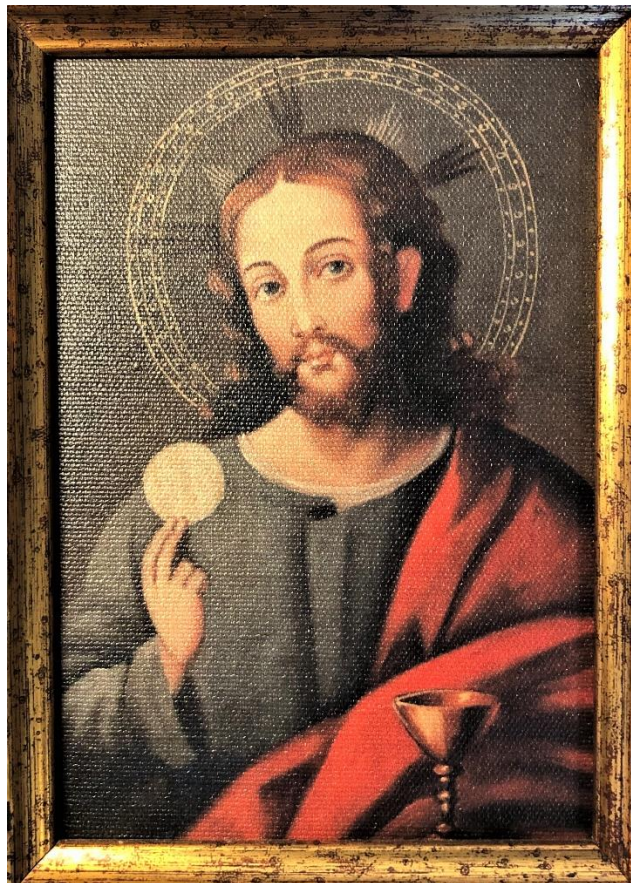


**First Penance and
First Holy Communion
St. Veronica Catholic Church
2025**



**Religious Education Office
St. Veronica Catholic Church**

3460 Centreville Road
Chantilly, Virginia 20151
703-773-2004
re@stveronica.net

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First Penance

St. Veronica School – TBD, February 2025
St. Veronica Religious Education – February 24, 2025

The Church teaches that parents are the first educators and catechists of their children. This means that parents have both a right and a duty to instruct their children in the truths of our faith. God the Father entrusts you with the task of raising your children to know, love, and serve Him so they can be happy in this world and the next.

To be true to the demands of the vocation to parenthood, parents should do all they can to learn about the Faith so that they can hand it on to their children.

You began preparing your child for the Sacrament of Penance long ago. Every time your child has seen or experienced loving forgiveness in your home, he or she has understood a little more about God's forgiving love. With the assistance of teachers and catechists, your child has begun a special preparation for the Sacrament of Penance. The preparation will focus on how God is a loving Father who forgives us if we just humble ourselves, repent, amend our lives, and return to Him in the sacraments.

Discuss this sacrament with your child. Remember to do more listening than talking during these discussion times. Your child may express feelings to you at home that may not have been mentioned in class. Be attentive, and your child will make you aware of his/her thoughts. Please do not hesitate to contact your child's teachers/catechists, the Religious Education Office, or one of the parish priests if you need help or advice in handling any of these questions or concerns.

Above all, relax and remember that this will be the first time your child will receive the Sacrament of Penance. It is the first step in a lifetime, during which your child's appreciation of the sacrament will grow and deepen. Please bear in mind that it is your responsibility to make sure that your child is provided the opportunity to go to Confession on a regular basis. We encourage you to lead by modeling the practice of a regular confession by going yourself, even monthly.

Reconciliation is one of the five precepts of the Church. These are the minimum requirements or obligations set for practicing Catholics to grow in love of God and neighbor. The second precept of the Church states, "You shall confess your sins at least once a year." (CCC 2041-2043). Once a year is not very often—it is the minimum. How often do we wash our cars or clean our houses? How much more valuable is our eternal soul! The saints often speak of how good reconciliation is for the soul, and we are all called to be saints. The more you come to understand and love the sacraments, the more often you will want to receive them.

As we approach this sacrament, may we always turn to the Mother of God, Refuge of Sinners, for the courage to make a good confession with a contrite heart and a firm purpose of amendment.

Why do we need Confession?

