



December 18, 2023

Dear Confirmation students and families,

The purpose of First Communion is to allow the Youth the opportunity to attend the Lord's Supper and thereby receive this Means of Grace (which provides comfort, forgiveness of sins, strength of faith, life, and salvation). It is intended that this would be allowed after the completion of one year of Confirmation Instruction and Special Instructional Meetings with Pastors and Parents.

### **Register for the First Communion Class**

- **You must register for the class to attend. Register by Friday February 9.**
- Register your family for this class at: [www.sjlplymouth.com/first](http://www.sjlplymouth.com/first)

### **Program. Dates. Location. Time.**

- We will have class on **Sunday February 11, 18, 25, and March 3.**
- We will meet in the Science Room (Upstairs of the School) from 9:30-10:15 AM.
- We will have a few weeks between our classes and the Rite of First Communion. This break will allow the Pastors to catch up and meet with any family as necessary.

### **Who Should Attend**

- Each year, St. John Lutheran formally invites the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> Graders (students participating in our Confirmation Program) to attend the First Communion Classes.
- *We recognize that there may be children and families who desire to receive the Lord's Supper prior to 6<sup>th</sup> Grade. If your child desires to receive the Lord's Supper and your family believes that they are ready to receive this precious gift, please speak with one of the pastors (prior to your attendance in the First Communion Classes).*

### **Parent Role**

- Parents should attend the class with their student(s) – each week

### **Rite of First Communion**

- Students will commune for the first time with their family on **Sunday April 7**
- Students and family should attend either the 8:00 AM or 10:30 AM service.
- Invite family and friends to celebrate with you and to attend this special church service.

Rejoicing with you!

Pastor Schultz + Pastor Thompson



## **A. Overview of Confirmation at St. John Lutheran**

Confirmation instruction occurs in 6th, 7th, and 8th grade. During this time, youth are formally taught to best appreciate what God has done in their lives with the gift of faith begun at their baptism. After considerable study they are given the opportunity to “confirm” that faith and to dedicate themselves towards greater faith maturity, especially in confessing the truth of the Scriptures.

- St. John Lutheran School Instruction
  - 6th & 7th grade classes are taught by the school teachers.
  - 8th grade classes are taught by the pastors.
  - Classes occur four times each week.
- Midweek Public School Instruction
  - 6th Grade Classes taught by Katrina Johns (SJL’s Director of Family Life & Youth)
  - 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Classes taught by Pastor Thompson
  - 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Classes taught by Pastor Schultz
  - Classes occur, during the school year, on Wednesdays from 5:30-6:30 PM.

## **B. Overview of First Communion Classes**

### **First Communion Classes**

The First Communion classes allow children who are in the Confirmation Program to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion after completing a year of catechetical instruction. The First Communion Classes are a four (4) week program held on four (4) Sundays from 9:30-10:15 AM. This class is taught by the pastors. First Communion instruction is not a substitute for Confirmation instruction, but does allow children to receive the Sacrament prior to Confirmation.

### **Who Should Attend the First Communion Class**

Each year, St. John Lutheran formally invites the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> Graders (students participating in our Confirmation Program) to attend the First Communion Classes. *We recognize that there may be children and families who desire to receive the Lord’s Supper prior to 6<sup>th</sup> Grade. If your child desires to receive the Lord’s Supper and your family believes that they are ready to receive this precious gift, please speak with one of the pastors (prior to your attendance in the First Communion Classes).*

A few reminders:

- We are not focused on age – rather, on faith and trust in the Lord’s promises.
- Luther’s Small Catechism states, “As the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to his household.” At home, our primary vocation is to teach our spouse, children, and all who live with us – the Christian faith.
- We expect that your child is faithfully attending worship services and is familiar with the following topics: Ten Commandments, Apostles Creed, The Lord’s Prayer, and Holy Baptism.

### **First Communion Class Expectations**

At least one parent must accompany their child at each session. Both parents must be in agreement and willing to participate. It is expected that member parents must be attending Church, regularly studying God's Word, and regularly receiving the Sacrament.

### **First Communion Class Requirements**

1. Review and demonstrate an understanding of the Six Chief Parts of the Small Catechism (i.e. 10 Commandments, Creed, Lord's Prayer, Holy Baptism, Office of the Keys, Holy Communion)
2. Read as a family the following Bible and Catechism passages:
  - The Biblical Narrative of the Passover and Exodus (Exodus 11-14)
  - The Celebration of Holy Communion (Matthew 26:17-25 and Mark 14:22-26 and Luke 22:1-23 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-29)
  - Small Catechism Section on the Sacrament of the Altar (Questions 348-374, p.322-345)
  - Luther's Christian Questions and Answers for those who desire to attend the Sacrament of the Altar. (Catechism p. 37-40)
3. Learn about the precious gift of individual (or private) Confession and Absolution.
4. Meet with the Pastors (for an Exit Survey) to identify and confess both the Lord and His blessings for us.

## **C. First Communion FAQ**

### **What has led St. John to consider the practice of communion before confirmation?**

St. John celebrates the Lord's Supper every weekend. Through prayer and the study of God's Word, our leaders and our entire church family have committed to receiving God's gifts in the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis. The practice of weekly communion has provided greater comfort (through the forgiveness of sin) to those weak in faith and overcome with guilt. It has grown us spiritually deeper and has caused us to value the gifts that God provides.

