



St. Francis of Assisi
CATHOLIC CHURCH

CHILDREN'S FAITH FORMATION PARENT HANDBOOK

Saint Francis of Assisi Parish
Children's Faith Formation
703-221-3127 703-221-3246 (fax)
Website: www.stfrncis.org/cff/

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your role as parents in the faith formation of your children is of utmost importance and we are honored to share in this effort with you! Faith Formation is a shared responsibility of all of Christ's faithful; first and foremost of parents because of their unique and close relationship with their children. Our responsibility is to support you in this effort in any way that we can.

Canon 226, §2 "Since they have given life to their children, parents have a most grave obligation and possess the right to educate them. Therefore, it is for Christian parents particularly to take care of the Christian education of their children according to the doctrine handed on by the church."

Baptismal Rite: "You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training him (her) in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him (her) up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?"

We know that your family is the primary community, the "Domestic Church", where faith is shared and nurtured. It is in the home where children are first introduced to prayer and faith traditions and where habits of church attendance are started and nurtured. The Church assists by providing formal faith formation and catechesis. Thus, the bond between home and church enables, empowers and nurtures families to be living examples of Christ and builds up the Kingdom of God.

It is important for parents to give visible signs of their faith through prayers, worship and sacramental celebrations. This lived example will show children the value that faith holds in our lives. Your children will come to love God in the same way that you show them how and why you love Him, they will follow your example! Making faith a priority enriches our children's lives by establishing and deepening a relationship with Jesus. Faith Formation begins with prayer in our homes and with regular attendance at the Sunday Liturgy, providing a sound basis for Faith Formation classes. Regular attendance is essential, so please choose your session to keep conflicts to a minimum. Genuine formation in faith informs, forms, and transforms.

The Faith Formation Catechist is a partner to the parent's role in this process. The Faith Formation Team builds upon the foundation that you have laid in fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of faith. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns, and please take every opportunity to discuss, share and build a faith relationship with your child.

In Christ,

Sheila Noble, Director of Faith Formation
Angelica Silva, Coordinator of Religious Education
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Introduction

Welcome to the Saint Francis of Assisi Children's Faith Formation Program! It is our hope that this parent handbook will serve as a guide and reference regarding our program.

Children's Faith Formation Mission Statement

We look upon faith formation as a total parish experience involving not just the child, but also the parents, families, catechists, clergy and all those who form the community of faith. We believe that faith formation most significantly involves getting to know Jesus and learning to follow Him. Our program reflects an integrated learning experience composed of catechesis, prayer, sacramental preparation, sacred Scripture, Catholic doctrine, liturgy, community building and other aspects of a deeply spiritual life.

Through the light of faith we hope to develop in those entrusted to our care a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ our Lord. We strive to build up the church, fulfill the message and mission of Jesus Christ, and to love God and all of God's creation by the inspiration and vision of Saints Francis and Clare.

The Goal of Catechesis

"A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep. And when the sun rose, it was scorched and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it and it produced no grain. And some seed fell on rich soil and produced fruit. It came up and grew and yielded thirty, sixty and a hundred fold." (Mark 4:3-8).

The seed is the Word of God and the sower is Jesus Christ. The seed falls on good soil when we make time in our lives for God, when we open our ears to the Good News, and when we live in solidarity with our neighbor. Saint Francis of Assisi Faith Formation exists to help children and families grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ. As Pope John Paul II wrote, "The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only he can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit."

The Role of Parents

At Baptism, parents undertake the responsibility of providing for their child's Christian formation. By word and example, parents teach their children throughout their lives. Saint Francis of Assisi Faith Formation exists to assist parents and to partner with you in that task. Although each of our catechists work diligently to help children grow deeper in faith, the role of parents is absolutely essential. It is essential that the foundation for a faith-filled life is first laid at home. Parents are encouraged to:

- Help your child grow in understanding by talking about what he/she learned in Faith Formation classes.

- Demonstrate an interest in reading and talking about Scripture.
- Spend time in prayer with your child(ren) each day.
- Bring your child(ren) to Mass and do your best to help them understand and appreciate its importance.
- Prepare for Sunday Mass by reading the Sunday readings with your family one evening during the week. The text of the Sunday readings is available online at www.usccb.org/nab
- Provide a good Christian example for your children by continually striving to live your life according to the Gospel.

St. Francis of Assisi Children's Faith Formation

Classes begin the week of September 7, 2025

Registration for Children's Faith Formation Classes:

Parents must be registered parishioners of Saint Francis of Assisi Parish in order to register their children in the Faith Formation Program. Upon registration, full payment is expected unless arrangements are made for a payment plan. All information will be kept confidential. When registering for kindergarten or first grade or if your family is new to the CFF program, a copy of the baptismal certificate must be submitted for each student.

