



# Front the Heart

A Newsletter ♦ Published by Sacred Heart Parish ♦ Main Street South, P.O. Box 686 ♦ Southbury, CT 06488

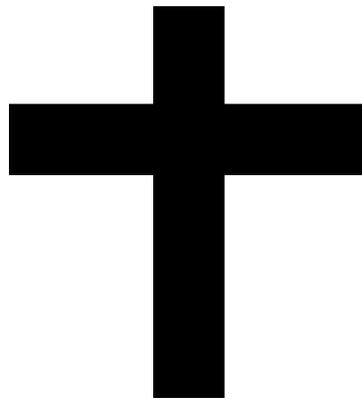
## A Season of Sacraments

Having grown up in a family in which Church was an integral part of our lives, I recall with a great sense of pride the lessons I learned. Most outstanding in my mind are those times in my life when I somehow became more aware of my responsibility as a person who was also a spiritual being. God and my parents played key roles in fashioning and awakening a sense of reverence and respect that have been anchors in my life.

I especially think back to my formative years around this time of year when, as a priest, I am preparing other young spiritual beings to be touched by the presence of God through the reception of the sacraments of Penance, Eucharist, Confirmation and Matrimony. My involvement in this process always makes me stop and wonder: what is it about our approach today that is so radically different that it has diminished the understanding and respect inherent in these sacraments answer: it's the time in which we live. Unfortunately, the quick and obvious conclusion isn't acceptable. Today more than ever before, greater care is given to the way in which catechesis (teaching) is imparted. Opportunities are available that would allow for a deeper understanding of exactly what sacramental participation requires. Despite that, tradition and the trappings associated with sentimentality seem to assume a prominent role. Parents for whom faith is an occasional

interruption in their everyday lives have their children baptized without realizing the responsibility they assume for themselves and their child. Baptism, the sacrament of belonging to God and membership in the Church, is reduced for many to simply a family tradition—an event rather than the reception of the gift of faith.

Similarly, parents enroll their children in religious education classes to have them learn about



God, Christ, forgiveness and the Eucharist. But when faith is not a part of a family's values or is not strengthened through family participation in the Sunday liturgy, how can a weekly religious education class hope to integrate a physical

and spiritual life development? How can we hope to create an awareness of sin and the joy associated with forgiveness if personal responsibility and spiritual development are nonexistent?

And what about this sacrament of personal commitment, this sacrament of responsibility and service called Confirmation? For all too many, it is seen as a type of graduation that marks the conclusion of any formal, ongoing religious study. Confirmation is often looked upon as an opportunity to become an adult in the Church, capable of making any decision without having to answer to anyone. Maybe the underlying problem that this sacrament overlooks is the fact that we aren't very good with commitment, especially one that involves a lifetime of questioning and growing, of changing and learning.

It's undeniable that we live in a different world. But we are responsible for making it the way it is and for allowing ourselves to be swept along by the current of popular thought. Perhaps sentimentality will always appear more powerful than sacramentality. However, when all is said and done, God is in control and each of us has a part in His plan. Our way is not God's way. He will continue to reach out and touch us, prod us, call us and finally astound us by His presence in the sacrament that is life.

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# Preparing for The Holy Eucharist

For Catholics, receiving the Eucharist as part of Mass is the central point of the service. Although offering bread and wine is a part of many Protestant services, only Catholics believe that they receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ. It is that belief that makes the Eucharist and, consequently, the Mass itself of special liturgical significance. More importantly, that is why, when children begin to ask questions about their faith, the Church directs their attention toward receiving first Communion.

For a youngster who is only beginning to see the world around him and question its authority, it is not easy to understand or even accept the concept of resurrection.

The idea that first Communion is the second of three steps (between baptism and confirmation) in reaching full membership in the Catholic Church might help a child concentrate on just what the Eucharist is and what it represents. To receive first Communion, a child must understand the principal mysteries of faith, distinguish the sacred Host from ordinary bread and understand the sacrament of reconciliation, also known as penance or confession.

Children begin to understand right from wrong at an early age. However, it takes time for a child to fully understand sin in the sense of violating the Ten Commandments. Young people will have differing reasons to be sorry to God for their misdeeds. Preparations for first

Communion emphasize that a priest will help us show the love and forgiveness of God if we tell Jesus those things for which we are truly sorry. The prayer at left, taken from a first Communion primer, may help.