Sin. We are all familiar with it. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines sin as “an offense against God, a rupture of communication with Him. At the same time, it damages our communion with the Church” (those around us.) (CCC 1440).

Jesus teaches that there are less serious and more serious sins. We call less serious sins **venial** sins, and more serious sins **mortal** sins. What are the distinctions?

In order to commit a mortal sin, all three of the following conditions must be met:

1. The person must be committing a gravely evil act or thought (i.e., violation of the Ten Commandments, the Precepts of the Church, or sins against the moral teaching of the Church.)
2. The person must have knowledge that the act or thought is gravely evil. If a person has a doubtful conscience, they may not act until they have gathered sufficient information to make a rightly ordered decision.
3. The person must freely intend the act committed or the thought. It is important here to distinguish between temptations and willed thoughts.

If any one of these conditions is not met, a mortal sin has NOT been committed. The sin would generally be considered a venial sin. However, it should be noted that it is possible to commit a deliberate venial sin. These sins are of special concern, since they lessen a person’s resistance to commit more serious sins. Even if the act or thought is not a grave evil, a person may still know that the act or thought is still wrong and that they intend to perform that act or thought anyway. All this describes sins of **commission**. It should be noted, however, that we are also liable for sins of **omission**-good acts or obligations that we failed to do (i.e., failure to attend Mass every Sunday.) In certain circumstances, such sins can be mortal sins. As St. Teresa of Avila says: “I paid little attention to venial sins. It all but destroyed me. What was a venial sin, I was told was no sin at all. What was mortal sin, I was told was a venial sin. I went on in this blindness for more than 17 years.”

Although you are only obliged to confess your mortal sins, any sin may be confessed. Of course, no one should receive Holy Communion if they have committed mortal sins that have not been absolved by a priest through the Sacrament of Penance. It is also important to note, however, that we fulfill our Sunday obligation by worshipping at Sunday Mass, not by receiving Holy Communion, therefore, the obligation to worship at Mass (in person) each Sunday remains, even if one is unable to receive Holy Communion.

One must also consider the social effect of every sin. Even the most private sin affects the entire Church and society at large since we are the Body of Christ and live in community and engage in self-definition by our acts and thoughts.

While the above information is difficult to explain to second graders, it may be helpful for parents as guidelines when instructing their children.

Why Confession Prior to First Eucharist?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states clearly, “*Children must go to the sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time.*” (CCC 1457). *There are very fundamental theological reasons for this. When we receive the Eucharist, as the Catechism points out, “we must prepare ourselves for so great and so holy a moment. St. Paul urges us to examine our conscience: ‘Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment upon himself.’ Anyone conscious of a grave sin must first receive the sacrament of Penance before coming to Communion.”* (CCC 1385).

In other words, Catholics -both children and adults- should always want to be as free from sin as possible before receiving Holy Communion.

It may be objected to by some that children are too young to understand what sin is all about, and so it makes no sense for an innocent child to be confessing his or her “sins.” But the fact is, if a child is deemed ready to receive the Eucharist, it means that he or she has attained a use of reason sufficient to understand that it is Jesus who is present in the consecrated Host. It follows that, if a child has reached the age of reason, it also means that he or she is old enough to understand, in at least a basic way, that some actions are right, and some are wrong—and that it is good to do what is right, and bad to do what is wrong. Thus, every first communicant should have at least an elementary grasp of what it means to sin. And, given our fallen nature, the implication is that once a child has reached the age of reason, he or she has begun to commit some sins.

Does a second-grade child, however, really have to worry about having committed a “grave sin” as mentioned in the *Catechism*? Probably not! But that is not the point of requiring children to make their first confession before receiving the Eucharist. As a rule, pastors, parents, and catechists are not worried that First Communicants may be in a state of mortal sin; but they nevertheless want to teach the children that before receiving Christ Himself, they must get into the habit of examining their consciences and shunning all attachment to sin. After all, if children are not taught this practice from the very beginning, when will they ever learn to do it?

Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the privilege and responsibility of *evangelizing their children.*
(CCC 2225)

Counting on God's Mercy

The Sacrament of Penance is God's gift to us. In the story of the Prodigal Son, Jesus tells us that God is waiting for us to "come home." In the parable, the father is not only patiently waiting, but he is also out by the road longing for the wayward son to return. When the son begins to give his practiced speech of repentance, the father interrupts him, not allowing him to ask to be treated as a slave. He then shouts orders to begin the celebration. Jesus is telling us that this is how God feels about our reconciliation. It is not about our having to shame ourselves or face being scolded. It is all about letting ourselves receive the merciful and healing love and peace that only God's love can give us.

