



First Communion Orientation 2017-2018

Welcome to our First Communion program at St. John's. I am looking forward to working with the students, and I pray that our time together will be a blessing to them. I invite you to speak with me at any time about questions or concerns you may have about the program, or any other spiritual matter that may arise over the course of the year. I will do my best to keep you informed and updated on everything as we go through the time of instruction.

Participation with the Church at our Lord's Table is one of the highest gifts we can receive. It is a blessing to be given our Lord's body and blood, and as Lutherans, we have certain things we believe and confess about the Lord's Supper. We also have a more conservative view on who should receive the Lord's Supper. With all of this in mind, the goals of the First Communion class are to give the students a basic understanding of some of the most beloved stories in the life of Jesus, all the while, introducing them to various portions of Luther's Small Catechism in preparation to receive this holy gift. There are certain things that should be known, believed, and confessed, not only to consider oneself a Christian, but also to partake of this great sacrament of unity in the Church.

There are then certain expectations of the First Communion program. The expectations for students are the same as the expectations of all members, and of all Christians. When we are called to faith, and as we live in that faith, it is important to feed that faith first by being in the gifts of God (*see Acts 2:42*), then by seeking ways in which we might serve our Lord through the church and in the community with the special gifts and blessings he has given to us (*see James 2:14-19*). Simply put, the expectations of this class are:

Regular attendance at Divine Services: Our life beyond regular instruction is centered upon finding the joy and peace that comes in being in God's presence, receiving his forgiveness, and departing in his peace. It is expected that students and their families will be in church on a regular basis, not because it is a requirement, but because they desire to be there. If you are away and cannot attend St. John's, you may attend another church and receive "credit" for going. Simply bring in a copy of the bulletin from that church as a sign of your presence there. Please limit yourself to no more than 2 services away from St. John's as part of your fulfillment of the service attendance requirement. It is hoped that students and families would make an effort to be at church every weekend, and requiring a certain number of services would be to make a law of that which is intended to be pure Gospel. However, if the student is not engaged in Divine Service attendance at least 50% of the time, it will be seen as an indication that the student is not ready to receive communion at this time. Attendance will be tracked through a sign-in sheet that will be located in the narthex each week. A monthly tracking of attendance will be made available to the students at the end of each month. Please remind them to check the list and keep you informed about their progress. If by Christmas it appears that the student is falling behind in this area, a phone call will be made to the family to discuss the future of the student in the program. By the end of April, the student should have attended and signed in at least 16 times.

Attendance in Class: It is expected that the student will be in class each week, and may not miss more than 5 classes (this requires attendance at 75% of the classes) otherwise it will be assumed the student is not ready to receive communion at this time. Attendance is taken each week. Due to the short time period for the class, if the student is late by more than 15 minutes or must leave more than 15 minutes before class is completed, they will be considered absent that day. If you know you are going to be absent, please let the office know so that materials may be set aside for you. If no one answers, please leave a message for Pastor Noack at extension 104, or you may email me. A make-up class is offered the following week, 30 minutes prior to class. If you are absent, please plan to attend that to get the handout and the notes from the previous week.

Be on time, and prepared: *All classes will meet downstairs by the kitchen.* Please make every effort to be on time for the classes, and to make arrangements to stay for the whole time in which the class meets. The student should bring a writing instrument, a Bible, and a copy of Luther's Small Catechism with them each week as they will regularly be used. We will be using the English Standard Version of the Bible for class, but a New International Version is also acceptable.

Homework: Each week, there will be a handout that will be distributed for the student to complete prior to attending class the following week. That handout will be a preparation for what is discussed in class, and the answers will be gone over in class. There will be two checks of the progress on these, one done in December, and the other in April. If the student does not have all the work done by these two checks, contact will be made with the family to discuss this. Therefore it is important that any missed classes should be made up the following week, and the student should not fall more than two weeks behind on their work.

Memory work: Between now and Christmas break, the students are asked to memorize and be able to write or recite the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. The student may write out the memory work, or if reciting it to Pastor is easier, they may do that. Whenever they are ready to complete one of these, they may do so after class on Tuesdays, or at another time that is mutually agreed upon by you and Pastor. **YOU DO NOT NEED TO DO ALL 3 THINGS AT ONCE!!!**

Work together: There is only so much that can be taught in the hour we are together over the year. This is why being in church is so vital...it reinforces what is taught in class. In addition, at the beginning of each subject in the Small Catechism, Martin Luther reminds the reader that these subjects are for instruction in the home, "as the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to his family." It has always been the intention, then, that the pastor of the church support and reinforce what is already being taught within the family unit. I can only do so much. It will be helpful if you, as a family, help to teach these things and encourage one another in growing in the faith. If you need help in how to go about this, please ask, I would be happy to offer suggestions. In the very least, discuss things that are discussed in class, and offer your own insights. If, as a family, you have questions, I would be happy to entertain them along the way.

Some final thoughts: We will follow the Sayville school calendar in regard to breaks and scheduled times to meet. There are students from many districts so we had to pick one to base things upon. If Sayville schools are closed for weather on a Tuesday, then class is cancelled for the day. If it is known in advance of the weekend that class will be cancelled, it will be announced at all services. However, please consider giving us an email address that you check regularly so that if a last minute emergency arises we can let you know more quickly that class has been cancelled.

It is expected that students will behave in a manner that is appropriate and respectful to both the Pastor and fellow students. If this becomes an issue at any point, a parent may be asked to accompany their child to class to help them with this. I will, of course, treat all students with courtesy and respect. I value their insights and opinions and views of the world and desire to hear their input. Over the course of the year, I often find that I learn as much as they do.

Finally, please keep the lines of communication open between us. If there is something going on in your family or home life that is affecting things at school or church, please speak to me. If your child has any special needs or issues I need to be aware of, please speak to us as soon as possible. If I don't know about it, I can't help to find a solution to it and I will assume that everything is fine. If I know, I can try to help as I am able and time permits.

Thank you for participating in the First Communion Program here at St. John's. Once again, I look forward to growing with you and your families, and I pray that the students will grow together in Christian friendship and in a lively and active faith.

Contact Information

Pastor Brian Noack
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Service Times

Saturday – 6:30pm
Sunday – 7:45am, 9:00am, 11am
Wednesdays – noon, 7:30pm (Advent & Lent seasons only)