

## **THOUGHTS FROM YOUR PASTOR: Reminder: Protecting our Children Here in Hardin County**

**Note: In light of the recent “list” released by the Diocese, I re-issue the following information to remind everyone of what I shared last August regarding how we maintain safe environments here at ICC and OLL. – Fr. Ferguson**

As a faith community, we have a great treasure that we have been granted by our Lord and by the generations of Catholics before us: the treasure of the apostolic faith of Jesus Christ, our salvation, and our hope of eternal life in Heaven. This is the treasure that Jesus instituted the Catholic Church 2000 years ago in order to pass on to the world for generations to come, especially through the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist at the Holy Mass: the most intense and Real Presence of Jesus possible in this world.

This is the treasure that we want to pass on to the next generation: our children and grandchildren. And it is so gratifying to see in our Hardin County parishes the wonderful ways that we assist our children, youth, and teens in their walk with the Lord and their participation in the life of the Church of Jesus Christ. Things like our PSR programs, our high school youth groups, our trips to the Steubenville Youth Conference, our pre-school programs, our altar server opportunities – even Jackie the Cat’s weekly bulletin reflections – etc., help our children to come to know and to experience the treasure of the love of God for them and His plan for their lives – both on Earth and more importantly in Heaven – especially given the many unhealthy cultural forces that are already acting against their souls in our secular society.

As we provide all these opportunities for our children and teens, it is crucial for everyone to be aware of and to continue to support the many steps and precautions we have long had in place here in our parishes to provide a safe environment for our little ones. Both Our Lady of Lourdes and Immaculate Conception are required to be fully compliant with the policies of the Diocese of Columbus regarding “safe environment” practices, which are overseen by the Bishop and the Office of Safe Environment headed by Ms. Regina Quinn in Columbus. The program is called “Protecting God’s Children” (PGC). It has been fully in place in our Diocese since 2003. The requirements are extensive, and each parish is expected to submit a “PGC Self-Audit” every March to the Diocese to document that we are, indeed, meeting the requirements. Ms. Quinn also visits each parish every three years to do a thorough “PGC On-Site Audit” of our child protection practices.

The requirements that we observe include the following, which is not an exhaustive list: 1) every employee (including clergy) regardless of expected contact with children, and every volunteer of the parish who will ever have contact with children in the course of his/her duties, is required to have a fingerprint background check done, and to complete the 3-hour course called “VIRTUS” on child protection awareness. Absolutely no exceptions can be made to this diocesan policy; 2) a certain number of adult chaperones is required for youth trips depending upon the number of youth involved; 3) adults cannot have one-on-one meetings with any youth behind closed doors; such meetings must be done “in the open” or with other adults in the vicinity; 4) a “two-deep” strategy is observed as much as possible with gatherings of youth, such that multiple PGC-certified adults will be in or around groups of youth for classes, events, etc; and much more. Each parish has a staff member who coordinates our parish compliance with these diocesan child protection policies, as we make sure that all employees and volunteers around children are compliant.

Personally, as pastor of several parishes now, and having worked in numerous Catholic elementary and high schools, I have always taken these requirements very seriously, especially given that youth and teen ministry is actually one of my specific pastoral interests given the cultural and spiritual challenges facing our youth. I am personally involved with both the self-audits and on-site audits, and I have always been very careful regarding how I interact with youth and teens. As some examples, when I have conducted Confirmation interviews, I have done them outside at a picnic table (and NEVER alone in my personal office); when I have taught the ‘Theology of the Body for Teens’ course on purity, chastity, and sexuality issues, I have always had a male and a female adult assistant to attend all classes with me; and just recently when I was asked by a teen for some spiritual direction, I met with the teen at a time when an adult staff member could be nearby.

Hopefully, awareness of these requirements and practices help all of us to be confident that here in Hardin County – and in the Diocese of Columbus – the crucial issue of child protection is indeed being taken very seriously as we minister to our next generation. As is always the case, if anyone has questions, feel free to contact me or contact Ms. Regina Quinn at the Safe Environment Office at 614-241-2568.

## Lenten Penance Service

Sunday, March 24 ~ 12:30 – 2:30 p.m. at Immaculate Conception Church

Exposition and Adoration

Prayer and Reflection

Confessions

12:30 pm	Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament
12:45-2:15	Quiet time for Prayer and Reflection
12:45 – 2:15	Confessions heard by Fr. Jeffrey and Fr. Ferguson
2:15 pm	Benediction and Reposition of the Blessed Sacrament
2:30 pm	Dismissal



The rite of Eucharistic Exposition and Benediction can be found on the inside back cover of the missalette.

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## Parish School of Religion – Calendar & Sacraments

PSR Classes: March 10, 17, & 24; April 7; May 5, 12, & 19

OLLY (Our Lady of Lourdes Youth) Mime Stations of the Cross: Good Friday at Noon



First Communion Parents Meeting: March 31 from 12:15 – 1:30 pm  
First Communion Rehearsal (with parents): May 12 at 9:45 am  
First Communion Mass: May 18 at 11:00 am

Confirmation Retreat at Damascus: April 12 – 14.

*Turn in Permission forms and retreat fees.*

Confirmation Rehearsal (Parents, students, sponsors):

Sunday, May 19 at 12:15 pm

Confirmation Mass with Bishop Brennan:

Wednesday, May 22 at 7:00 pm

