

First Holy Communion Guidelines

Holy Communion is the Body and Blood of Jesus which becomes present for us when the priest consecrates the bread and wine at Mass. Jesus gives Himself to us in Communion as a sign of God's presence and to deepen our relationship with Him and His disciples. It is normally the second sacrament of initiation into membership in our Church. The celebration of the Eucharist at Mass also renews the sacrifice of Jesus by which we have been redeemed. It is the primary act of worship for the Faith Community which Catholics celebrate every week.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND FOR CATECHISTS

The doctrinal elements of catechesis for First Holy Communion must always reflect the teaching of the Church in its worship and its creeds. In preparing for their role, catechists are to rely especially on Sacred Scripture, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, The Teaching of Christ, and other diocesan-approved catechetical materials.

- There is a 3 year preparation period required for children at OLM, this requirement of the Archdiocese of Madrid.
- OLM assumes you will remain a participating family, even after your child's First Communion. Of course, we are referring to Madrid residents. For those families who choose to "temporarily" leave the parish, please know the 3 year preparation for Confirmation will be **SCTRICTLY** enforced for your child. No exceptions, so don't ask. The CCD programme is designed to be a continuous journey of spiritual preparation from Grade 1 (pre-FHC) through Confirmation."
- If a child has received catechesis previously, parents should present the director of Religious Education with a letter from the previous parish.
- If a child misses more than 3 classes (sickness not included), they will forfeit their right to celebrate their FHC for the current year.
- Of primary importance to a child's religious formation is the good example provided by the parent. The experience of a family attending Sunday Mass together is central for faith formation. "Drop off" situations will **NOT** Be tolerated.
- First Reconciliation will be celebrated within one month of the FHC date.
- A copy of the child's Catholic baptismal certificate is required. Start looking for it **NOW**.
- The parents must be **FULL REGISTERED** members of the parish; they are expected to support their church financially. The amount is not as important as is the constancy.

First Communion Eucharist Ceremony & Celebration Guidelines

- The **parents form a committee** to plan out the practical details of the ceremony. There will be a number of these meetings. Fr. Ron will emphasize the spiritual importance of FHC.
- The parents decide the amount they wish to spend on **flowers** keeping in mind that flowers should never block the space in front of the altar as that is where the children will receive their FHC. Flowers must be purchased through George's Flower shop on calle Bolivia. (reasonable prices, good quality, and they are familiar with the church). Depending upon church activities, there may be flowers from a previous Saturday school celebration of First Holy Communion. The flowers should cost no more than 200 Euros. If a volunteer can do more economically, that would be acceptable as well.
- **Ribbons/Flowers are not necessary for the pews** where the children will sit, but if the parents insist on this practice, they will be responsible for placing them on the pews 15-30 minutes prior to the service and removing them immediately after the Mass concludes. Any tape used must not damage the pews. (It would be better to tie them on with ribbon).
- The parents are free to choose **how their children should be attired** for the FHC day. They should be dressed smartly but no special dress will be required. Parents often agree in a general "dress code". Usually white dresses for the girls and white shirts, black pants for the boys. Remember, as a sign of respect for the Church and its members, all females (all ages) are required to cover their shoulders (no strapless or garments with only straps are permitted - a shawl or other garment may be worn in Church and removed after exiting. Please inform your family and guests of this requirement. Please, no sports shoes for boys taking FHC.
- **The Photographer** of First Holy Communion is Jose Luis Santana. If you know a cheaper one, ask Fr. Ron. No one will be permitted to leave their seats to take photos during the ceremony or immediately following (a group picture may be organized in the salones or outside away from the patio, weather permitting - this is the responsibility of the parents to coordinate with the official photographer). Please inform your family and guests of this rule rather than suffer the embarrassment of being removed by an Usher.
- **All children participate in the Mass** in some fashion. They either read (readings may be split into two), the responsorial psalm is read with a sung response, they bring up the gifts, they can present the gift to their teacher, they can read one prayer of the faithful (maximum of 6 please), which their class writes. If you need additional ways, consult Fr. ron
- Fr. Ron will set up the **video** and make copies of the Mass on CDs if the parents ask him to do so with sufficient notice. The parish will pay for these costs.
- In the past, parents have made a special **souvenir book** that includes photos and reproductions of the children's artwork. This book has evolved over the years with new printing techniques. The parents are NOT required to make this book but if they choose to do so, they may request an example of previous years from the parish assistant (on CD or in book form). The parents would be wise not to go overboard on this booklet. A simple photocopy of the child's drawings and a small photo of the child on each page is all that is required. This booklet is for the families, not the parish. The cost should not be extravagant.
- **All music selections for the FHC Eucharist are made by the choir director.** Elke knows which songs are liturgically correct. In exceptional cases Elke might consider a special request, if you make it to her months in advance. Also, you may have to find the sheet music, if she approves it. The choir director/pianist should be present at the rehearsal.
- **Gifts and donations.** In the past, parents collected money and made a common fund in order to pay for the flowers, booklets, gifts for the CCD teachers, gift/flower for the director of CCD, and the donation to the church. The gifts and donations should be presented on the same day as