Mercy is the chief characteristic of God the Father. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus reveals to us that God's mercy far outweighs His judgment. In the encyclical *Dives in Misericordia* (Rich in Mercy), Pope John Paul II offered us insights into this most familiar of parables. The Holy Father wrote that, just as the Father in the parable constantly looks out in anticipation of his repentant son, so does God the Father anticipate our contrite return to the Church's sacraments and the state of grace.

This theme of repentance was among the central themes of both St. John the Baptist's and Our Lord's preaching. It is clear that Our Lord thought that repentance and forgiveness were so important that he instituted the Sacrament of Penance. In John 20:23, Jesus says to the Apostles, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." In Matthew 16:19, Jesus says to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." In both instances, Our Lord gave the Apostles (the first twelve bishops) and their successors the authority to forgive sins on His behalf. Since her earliest days, the Catholic Church has obeyed this divine command and has practiced some form of this Sacrament of Reconciliation, formalizing it as early as 100-150 A.D.

Another parable that reveals God's merciful love towards us is the parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15:4-7. In this parable, the Shepherd (representing God the Father), notices that He is missing one of His sheep, the sinner who has turned away. The Shepherd sets out to find the one sheep---the one is so very important. From this parable, we notice that God loves us individually so much since He seeks out one sinner at a time. We also see that God's love is patient and protecting. Sheep are proverbially foolish animals that need much guidance to avert potential disaster. Good shepherds go to great lengths to ensure that their sheep do not fall into the hands of predators or encounter other dangers. Finally, we know that God rejoices when the lost sheep is found and returns to the fold. In the parable, the Good Shepherd does not merely herd the sheep back to the fold; rather, He places that lost sheep on His shoulders and carries it back home. Similarly, we can experience the tremendously compassionate love God has for us through the Sacrament of Penance.

Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the privilege and responsibility of *evangelizing their children*.
(CCC 2225)

Penance: A Fact Sheet for Parents

The Sacrament is officially called the Sacrament of Penance because it consecrates the Christian sinner's personal and ecclesial steps of conversion, penance, and satisfaction. (CCC, 1423n).

- It is called the Sacrament of Conversion because it makes sacramentally present Jesus' call to conversion the first step in returning to the Father from whom one has strayed by sinning.
- It is called the Sacrament of Confession because disclosure or confession of sins to a priest is a necessary element of this sacrament. In a profound sense, it is also a "confession"-acknowledgment and praise of the holiness of God and His mercy toward sinful man.
- It is called the Sacrament of Forgiveness, since by the priest's sacramental absolution, God grants the penitent "pardon and peace."
- It is also called the Sacrament of Reconciliation because it imparts to the sinner the love of God who reconciles: "Be reconciled to God." He who lives by God's merciful love is ready to respond to the Lord's call, "Go; first be reconciled to your brother." (Matthew 5:24, CCC 1424n)
- It is called the Sacrament of Mercy

"Those who approach the Sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offenses committed against Him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer, labors for their conversion." (Lumen Gentium, 11).

When the priest celebrates the Sacrament of Penance, he is fulfilling the ministry of the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, of the Good Samaritan who binds up wounds, of the Father who awaits the prodigal son and welcomes him on his return, and of the just and impartial judge whose judgment is both just and merciful. The priest is the sign and the instrument of God's merciful love for the sinner.

The confessor is not the master of God's forgiveness, but its servant. The minister of this sacrament should unite himself to the intention and charity of Christ. He should have a proven knowledge of Christian behavior, experience of human affairs, respect and sensitivity toward the one who has fallen; he must love the truth, be faithful to the Magisterium of the Church, and lead the penitent with patience toward healing and full maturity. He must pray and do penance for his penitent, entrusting him to the Lord's mercy. (CCC 1466).

Given the delicacy and greatness of this ministry and the respect due to persons, the Church declares that every priest who hears confessions is bound under very severe penalties to keep absolute secrecy regarding the sins that penitents have confessed to him. He can make no use of the knowledge that confession gives him about penitents' lives. This secret, which admits of no exceptions, is called the "sacramental seal," because what the penitent has made known to the priest remains "sealed" by the sacrament. (CCC 1467).

