before stitching to prevent fraying on fussy fabrics).
- Form a casing at the top to hang the banner by turning down 1 inch and stitching. (By the time you have hemmed and made a casing for the wire, the finished piece will be 10 inches wide by 22 inches long.)
- Cut Eucharistic symbols from felt or other suitable fabric to glue or stitch to the banner. These symbols could be a chalice, a host, wheat, grapes, or any other appropriate symbol. Your child's first name should be part of the banner. Please mark your child's last name on the back of the banner so that we can return it to you.

The banners will be hung on the windows and glass doors of the corridor on the south side of the Church. Please drop off your child's banner by April 1st. We will return it to you through your child's class after **both** First Communions are over.

Banner Kits: You may also choose to purchase a First Communion banner kit (see examples below – which are from Illuminated Ink, a small Catholic business that sells through Amazon) as long as it contains appropriate Eucharistic symbols. The banners made from kits tend to be smaller than the homemade banners, which is not a problem!

Whether you make a homemade banner or purchase a kit, please allow your child to be involved in planning and constructing the banner as much as they wish to. We hope that this banner will be both a lovely preparation for and a happy remembrance of your child's First Holy Communion.





I am the vine; you are the branches...Now, remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's command and remain in His love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. (John 15)