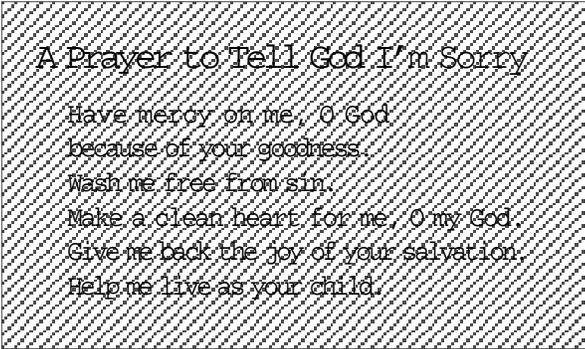
After confessing

one's sins and receiving a penance (as well as God's loving forgiveness), a communicant is prepared to receive the Eucharist for the first of hopefully many times to come.

The sacrament of the Eucharist was instituted by Jesus almost 2,000 years ago. He knew of his impending trials and ultimate death and sat at supper with His close friends and disciples. They had gathered for the Passover, a celebratory meal that commemorates the deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. After having given thanks to His Father in Heaven, Jesus offered bread and wine to His disciples as His body and blood, and asked that they do that as often as they could as a remembrance of Him. His disciples had difficulty understanding the full meaning of what He had done, until the Resurrection.

At first Communion, we receive this same blood and wine, transformed through the Priest's blessing during the Mass into the body and blood of Jesus, thus bringing us into true communion with God through His Son Jesus.

*Ernest Swarberg*



## A Prayer to Tell God I'm Sorry

Have mercy on me, O God  
because of your goodness.  
Wash me free from sin.  
Make a clean heart for me, O my God.  
Give me back the joy of your salvation.  
Help me live as your child.

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## On the Lighter Side

Who was the greatest financier in the Bible? Noah. He was floating his stock while everyone was in liquidation.

Who was the greatest female financier in the Bible? Pharaoh's daughter. She went down to the bank of the Nile and drew out a little prophet.

What kind of man was Boaz before he got married? Ruth-less.

What was the greatest comedian in the Bible? Samson: he brought the house down.

How did Adam and Eve feel when they were expelled from the Garden of Eden? They were really put out.

What is one of the first things that Adam and Eve did after they were kicked out? They raised Cain.

What excuse did Adam give to his children as to why he no longer lived in Eden? Your mother ate us out of house and home.

Who is the greatest baby-sitter mentioned in the Bible? David. He rocked Goliath to sleep.

*Author unknown*

*Contributed by Eileen Daley*

# A Father's Last Minute Reflections

It happens to all of us fathers of the bride at their daughters' weddings. We're suddenly overrun by emotions and memories. What emotions do I remember? The elation of the moment, certainly, but most of all I will never forget the revelation: whatever happened to daddy's little girl?

What really did happen to my little girl, the one now standing next to me dressed in white? This revelation generally descends upon the father at the same time he wipes perspiration from his forehead—the direct result of tightness of the dress shirt he's forced to wear by, of course, his little girl.

I was standing at the beginning of the aisle, at St. Joseph's, waiting for the go-ahead nod from Monsignor Connolly. My daughter eyed me nervously. "Daddy, are you all right?"

"Absolutely," I remember muttering.

But I wasn't all right. I had known that for the past few months. I had always been Lauren's confidant and her private comedian during late-night phone calls from Fordham, the one who always had the ability to say the right thing at the right time. (I thank God for that.)

And now it just wouldn't be the same.

I wonder whether Phil and Lauren will be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world." I hope that

God's grace, generated by the sacrament of marriage, will be enough to help them through troubled times when God, for His own reasons, tests us.

"Daddy, let's go," whispered my now-grownup daughter.

Wait a minute, I thought. What's the hurry? Surely someone out there must realize that I am losing a daughter and, since I already have three sons, am not looking forward to gaining another one. Can't anyone hear a father's plea?

I felt the pressure of Lauren's arm through mine. Here we go, I thought, and I looked over at my daughter, whose beauty could not be denied (not even by her modest father). As we began to walk down the aisle, I considered that, being Irish, my Catholic faith is never ending and certainly defiant, and I am secure that God's special grace will provide. On the other hand, there's nothing wrong with me providing a little corporal assistance just in case. Just think of me as God's little 250-lb. helper.