Parent/Child Sample Discussion Questions

What is the Sacrament of Penance?

It is the Sacrament by which sins committed after Baptism are forgiven.

- Mortal sin kills the life of Christ in our soul.
- Venial sin makes our soul sick.
- Confession is like medicine.
- It cures sick souls.
- It is much stronger than any medicine for the body.
- The Sacrament restores the life of grace in souls deadened by mortal sin.
- This Sacrament helps us to be good afterward (gives grace = God's help).
- Our sins may be big. Our sins may be many. But Our Lord always forgives us if we are sorry and come to Him in confession.
- God is never angry with us. He loves us. God doesn't love us because we are good. He loves us because He is good.
- God loves us so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins and restore us to life through the Sacrament of Penance.

What must you do to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation worthily?

To receive the Sacrament of Penance worthily, I must:

- 1) Examine my sins (by an examination of conscience).
- 2) Be sorry for my sins (repent).
- 3) Make up my mind not to sin again (firm purpose of amendment)
- 4) Tell my sins to the priest (confess).
- 5) Do the penance the priest gives me (restitution).

How do you make your confession?

I make my confession in this way:

- 1) Prepare beforehand by asking the Holy Spirit to reveal my sins to me and by doing an examination of conscience.
- 2) I go into the confessional and I either kneel (behind a screen) or sit (face to face).
- 3) I make the Sign of the Cross.
- 4) “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.” Then I tell him how long it has been since my last confession. (At your first confession you will say : “This is my first confession.”)
- 5) I confess my sins, mention the kind of sins I’ve committed, and the approximate number of times I have committed them since my last confession. (The priest will help me if I need help.) At the end I say, “For these and all my sins I am truly sorry.”)
- 6) I listen to what the priest tells me. He may ask a question or give some advice. Then he’ll give me a penance. If I do not know what the penance is, I should tell the priest.
- 7) I say the Act of Contrition loudly enough for the priest to hear me.
- 8) The priest then prays the prayer of absolution.
- 9) I make the Sign of the Cross and say, “Amen” at the end of the prayer of absolution.
- 10) Do my penance outside the confessional (preferably before leaving the church.)

Remember, you are talking to Jesus, Our Lord. The priest is standing in Jesus’ place, because Jesus asked the priest to do so.

- Do not be afraid. Tell the truth.
- Tell all the sins you can remember.
- Do not leave out any sin on purpose.
- If you forget to tell a sin, God forgives it.
- If you don’t tell all your serious sins that you remember, you commit another sin.
- Listen carefully to the priest.
- Say your Act of Contrition from your heart. Really mean what you are saying.

What do you do after leaving the confessional?

After leaving the confessional, I do the penance the priest has given me, and say another prayer to thank God for forgiving my sins. Do the penance immediately after leaving the confessional. If you wait, you might forget.

Before bedtime, how can I reflect on my day?

Before bed each night, I can do an examination of conscience to reflect on my day and see if I have done anything that was sinful. I can ask God to forgive me for these sins. If I have done mortal sin, I need to go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation to be forgiven.

Sample Examination of Conscience

For First Penitents

Did I miss Mass ON PURPOSE on a Sunday or Holy Day? (Do not confuse this with your parents' not taking you to Mass. You have only the obligation to ask them to take you.)

Was I late for Mass through MY own fault?

Did I laugh, talk, or play in church?

Was I disobedient to anyone looking after me?

Did I talk back to anyone taking care of me?

When I had a chance to do something nice, did I choose not to do it?

Did I fight with someone?

Did I use angry words?

Did I cheat on schoolwork or on tests?

Did I try to "get even" with someone?

Did I use bad words?

Did I steal something?

Did I tell any lies?

Did I call anyone bad names?

Was I mean to other people?

Did I tease someone unkindly?

The Rite of Reconciliation

Child:

- 1) In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen
- 2) Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.
- 3) This is my first confession. (For future confessions: It has been _____ days/weeks/months/years since my last confession.)
- 4) These are my sins: (Name your sins and tell the priest the approximate number of times you've committed them. Take your time and don't rush through them.)
- 5) For these and all the sins I may have forgotten, I am truly sorry.