the celebration. This normally takes place after the closing prayer. The choice of gifts is up to the parents (normally flowers or a gift certificate for the teachers, money for the church) The donation to the church should not be insignificant when compared with the total cost of a child's FHC celebration. The best way to handle this is that each family makes an envelope, writes a few words on a card, and makes their sacrificial offering in the envelope. The families individual envelopes are sealed and placed in one big envelope, which is later presented to Fr. Ron at the end of the FHC Mass. 10% of the total costs paid for the Communion celebration is an acceptable donation. (For security and logistical reasons, the true donation could be offered a week before and an empty symbolic envelope can be presented on the day).

- The **children may take photos in the small (air conditioned) chapel** on the day of the FHC before the mass begins. If a Mass in Spanish is being celebrated in the large chapel (it starts at 10:00), the parents must remember to keep a respectful silence so as not to interrupt the prayer.
- The **seating for the parents and families is done by lottery**. This should be held at one of the parent's meetings.
- In order to avoid the appearance of favoritism, it would be prudent not to invite the teacher/parish priest to your child's reception/lunch.
- **On the day of the FHC, the children will receive on the tongue**. The host will be intincted by the priest with an insignificant amount of wine. On the Sunday following the FHC celebration, the children are encouraged to receive Communion in their hand. They should be instructed clearly in the proper manner to receive both ways.
- **The Sunday following the FHC celebration**, the children are invited to process in with the priest and sit in the front pews. They are welcome to once again wear their Communion attire if they so choose. They should receive Communion in the hand so they can experience both allowed methods in the church. Afterwards, they may decide how to receive on a weekly basis.
- **There will be a FULL rehearsal** in order to practice for the FHC celebration. The priest will be present at this practice.
- **OLM will purchase the FHC candles**. When lighting these candles, there should be a sufficient number of adults with long nosed lighters. Tapers must be avoided as wax drippings are difficult to clean. A good idea is to light the candles once before the celebration as this will make the lighting easier on the FHC day.
- **A Worship Aid is not necessary** as the FHC Mass is an ordinary Sunday Mass (in the sense that no special prayers are used) and we can use the church hymnals.
- **The Sunday following the FHC Mass, the parents in the past have provided food/cake for a small reception**. On that day, the church will serve soft drinks and coffee with no charge. It would be considerate to bring to church about 6 liters of juice/soft drinks a few days before so we may place them in the refrigerator and be prepared. Please do not spend excessively on a First Communion Cake, maybe brownies or individual cakes could be done. In the past, each family brought in something. Fr. Ron and Michele Martorell help with the setting up. David Franklyn also helps with the setting up and his volunteers stay until the end to clean up. It would be nice if a few parents assisted that day as well.