And so when I handed Lauren over to Phil, I was happy for her and for them. But I still felt a pang of selfishness. I had just lost the one person who could make me the perfect martini.

*Dermis J. McLaughlin*

## Ask Father Flynn

**Q** *A confused and perplexed Catholic asks, "Is it still a sin to miss Mass?"*

**A** I can certainly understand the confusion surrounding this question. Apparently, since the time of the Second Vatican Council, Catholics have fallen prey to the assumption that since so many of the externals of our faith have either changed or been abandoned, the concept of sin has also become extinct.

The Church has always taught and continues to teach that every Catholic is obligated to take part in Mass every Sunday as well as on the holy days of obligation. To absent one's self from Mass unless sick or unable to attend due

to an extreme circumstance (traveling in an area where it is impossible to attend Mass) is a sin that must be confessed. Additionally, the Church continues to teach that every Catholic must confess his or her sins once a year.

Although it is always easier to ease one's conscience by listening to those who say missing Mass "isn't a sin anymore," the Church remains constant in its teachings. As members of the Church, our first desire should always be directed at being close to God and being recipients of His grace.

*If you have a question about your faith, send it to the Communications Committee in care of the rectory and watch for the answer in a future newsletter.*

# Confirmation Culminates Two-Year Program

As Confirmation Weekend rapidly approached, tenth graders at Sacred Heart Parish prepared for their final pre-confirmation retreat. On April 24, the day before their confirmation, the students and their parents participated in a parent-child encounter at St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield. According to Kacey Tessitore, the parish's Director of Religious Education, the retreat gave students the chance to communicate with their parents on such topics as maturity, commitment and relationships—particularly their relationship with God—and put them in the mood to receive the sacrament the next day.

The April 25 confirmation ceremony ended two years of preparation and service. Sacred Heart's confirmation program begins in the ninth grade. During the first year, students attend weekly confirmation classes, and are required to perform 15 hours of community service: five hours at home, five hours within their church and five hours within the community. Students and their sponsors also take part in a Rite of Calling liturgy, where they acknowledge that they have been called to the sacrament of confirmation. Sponsors acknowledge their commitment to the students and agree to serve as living examples of Roman Catholicism.

In the spring, students attended their first pre-confirmation retreat: a day at the Franciscan Life Center. The retreat gave students the chance to participate in activities designed to help them understand

and strengthen their faith. The retreat also gave students the chance to discuss issues in today's world and to apply the principles of the Catholic faith to real-life situations. "The discussions were really great," said Chris Tocco. "The nuns were really nice to us, especially Sister



Claire. She discussed everyday occurrences with us and also helped us to understand Bible passages and concepts—such as the Holy Trinity—that weren't clear to us."

Kacey noted that the first retreat also brought together all of the confirmation classes for the first time. Like CCD classes, confirmation classes are divided by neighborhood. At the retreat, the students "found out that other kids in their high school go to the same church, and are being confirmed too. It really put confirmation in a whole new light for them," she said.

During the second year of the program, the students met as one class at Sacred Heart on one Sunday of every month. Students heard a broad range of speakers, usually teens and young adults who have already been confirmed, who take the time to share their faith and Catholic identity with others. They also participated in a Rite of Renewal liturgy, in which they

renewed their commitment to God and declared their intentions to continue with the confirmation program.

The students were also asked to become Christian witnesses and to take part in such parish activities as performing the Liturgy of the Word at Mass, serving as cross bearers and altar servers, and assisting with Social Concerns Committee functions. "These activities showed the students that Catholics are called to be 'people of service' and allowed them to explore many different aspects of the parish community," Kacey noted.

One student, Jason DeMonte, served as a waiter at a pasta dinner and at the Lenten soup and bread suppers. "I really enjoy helping people out, and serving dinner for them was a way to do just that," he said.

During Lent, the class also participated in a pre-confirmation liturgy called the Rite of Election. At the service, sponsors affirmed that the students had fulfilled their pre-confirmation obligations and were ready to be confirmed.

Their final faith commitment was made April 25. At baptism, the parents of the students chose their faith for them. At confirmation, the students chose the Catholic faith on their own, and accepted all of the responsibilities that go along with that choice. "This is the first faith decision I've made without my parents," said DeMonte, "I'm really looking forward to becoming a true disciple of Jesus." Lyn Nagel agreed. "My confirmation shows those who know me that my religion is a very important part of my life."