Priest:

- 1) Gives words of advice or suggestions.
- 2) Gives the child penance (often, this will be prayers to be said in the Church after Confession). Be sure to tell the priest if you do not understand the penance.
- 3) Priest asks the child to say an Act of Contrition.

Child:

An Act of Contrition

Oh my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You. I detest all my sins because of Your just punishments; but, most of all, because they have offended You, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Your grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life. Amen.

OR An Act of Contrition you have memorized.

(If you forget all the words, there are cards with them inside our confessionals.)

Priest:

Gives absolution (the prayer which removes one's sins)
The priest then says, "Go in peace."

Child:

Thank you, Father.

First Holy Communion – Saturday, May 10, 2025

May 10, 2025

9:45am-10:00am -Please drop-off your reception food item in the kitchen.

10:00am- All children will assemble dressed and ready to go in the Parish Hall.

10:30 a.m. – Mass

Following Mass, families and guests are invited to a light reception in the Parish Hall.

Reception Guidelines: Families are asked to each bring a food item to share and drop it off in the kitchen prior to Mass. We will already have cake, coffee, and drinks.

Please plan to bring the food item below to share, according to your last name:

A-F Tray (Fruit Tray, Veggie Tray, or Cheese/meat and Crackers Tray)

G-N Entrée (Finger Sandwiches, meatballs, Spring Rolls, Chicken Wings, etc.)

O-S Snack (Chips and Salsa, Pretzels and hummus, etc)

T-Z Desserts (Cookies, Brownies, Pastry (We will have cake.)

Rehearsals

For Religious Education: **Monday, April 28th at 5:30 p.m.** and **Monday, May 5th at 5:30 p.m.,** during RE session. These rehearsals are for all Parish Religious Education students and homeschool students.

For St. Veronica Catholic School: St. Veronica School students rehearse during school.

Photography

The photography policy during the First Holy Communion Mass is as follows:

(1) There will be a commercial photographer at the First Holy Communion Mass; (We are in the process of securing a photographer at this time).

(2) Parents may take pictures only during the children's entrance procession and during the closing recessional, but may not take photographs between these events; and when taking pictures of the processions, those taking the picture must not obtrude themselves into the center aisle to disrupt the procession.

(3) At the two times that photography is permitted, they may not be taken either from the center aisle of the church or near the sanctuary, and

(4) After Mass, the first communicants will stand as a group on the steps of the sanctuary, at which time, parents may take pictures of the group, as well as individual photos once pictures of the group are over. In addition, Msgr. Kleinmann, Fr. Moschetto, and Deacon Ochenkowski will remain in their vestments in the Parish Hall for the taking of individual pictures.

Dress Code

Special clothes highlight a special occasion; however, you are reminded to stress the coming of Jesus as the most important part of the day. Your child will catch the right spirit from you. Keeping this in mind, we offer the following guidelines:

Girls- should wear modest white dresses (shoulders should be covered) and white shoes with stockings or white ankle socks. Veils or hair flowers are optional. Gloves are permissible because the children are receiving on the tongue.

Boys- should wear suits or dress pants and a jacket, a dress shirt, a tie and dress shoes.

Denim clothing, tennis/athletic shoes, sneakers, sandals, flip-flops, and nail polish are not permitted. Cultural attire may be worn but please contact the Religious Education Office first.

Requirements for Receiving **First Holy Communion**

“It is primarily the duty of parents and of those who take their place, as it is the duty of the parish priest, to ensure that children who have received the use of reason are properly prepared and, having made their sacramental confession, are nourished by this divine food as soon as possible. It is also the duty of the parish priest to see that children who have not reached the use of reason, or whom he has judged to be insufficiently disposed, do not come to Holy Communion.”

(Canon 914, Code of Canon Law)

Sacramental Confession

1. Know the Ten Commandments.
2. Know the difference between Mortal and Venial Sin. (Mortal Sin involves grave matter, sufficient reflection, and full consent.)
3. Know an Act of Contrition.
4. Be able to examine his/her conscience.
5. Have faith in the sacrament. (Believe that the priest absolves and Jesus forgives.)
6. Have a desire for the sacrament.

Holy Communion

1. Understand the difference between ordinary bread and the Eucharist, i.e., that the consecrated host is truly the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ.
2. Have a desire for the sacrament.
3. Observe the one-hour Eucharistic fast.
4. Be in a state of grace.

