

## PARENTING THROUGH THE SACRAMENTS

By Jennifer E. Bruneau



*Jennifer Bruneau, pictured with her daughter, Sadie, reflects on how sacramental preparations enrich the whole family.*

Our family has been on a journey through the sacraments these past two years with our oldest daughters. During the preparation for our daughters' sacraments of Reconciliation and First Communion, our whole family benefited from the experience. My husband, Geoff Olsen, and I have three daughters, Sydney, age 9; Sadie, age 7; and Shelby, age 5. Sydney received her First Reconciliation and Holy Communion last year. This year was Sadie's turn. The sessions we attended at church and school together with the sharing we did as a family at home refreshed my own faith formation.

I was confirmed as an adult while attending Loyola University Chicago. During that time, I developed a passion for knowledge and understanding of what it means to be Catholic, and I appreciated the spiritual benefits of

discerning this calling as an adult. I experienced a similar opportunity for personal enrichment when assisting our oldest daughter, Sydney, with her sacramental preparations last year and again this year with Sadie. I realized that although I went through the process just one year ago, I still learned and elaborated my understanding in new ways.

Regardless of whether children attend religious education or Frassati Catholic Academy – like mine do, families participate in additional training and retreats outside of the classroom. Together we learned church terminology and the reasoning behind our Catholic practices. We explored the different ways to ask for forgiveness and admit wrongdoing while truly being sorrowful. We toured the sacred space, which is something I had not experienced and highly enjoyed. We received a behind-the-scenes look at the sacristy as well as education about proper care and handling of the Eucharist. I enjoyed interacting with other parents and children during these sessions as well as hearing different answers and perspectives to the reflection questions during the retreat.

During the final weeks before Sadie's First Communion, I helped plan and execute the First Communion retreat together with a team of parent volunteers under the direction of Sue Matousek, Director of Religious Education. Candidates were separated into small groups and participated in crafts to help implement the teachings such as God's ever-growing love for us. They also practiced going through the motions of walking up and taking the bread and wine for the first time. This is exciting to watch and experience. I would highly recommend parents of future celebrants become as involved as their schedule allows.

I truly love growing along with my children as they have helped refresh the faith and knowledge of our entire family. Our girls enjoy quizzing each other over dinner about what they have learned. St. Mary sacramental preparation has helped our family grow closer to our parish and has strengthened our relationships with God.

Thank you, St. Mary, for helping us grow together in love. We should all be proud of the next generation being formed in faith at St. Mary.