

Implementating Prayer Partner Activities in Parish Sacrament Preparation Programs

Prayer Partner activities are marvelous ways to connect those who are preparing to receive sacraments with the larger parish community. In a nutshell, a member of the parish community choses (random draw or chosen pick) or is assigned a student who is preparing for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist or for Confirmation. Some parishes ask Prayer Partners not to review their identity to the student until shortly before First Eucharist or Confirmation, others have Prayer Partners regularly communicate through mailed notes to each other. Regardless, the students are reminded often that the parish community is praying specifically for them and they are asked to pray for their Partner in return.

This is how some parish leaders in our archdiocese implement this activity:

- Each fall, we advertise “Prayer Partner Sunday” for a few weeks prior to the event so that parishioners can be made aware of the date for that year’s distribution of names. At one of our Masses on Prayer Partner Weekend we distribute the names of the First Eucharist students, at another, the Confirmation students. At announcement time, the PCL makes a short announcement about the activity and invites the parish members to come forward after the Song of Thanksgiving has concluded to pick a Partner. When they pick a Partner, they can chose the individual student they would like to pray for that year (2nd graders trace their hands, folded in prayer, on cardstock, Confirmation candidates write a short note for their Partners) and then fill out a small information card which is immediately returned to the PCL so that we know who is praying for whom. The Partners are given the name and home address of the student so that they can write their Partner notes of encouragement throughout the year of preparation.
- We connect our 2nd graders to some of the “shut-ins” in our parish. At the beginning of the school year, each of our second graders writes a letter to one of our “shut-ins” and asks their new “Partner” to pray for them throughout the year. We give each of the 2nd graders a “shut-ins” name and address. The 2nd graders write the note and address the envelope. We have the 2nd graders write notes throughout the year – initial note, note before 1st Reconciliation, note at Christmas, note before 1st Eucharist, and so on. The majority of the Partners write back to the 2nd graders. Also, for the past two years, we’ve also had our 2nd graders write to our Archdiocesan seminarians.

Suggestions:

- If your activity involves giving out the child’s name and address, always inform parents, prior to the day of the activity, that their child’s name (and possibly home address) will be given out to a parishioner for this activity. Allow parents the option to “opt out” of this activity upon request. Because of personal issues, some parents may not want their child’s name distributed to someone in the parish.
- Be specific as to what you expect from Prayer Partners. Some parishes request prayers only from Prayer Partners, some ask for prayers and periodic notes for the student. Some parishes request that no physical gifts be offered to Prayer Partners as some Partners are more generous with physical gifts than others and the administrators of the activity don’t want any student to be left out.
- Inform Prayer Partners of important dates in the year of their Partner, such as dates for the sacrament, for their retreat or spiritual activity, or other special event.

- If the Prayer Partners have remained anonymous through the year of preparation, remind them to reveal their identity to their student (either through note or in person) near the time of First Eucharist or Confirmation.