First Communion Banners: Due to the Parish Office by May 1st

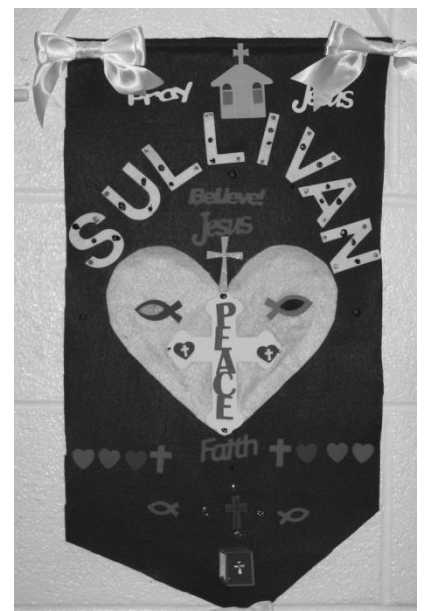
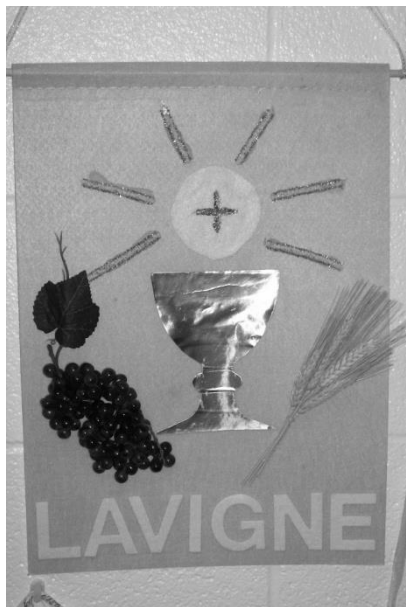
Many families of first Communicants enjoy making a special banner to honor their child's First Holy Communion. The banners will be hung in the Parish Hall for the day of First Communion and returned to each family.

Please look at the following page of this document for examples of previous First Communion banners. These are only suggested ideas.

Directions

1. Visit a store that sells First Communion banner kits and purchase a kit. They are sold at the Paschal Lamb in Fairfax, and at Party City stores.
2. Discuss this important event with your child and how, as a family, you would like to represent this event in symbolic form. For example, discuss how Jesus as God chose very simple means—bread and wine—to come very close to us. He very much wants a home in our hearts, and our daily work, prayers, and actions can open our hearts to God. Thus, symbols of the Eucharist, the cross, a special saint, bible, candles, praying hands, etc. would be appropriate to choose.
3. Purchase a piece of felt in a basic primary color and cut it into a rectangle 18 inches by 12 inches. The banner will hang down the long way.
4. Glue the symbols you and your child choose, as well as your LAST name onto the banner. The last name should be large and clear.
5. Items that are glued onto the banner may be paper, wood, metal, felt, cloth, etc.
6. Purchase a wooden dowel rod no longer than 12 inches. Fold the top one inch of felt over the rod and glue or sew into place.
7. To be able to hang the banner, securely attach one piece of ribbon/yarn to each end of the rod.

Banner Examples



St. Veronica Catholic Church
First Penance
First Holy Communion

2025 Timeline

Birth Certificate and Baptismal Certificate – Religious Education Office

This is the first year that the Diocese of Arlington requires for us to collect a copy of a Birth Certificate for every child. We also need to verify the seal on an Original Baptismal Certificate and keep a copy. If your child was Baptized at St. Veronica, we do not need to see a Baptismal Certificate, but we will still need a copy of your child’s Birth Certificate.

Note: St. Veronica School students may submit these items to the School Office. The St. Veronica School Office will supply the necessary copies to the Religious Education Office.

Sacrament Fee- Religious Education Office

A fee of \$40 is collected for administration costs related to First Holy Communion.

Note: St. Veronica School students in Second Grade, pay this in their tuition and do not need to submit additional funds to the Religious Education Office.

First Penance -

St. Veronica School children	TBD, February 2025
Religious Education children	Monday, Feb. 24, 2025

First Holy Communion Rehearsal -

Religious Education children	Monday, April 28, & May 5, During RE
St. Veronica School children	During school

Holy Hour in preparation of First Holy Communion -

All family members invited	Friday, May 9 th , 2025 from 6-7 pm.
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