*Stellie Reck*

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# The "Lollipop Lady" Says Good-bye

Ellen Cassidy, affectionately known as the Lollipop Lady by children of Sacred Heart, retired in December from her post as Religious Education Secretary. How legions of Lilliputians will satisfy their sweet teeth after a rigorous session of Religious Education will for now remain in question.

After 13 years of faithful service, Ellen decided it was time to slow down a bit and enjoy more time with her husband, Deacon Vincent Cassidy, and her grandson Patrick, the son of her only child Patrick and his wife Lori.

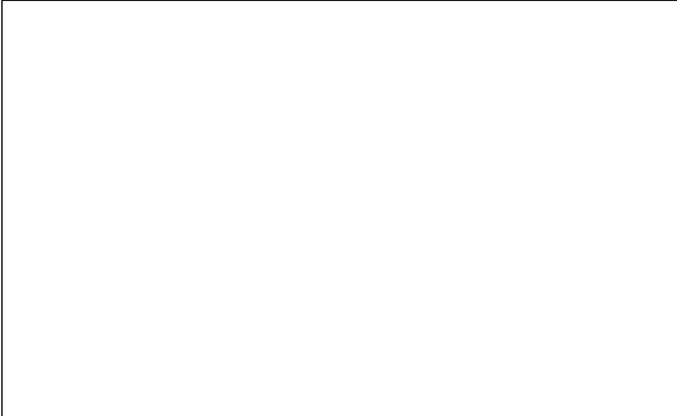
A New Jersey native and a long-time resident of Southbury, Ellen attended religious education at the Southbury Consolidated School (now the Gainfield Elementary School), with all eight grades of Catholics in one classroom. Even then, religious education was held on Tuesday afternoons, but was taught by a priest. When queried as to when that was, Ellen declined to say, noting only that at the time, Southbury's population totaled "500 people and 2,000 cows."

Ellen came to work for Father Flynn at Sacred Heart after a career in the insurance industry and with

experience as a bookkeeper. She's been active in the parish as a member of the Columbiettes and the Altar Rosary Society. She says she will miss the regular contact with young families that come through the Religious Education office, especially the little ones—who'll have to find a new source for their lollipops.

We all wish her a long, happy and healthy retirement and are thankful for her many talents, which contributed to our well-organized Religious Education Department. Fortunately, we'll still have the opportunity to see Ellen at church as a Eucharistic Minister, and she plans to continue to actively serve Sacred Heart parishioners of all ages.

*Rich Stephens*



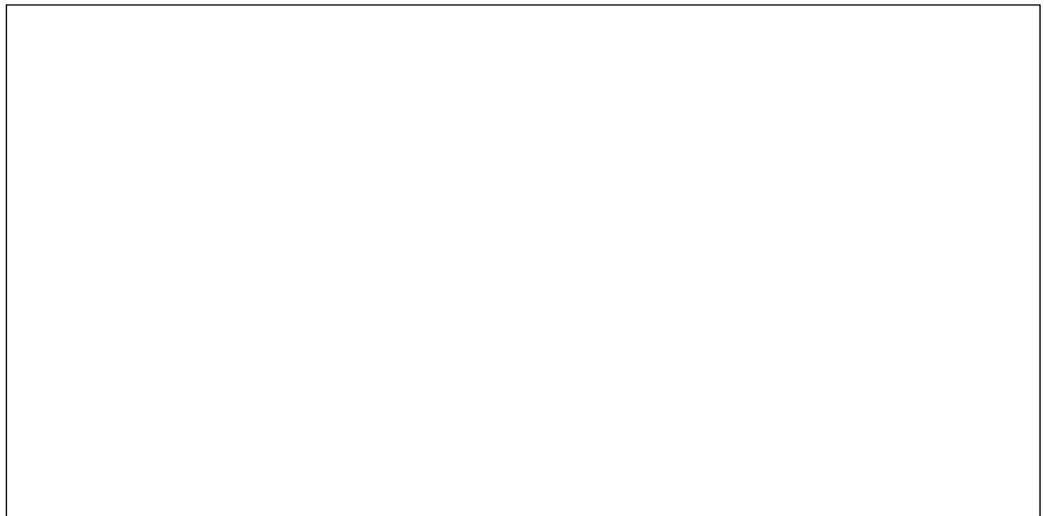
*At a reception in her honor, Religious Education staff and Fr. Flynn bid Ellen Cassidy a fond "farewell" on her recent retirement. Pictured from left: Eileen Dignazio, Kacey Tessitore, Ellen and Fr. Flynn.*