Over the last few years, several families (with young children who have completed First Communion instruction from previous Lutheran congregations) have moved to the area and become members at St. John. Since these young children have been taught, examined (by the pastors and elders of fellow Lutheran congregations), and approved to receive communion (in their previous church family), they continue to receive Holy Communion before they are confirmed – even when they move to Plymouth and join St. John. At St. John, many families have noticed the difference in ages of communing children and ask, "If Holy Communion is so special, what prevents my child from receiving these gifts of God?"

We believe that faith is not a "data-dump" or an "amount of knowledge to be reached". Rather, faith is a gift of God. Faith trusts the Word of God and graciously receives His promises. Trusting in Christ's words, we receive Christ's body and blood and are offered the benefits that He has promised (forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation).

**Why would St. John offer the option of receiving communion before confirmation?**

Many students are spiritually ready to receive the Lord's Supper long before confirmation in the spring of their 8th grade year of school. We want them to be able to receive the benefits of the Lord's Supper as soon as they are ready. We also hope that by separating communion from the confirmation experience, student's will not view confirmation as graduation (with communion as the "prize") but rather see both as simply two of many faith stepping stones in their spiritual development.

**What is the purpose of Confirmation if Communion is not awarded to the student at the end?**

We believe that it is important for adults and children to gather in small groups for learning and growing in our Christian faith. We believe in lifelong learning – there is a never a time that we stop growing to be like Jesus. Confirmation is one of the ways that the youth of our congregation enrich their understanding and knowledge of our triune God. The end of Confirmation is not an end to learning. Instead, it is a time when youth confess their faith and makes a public lifelong commitment to our faithful God. Primarily, confirmation is a custom of the Church that links the student to their Baptism – not to the reception of the Lord's Supper.

The Rite of Confirmation emphasizes God's work in Baptism, the gift of faith, celebrates the reception of the Lord's Word among them. Confirmation declares that the student is a Christian who has been baptized, confesses the faith, and is in communion with Christ and His Church. In cases where the student has not yet communed, Confirmation welcomes them to the Lord's Table.

**Is receiving communion before confirmation O.K. with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod?**

Yes. The LCMS has discussed this practice and has concluded that there is no Biblical reason to prevent offering communion before confirmation. Each church can determine, according to local traditions and customs, when someone is permitted to receive the Sacrament. Increasing numbers of LCMS congregations are moving to this practice.

**What does the Bible say about the "right age" for receiving the Lord's Supper?**

The Bible gives no specifics on "the right age." First Corinthians 11:27-29 says communicants must be able to examine themselves and discern what is happening in the Lord's Supper. Again, we believe that many children are able to do this before the end of 8th grade.

**What if I want my child to wait to receive the Lord's Supper until confirmation?**

The First Communion class is optional. Parents and students who would rather wait until confirmation to receive the Lord's Supper may do so. All children when Confirmed are welcome to the Lord's Supper. If a youth does not participate in the First Communion Classes will be welcomed to the table on Confirmation Day. First Communion will require a greater commitment from the youth and their parents.

**Is the Lord's Supper taught during Confirmation classes?**

Yes. Students who choose not to receive communion before completing the confirmation program will still need this instruction and will be a great review for the students already receiving the sacrament.

**Why do parents need to attend the class?**

It is the parent's primary calling and responsibility to teach children the Christian faith. This class enables the church to come alongside parents to provide a shared experience between parents and child to learn about the Lord's Supper.

**Does a child need to be baptized before taking communion?**

Yes. The Bible teaches that people should be baptized before taking the Lord's Supper. Please contact the Church Office about getting your child baptized before taking the class.

**If my student takes the First Communion class, do they still need to go through Confirmation classes?**

Yes. The First Communion class has a different purpose than the confirmation experience. The First Communion class primarily prepares the student to receive the Lord's Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper. Confirmation, covers the primary teachings of the Christian faith – leading the student to confess the faith and defend against error. The First Communion class will definitely enhance a student's confirmation experience, but cannot replace it.

**What if my student takes the First Communion class but we don't finish the Confirmation program?**

First Communion is an extension of and additional benefit to the Confirmation Program. If the student does not complete the Confirmation program, the pastors and elders will find ways to work with the family for the purpose of continuing the religious training. Failure to continue in lifelong learning, may result in the withholding of the Lord's Supper to both parents and students.

**We want to participate in the First Communion class but are unable to attend the Rite of First Communion, can we still come to the class?**

Yes. Those who are unable to attend this service may take Holy Communion at any service once they've completed the class.

**If we visit or attend another Lutheran Church, would the child be welcome to commune with their parents?**

Yes. When the family is on vacation or visits another Lutheran Church, the family should speak with the pastor (before the worship service) and let him know that you have received training and instruction in the Lord's Supper and regularly receive the Lord's Supper. If the family moves, prior to completion of Confirmation Instruction, the youth would conclude the training in the new Church. Most Pastors make allowances for special circumstances.

**I have more questions.**

For further questions, please discuss with the pastors and/or a member of the Board of Elders.