

As the new school year begins, we begin another year of religious education for our parish students. I am grateful to all those in our parish who give of their time and study the teachings of the church to assist me to impart this important ministry of catechesis to our young people. A primary purpose for this program is to form our children for the reception of the Sacraments; particularly, First Reconciliation, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation. As pastor I take that responsibility seriously, and at the outset of this year I hereby share my vision and expectations for participation in these Sacraments.

First, I heartily encourage all our families with children ages 3 to Grade 12 to participate in our religious education program! As our parish does not have its own day school, Saints Peter and Paul students are educated in various schools, both Catholic and secular, brick-and-mortar schools and homeschools, and some with the support of our St. Ambrose Homeschool Co-op. This education is primarily done under the stewardship of their parents. However, our parish religious education program provides a valuable supplement to all of these forms of education, and in addition it unifies our children both in study and in participation in parish life, especially for these Sacraments of Initiation. Even beyond these initial Sacraments, our program through high school bonds our young people in a Catholic community that will support religious and moral development through the high school years and their identity as members of our parish.

The classes entail one hour a week for the family. While a single hour can be difficult for a busy family to come by, we offer these classes in conjunction with our Sunday Masses in a way that makes it easier for families to participate, with all grade levels being taught simultaneously, facilitating the option of making a single trip to the church on Sunday mornings.

In particular, for those families intending to present their children for the Sacraments of First Holy Communion (normally in 2nd grade) and Confirmation (normally in 6th grade), registration and attendance in our classes is required for these years. Even though many parents of our parish do an outstanding job of preparing their children for the Sacraments at home, this separate learning experience cannot replace the experience of the community that they gain here at our parish when they participate together in study and preparation, which is not only academic, but social.

To that end, as pastor, I anticipate that all our children will celebrate the Sacrament of First Holy Communion together and the Sacrament of Confirmation together as a sign of our parish's unity in the Sacraments of Initiation. It is clear that since the Bishop or his delegate offers Confirmation at our parish once a year, we come together for that celebration. The Church also charges us to offer a general First Holy Communion once a year (cf. Pope St. Pius X). The ideal is for the community to celebrate together this moment in the life of children, who do lots of things together with the peers of their own age group, as is well and good and appropriate. Holy Communion is not just "me and Jesus." It's about communion with Christ, for sure, but this only takes place within the context of His Bride, the Church. There is no Holy Communion without the Church. The ideal that I have discerned here is to celebrate this momentous and great thing as a community on the feast of *Corpus Christi*, the Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. So I ask that you please mark your calendars for these Sacramental celebrations when the dates are announced, and plan to participate!

Because we celebrate the ancient form at our monthly *Missa Cantata*, parishioners have come to value its reverence, and I appreciate that. A few have asked for their children to receive their First Holy Communion at our *Missa Cantata* for this reason, and in the past I have ceded to this request. However, after prayerful discernment of our unified celebration on *Corpus Christi*, I now defer to the greater good of celebrating all our First Communion on this day **as a community**. The ideal would be to have one multilingual celebration, as we do for Confirmation, but logistics of 1400+ people attending our English and Spanish principal Masses that day would render it nearly impossible for our church capacity of under 900. Thus, although our principal First Holy Communion Masses are two, the celebration is still on the one *Corpus Christi* feast day, connected with one and the same Adoration and Eucharistic procession that we celebrate together between those two Masses. This doesn't preclude celebrating, in a secondary way, a sort of "second First Communion" at the Latin Mass, for all those who would like to do so.

Our principal celebration of Mass must necessarily be in the Ordinary Form, as long as we remain a territorial parish of the Diocese of Knoxville. While we happily celebrate the traditional Latin Mass here at the Basilica and incorporate the spirituality that it brings, we must be careful of conflating our love for the form with the necessity of the substance, which can be found in either form. Christ cannot be divided! Of course, we hope that the first reception of Holy Communion is one of many throughout the life of our children, and they will have the subsequent opportunity to receive Communion in the ancient form whenever we offer it.

In conclusion, I want to thank all the many people who work together to educate our children in the faith – our parents, teachers, and coordinators, Danielle and Michael Stradley. I pray that God's grace might shine on all of us and that we might draw closer in unity with our Lord and with one another throughout this year.

Rev. J. David Carter