

**Saint Michael the Archangel Catholic Church**  
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March 5, 2019

Dear Parishioners,

The reception of the Sacraments is always a special moment in our lives. Parents have the right and obligation to be the first teachers of their children in matters of faith and thus in the education and preparation of their children for the reception of the sacraments. We as a parish have the obligation to assist parents in their obligation of passing on the faith. Through faith we come to know that the sacraments are an outward sign of God's grace. A moment in time in which God's love is apparent in our lives.

This year we have made changes in our faith formation program in the reception of the Sacraments of Reconciliation, First Communion and Confirmation. We moved the reception of the sacrament of reconciliation from the Advent Season to the Season of Lent. The Season of Lent is penitential in nature. During Lent we focus on a conversion of life, from turning from a life of sin to a life of grace, from death to life. What better time to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation? The Sacrament in which we come back to the life of Grace.

The changes in First Communion come from a practical as well as theological stand. Practical in that many parents asked that First Communion be celebrated at the 8:30 Mass as opposed to the 11:00 Mass. While I am happy to accommodate this change, it does mean that there becomes the imposition of some time constraints. There is usually a reception for the First Communicants and their families after the Mass. This year the Sunday falls on a weekend of the parish breakfast. The Knight of Columbus are always gracious and are more than happy to provide the parish breakfast in conjunction with the First Communion Celebration. The First Communion Mass is usually quite full due to additional family members and friends in attendance to witness the children receiving their First Communion. After Mass, families usually want to take pictures of their children and group pictures of the First Communion class. All these things add to the time constraints. Those preparing and setting up for the breakfast often cannot go to the early Mass because of breakfast preparations so must make it to the 11:00 Mass.

From a theological stand point, First Communion is not celebrated during the second-grade-year arbitrarily. One receives their First Communion when they reach the age of reason, which is generally considered seven years of age. One must be able to recognize that they are receiving The Body of Christ, and not just a wafer of bread. When one responds "Amen" to the priest or minister saying "The Body of Christ" one is making a profession of faith. The response "Amen" means "I believe." Members of other faith communities do not receive communion in the Catholic Church for the fact that they do not hold the same belief in the Real Presence of Christ

in the bread and wine, now become the Body and Blood. Reception of their First Communion is a first act of the children demonstrating their reaching that age of reason and their first act of affirming their Catholic faith and belief in the Real Presence. It is the children demonstrating that they are not just receiving their First Communion because their parents tell them to but because they believe that they are receiving Jesus Christ, God dwelling within them.

Finally, another practical point, there are times when we as adults do not receive communion. This can be for a variety of reasons. It may be because we have not prepared by partaking in the Eucharistic fast; It may be because we are not in a state of grace and need to partake of the Sacrament of Reconciliation; It may be because you are of another faith community and do not believe in the Real Presence; It may be because you have entered a marriage outside of the Church. Our faith does not require us to publicly admit our sins. As a Church we should not be placing others in the occasion of sin. It is not up to us, in celebrating the children's First Communion, to put people in the occasion of sin by making them feel obligated to receive the Eucharist when they know they should not be. It is not up to us to put people in a position that they feel they must receive the Eucharist rather than publicly display that they are in a state of sinfulness.

Keeping all the above in mind, during the celebration of the children's First Communion only the children will approach the altar as they receive their First Communion. The primary reason to demonstrate their belief in the Real Presence, the secondary being the practical reasons of trying to maintain a timely celebration and to not put others in an occasion of sin.

Our celebration of Confirmation will be held at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Wichita. The ordinary minister of Confirmation is the Bishop. There are a couple of instances when a priest can confer this sacrament, but they are the exception to the rule. The Cathedral is the Mother Church of every diocese. The word Cathedral is taken from the Latin "Cathedra" which means "Chair." The Cathedral is the Church which is the home of the Bishop's Chair. Cathedrals have a chair that is reserved for the Bishop when he is presiding. The Cathedral is a special place and should be held as such for all members of the diocese. This year, the Bishop extended the invitation to parishes to hold the celebration of Confirmation in the Cathedral Church. After consulting with our catechists, I decided that we should accept the Bishop's invitation this year. I felt it would be something special for the youth to be able to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation from the Bishop in his, and our Cathedral. Not many can claim to have received a sacrament in the Mother Church of our Diocese. It should provide a special day for all.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns do not hesitate to ask me, I will always be happy to explain my reasoning. Prayers are with you as always.

In Christ,

Fr. John Hotze