

# First Communion Programme

## **How the Programme is organized:**

The programme is designed for all students who are eligible to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation, First Communion and Confirmation. After registering in September and October, following parent information meetings, the classes begin in January at Transfiguration of Our Lord School. More than twenty five catechists, arranged in pairs, are assigned classes ranging from 15-20 students. The classes run weekly from the beginning of January until the sacraments have been administered, in May. There is a cost involved, but this is waived for any family who expresses a need. The cost includes all materials and gown rental for the ceremony. Weekly attendance is taken and families are reminded that attendance is very important.

## **Benefit to the Children:**

Sacramental preparation belongs in the parish. This is not to say that religious education should not be a part of the school curriculum. The school has a very important role in nurturing students in the Catholic Faith. However, children need to experience that faith development goes beyond the school. It is not an academic subject, but a way of life. Many of our children do not attend mass on a weekly basis and need to know that receiving sacraments goes farther than monthly mass in the school gym or during school hours. Just as music lessons, ballet and soccer are outside of school hours and require practice, so, too does one's religious life. The students become exposed to people who are dedicated to sharing their faith with the students and giving witness of a personal commitment to this faith. Faith development is then seen as something, not to be taken for granted, but as activity that is fundamental to developing a relationship with God.

## **Benefit to the Parents:**

At baptism, our parents chose the Catholic Faith for their children. Most of them send their children to the Catholic Schools to continue in the nurturing of their children. Many do bring their children to Mass, many to the Children's Liturgy, which is an excellent way to address the needs of the child in his/her spirituality. In our programme the parents are invited to participate in their child's preparation without having to handle the whole instruction. Days of reflection give the parents an opportunity to learn more about the sacraments at hand and their meaning in the life of the child. They have an opportunity discuss faith issues and come together with their children for dialogue and ceremony. We require that they have a role in this most important time. Faith development is a family affair and we encourage family participation. First Reconciliation is held in the evening when parents and grandparents can attend and participate. How sad that hardly any parents receive the sacrament of penance themselves. At the beginning, a parent booklet gives ideas for dialogue with their children a page of homework assignments asks that they help their children with follow-up activities for each lesson. We highly encourage the parents to walk along side their son/daughter as he/she prepares to continue the process in initiation into the faith.

## **Benefit to the Parish:**

Children are the future of our faith community. At Transfiguration we have a children's liturgy at the 10:30 and 12:00 masses. It a wonderful sight to see our children around the altar taking an active role in the Mass. Many of the First Communion children take part in these liturgies; in fact, they are urged to do so. These liturgies are a wonderful complement to the Sacramental Preparation Programme and can be experience for more than the one year. So, too, with the candidates for confirmation. At many masses, from November to April, the parish community is a witness to the young people and, in turn, is inspired by the new life among them. The younger children make a banner which hangs in the church for a few weeks, as testament to their

reception of the Reconciliation. Parish ministries welcome the involvement of the young people and pray that they will feel more comfortable in becoming involved in future years. There is a certain aura of the new life among us that is refreshing. The programme also gives many people an opportunity to take part in the parish ministry of educating our new members and sharing faith with them.

**Role of the Schools:**

The parish schools have been very helpful in the process of sacramental preparation. It was somewhat of a struggle for the parents to make this change and assume their role as primary religious educator, but the schools supported us all the way. Principals and teachers alike have shared their own wisdom with us. We have several meetings each year with the staff involved to exchange ideas and share any concerns. Grade eight teachers help us to sort the kids so that each class has groups that can and will work together. They also identify special needs students so that we can make appropriate accommodations. The school staffs have also shown support by attending parent information nights and all ceremonies involving the students. It is an honour to introduce our Catholic educators whenever they are in attendance. The school teachers also prepare the music with the students so that each sacrament is enhanced by music. Truly, instead of separating the sacraments from the school, we have come together, as a community of parents, school and parish, to prepare our students for these sacraments.