*Editor's note: Marilyn Stephens, former Secretary/Receptionist at the Rectory, replaced Ellen in late December as Religious Education Secretary—but not yet as the Lollipop Lady, as far as we know.*

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## First Communicants

*During the month of May, 92 youngsters (not all pictured here) will receive the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist for the first time. Preparation began last September with the Reconciliation Program. Final preparation will conclude at a retreat with their parents at the Church. Congratulations to all of these First Communicants!*



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# Jesus: He's the Best

**L**ike most aunts, I get much delight in talking with my niece and nephews. They are a variety of ages (Jeff is 18, Linda is 15, John is 10 and Matthew is 7), and I have a broad picture of the distinct stages of their lives. Linda was confirmed this spring and Matthew will receive his first Communion this year, and so I decided to ask them about the sacraments they'll be receiving and what they mean to them.

I decided that the quickest way to get an answer from Linda, a very busy student at Naugatuck High School, was to send her an e-mail. I explained that I was doing an article for our parish newsletter and asked for her input on what confirmation meant to her. She sent me her response within two days. For Linda, confirmation will be a deepening experience of baptismal grace. She will be renewed in her Christian beliefs and strengthened in her role as a Catholic disciple by using the gifts given to her by the Holy Spirit.

Matthew was my next interview. He and his family live next door, and he usually calls after dinner to see if I would like to play a game of Star Wars Monopoly. It wasn't hard to ask him a few questions. I asked him about his first confession. Matthew said he wasn't afraid of going into the Reconciliation Room: Jesus was with him, he said. And, since it was a special day, his parents took him to lunch to mark the occasion. I also asked him what receiving Holy Communion meant to him. "Those little breads are the body of Christ," he said. "They're Jesus." After a while, he added that Jesus is "nice" and that he always wants to be with you. Why is he nice, I asked him. His reply was full of innocence

and sincerity. "Jesus is nice because he gives us food, homes, family and fun stuff." I found myself laughing and with no additional prodding, Matthew told me again that Jesus "is very nice and he's the best." With that, I asked him why he loved Jesus. Jesus died for us and is God's son, was his reply.

His brother John gave his opinion too. He likes receiving Communion because he likes having Jesus with him and he likes talking to Him in prayer after receiving the host. He knows that Jesus loves him and is listening to him.

After our interviews and conversation, I thought about how free and open these kids are with their feelings for Jesus. No prodding was necessary to get them to talk about God. I could see God's grace working in them as they spoke about Him. Linda is on her journey of deepening her faith as a Christian disciple, and John and Matthew both know that Jesus loves them and that He is a good friend to talk to. Each stage in their lives takes them further in continuing their spiritual growth and heeding God's call.

As we see our children receiving first Communion and being confirmed, let us pray that they will continue their journey of faith into their adult years with as much excitement and openness to God's grace as they have now. The seeds have been planted, and must be nurtured and cultivated by a family deeply rooted in faith, a supportive parish community, and most of all, by a loving, ever-present God.

*Paula Vaghi*

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## Shake It Off and Step Up

**A parable is told of a farmer who owned an old mule.**

One day, the mule fell into the farmer's well. After assessing the situation, the farmer sympathized with the mule but decided that neither the mule nor the well was worth saving. He called his neighbors together and told them what had happened, and enlisted their help in burying the old mule in the well and putting him out of his misery.

As they began to shovel dirt into the well, the mule became hysterical. But as the farmer and his neighbors continued to shovel and the dirt hit his back, a thought struck him. Every time a load of dirt hit his back, the mule decided he should shrug it off and step up. This he did, blow after blow. No matter how painful the

blows or distressing the situation seemed, the mule fought panic and kept shaking it off and stepping up. Before long, the mule climbed from the well, battered and exhausted.

What seemed likely to bury him actually blessed him, all because of the manner in which he handled his adversity. If we face our problems and respond to them positively, refusing to give into panic, bitterness or self-pity, the adversities that come along to bury us usually have within them the potential to benefit and bless us.

Forgiveness, faith, prayer, praise and hope all are excellent ways in which to shake off problems and step out of the wells in which we find ourselves.

*Author Unknown  
Contributed by Eileen Daley*

