"God does not fit in an occupied heart."

 St. John of the Cross

Dear Parents,

I hope I’ve worked out the kinks in the emailing of all the parents of First Communicants at OLMC!!!  I’ll continue to work on providing everyone with the information needed.  Please let me know if there is anything l can do to make this journey smoother and easier!

First Penance is the primary Sacrament for which we will be preparing. It will be held on Saturday, February 3, 2018 at 10:00am.  Before that, there is the Parent meeting on October 3rd from 6:30-8:00 and the work on individual Jesus Books (which will be explained in detail at the October meeting).  On Saturday, January 27, 2018 is the mandatory First Penance Retreat called *Good Shepherd Day* for the children and an invitation to the parents to attend a parallel track for parents that same day. The event goes from 9am to noon in the school building.  Please mark these dates in your calendar!

As required by the USCCB (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops), I am sending information with this memo on Penance as sacramental instruction for parents.  Please read these articles so that you may help your child receive the Sacrament with excitement and confidence.  Parents will be asked to receive the Sacrament along side their children on February 3. If it’s been a while since you have availed yourself of this Sacrament, please let me help you also approach the confessional with excitement and confidence!!!!

God bless,

Mrs. Gulden

ASKING FOR GOD'S FORGIVENESS

God is is pretty clear about forgiveness:  we need to seek it from those who we have hurt; we need to seek it from God; and we need to be ready to forgive others.  In the Lord's prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray:  "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us" (Luke 11:4).  But forgiveness isn't always that simple.  Fortunately, we have in the Church a way to help us get right with others, with God, and with ourselves - the sacrament of reconciliation.

WHAT FIRST PENANCE & FIRST RECONCILIATION MEANS

First Penance is the first time your child will meet Jesus when he or she is sorry for doing something wrong ON PURPOSE.  The child expresses sorrow for their sins and the intention not to sin again.  Your child will be welcomed back by the priest in the name of Jesus and the Christian community.

Reconciliation is a sacrament by which a person renews a love relationship with God and the community.  In the sacrament of reconciliation a person

* *makes peace with the community*
* *celebrates God's forgiving love*
* *receives help to live a better life*

Children begin to view this sacrament of forgiveness and grace in  more complete way when they talk about preparing for First Penance or First Reconciliation, the terms we use instead of First Confession.

NEW NAMES, NEW RITUAL, NEW APPROACH

**Confession:** a detailed telling of faults, an important and integral part of the process, a term not fully adequate

**Penance:** allowing the spirit to be overturned in order to make it turn toward God.  Through this ritual we undergo a kind of conversion; we change our hearts under the Lord's grace

**Reconcilliation**:  restores, heals and strengthens our relationships with God, with one another, with the community, the Church, and with our inner self

THE ELEMENTS OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

* *A greeting and a blessing from a priest*
* *A reading from Scripture to inspire a heart-felt confession*
* *The penitent confesses his or her sins*
* *The priest gives a penance*
* *The priest gives absolution to the penitent*
* *A prayer of thanksgiving and praise, dismissal and a blessing*

EXPECTATIONS OF THE CHILD

* *It is expected that your child is already celebrating Mass each Sunday together with the family.*
* *Your child must also attend regularly the prescribed classes and receive the necessary additional help at home from his/her parents and family.*
* *Your child requires this basic knowledge of First Penance:*
1. the ability to distinguish between right and wrong;
2. awareness of his/her need for forgiveness and trust in Jesus' forgiving love;
3. ability to express sorrow; and
4. ability to describe wrong-doing in his/her own words.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE PARENT

* *The position of parents in the sacramental preparation of child is of primary importance.  Therefore, parents presenting their child for the reception of the Sacraments of First Penance and First Holy Communion MUST attend the parent sessions provided by the parish.*
* *The emphasis of the Sacrament of Penance is reconciliation with God and others.  Therefore, the reception of First Penance for children is a communal celebration in which the parents present their child to the priest.*
* *In as much as Penance and Holy Communion are two important and very individual celebrations, Penance will be separated from Holy Communion by a reasonable period of time.  This will allow the child to appreciate these sacraments as distinct gifts of God.  Each Sacrament is a distinct moment in the child's encounter with God.*

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| THINGS TO DO AS PARENTS1. Be consistent about what you tell your child is right or wrong.
2. Help your child to know the difference between things done "by accident" or "on purpose".
3. Train your child to forgive, to lend, to share, to make friends, to pray.
4. Discuss real situations and help our child to make judgments about them.
5. Pray with your child.
6. Model forgiveness.

THINGS NOT TO DO AS PARENTS1. Do not suggest sins to your child. If no sins are recognized, then the child is not responsible for them.
2. When something wrong is done, help to understand WHY it is wrong. Do not confuse what annoys you with what is really wrong.
3. Do not bear a grudge about something already forgiven. Forgive completely yourself.
4. Do not expect your child to become a saint overnight.
5. Do not even indirectly instill fear into your child about anything to do with confessing.
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Taken from *American Martyrs Families in Faith* website.