Sessions: **Sunday** **9:15am - 10:45am**
 Thursday **5:15pm - 6:45pm** * Please note the time change

RE Fees if paid before August 1st: One child: \$110, 2 children: \$160, 3+ children: \$210, First Eucharist Fee: \$30, Confirmation Fee (due only in the second year of Confirmation Preparation): \$75

If paid after August 1st: One child: \$120, 2 children: \$170, 3+ children: \$220, First Eucharist fee: \$30, Confirmation Fee (due only in the second year of Confirmation Preparation): \$75

Home School Option for Children's Faith Formation: Parents are the primary educators of their children, especially in the formation of faith, so we offer home school as an option. The Children's Faith Formation program will provide materials, resources and support to you in these efforts.

During the years of sacramental preparation, we prefer that children attend Faith Formation classes for their strengthening in the faith community. Our sacraments are community celebrations and the child prepares for the sacraments within the faith community, bringing a wealth of faith experiences to be shared with others. You may, however, opt to home school during sacramental preparation years for students in grades 1, 2, 7 and 8. We do not allow homeschool for High School Sacramental preparation class. If you choose to home school, please complete the online registration form or packet and pay the required fees. You will be required to attend all homeschool parent meetings and Sacramental parent sessions and retreats as well as keep an accurate log of all CFF homeschool hours. You must also turn in all unit tests attached to the log at the end of the year for grades K-7 and Chosen review essay questions for 8th grade.

Special Needs Children's Faith Formation

Special Needs Faith Formation classes are available. Parents must inform us of any learning difference, health challenge, language problem, or home situation which may affect their child's ability to learn or participate fully in class so that we can do our best to provide accommodations in a timely manner. Most children with special needs can be included in regular Children's Faith Formation classes with assistance from an aide. We do have classes specifically for Special Needs children if needed for your child. CFF desires to partner with parents to provide faith formation and sacramental preparation for all children.

New to the Parish or Transferring

Students transferring from another parish's Faith Formation program or from a Catholic school must supply the following when registering:

- A copy of your child's baptismal certificate
- Documentation of prior religious education or Catholic school completion (letter of verification, including attendance record). Students who enter the CFF program without having celebrated the sacraments of First Reconciliation, First Communion or Confirmation and who are beyond the usual age for reception of these sacraments will need additional formation.

Custody Issues

Please notify the Coordinator of Children's Faith Formation (CCFF) if only one parent/guardian has the custodial care of a child during class time. We must be aware of who may or may not pick up children during or after class.

Rights of Non-Custodial Parents

Both parents have access to a child's faith formation progress reports and achievement information **unless** one parent produces a legal (court certified) document to the contrary. Once we receive that document, it will be attached to the child's record and all catechists to whom the child is assigned will be informed of these special directions. Progress reports to the non-custodial parent will be provided upon request, which must be made in writing. Changes in the child's normal routine must be approved by the custodial parent in collaboration with the CFF Office; catechists will be notified of these changes. No child will be dismissed from the program to the non-custodial parent without the written consent of the custodial parent.

Attendance:

Regular attendance at Children's Faith Formation (CFF) sessions is important to the ongoing faith formation of students. The sessions are built on each other and carry a central focus throughout the year.

During the year, parents are asked to notify the CFF office if their child will be absent. **For all absences, parents must obtain the assignment from your child's catechist, have your child complete the assignment and return it to the Children's Faith Formation office.**

Students in Sacramental Preparation (1st, 2nd, 7th, 8th, High School Sacramental Preparation) may not miss more than 3 scheduled classes to be considered ready for reception of the sacraments. Students in non-Sacramental grades (3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th) may not miss more than 4 classes for the year. Please contact us as soon as possible if there is a family situation that will impact your child's attendance.

Inclement Weather: Cancellations will be emailed and texted through Flocknote. **Please be sure that you notify us of any changes to your preferred phone contact number or email address.**

When Prince William County Schools are closed or dismissed early and/or after school activities are cancelled on a Thursday due to the weather (not Transportation), CFF classes on Thursday will be cancelled. In case of inclement weather on Sunday, please check your email and texts for notifications.

2025-2026 Children's Faith Formation Calendar

The **CFF Calendar** is available online at stfrncis.org under Learn/Children's Faith Formation/Welcome introduction or in the Children's Faith Formation Office.

Tardiness

Please make every effort to bring your child to class on time. The child's tardiness will be recorded and if minutes have accumulated to the amount of one class, an absence will be recorded. For Security reasons, the front doors are secured 10 minutes after the session begins. If you arrive more than 10 minutes after the beginning of the session time, please come to the side (Faith Formation Office) entrance and ring the white bell located next to the door.

Communication

Announcements regarding parent meetings, special events, deadlines, etc. will be communicated to parents primarily by email through Flocknote. You may also check the Sunday bulletin and parish website.

It is the responsibility of the parent to make sure that the CFF Office has the most up-to-date email address and phone number on file. Any issues with attendance, class participation or discipline will be communicated to parents in a timely fashion.

Student Progress Reports: Reports will contain records of attendance, mastery of curriculum and behavior and will be sent home in January.

Parents may contact the Children's Faith Formation Office at 703- 221-3127 any time to discuss any issues or questions.

Drop Off

Parents should park and accompany all children into the school building and students in grades 5 and below to their classrooms. On Sunday, the lanes in front of the parish center/school are not to be used for drop off, please go around and park and walk your child to class. **Please do not park in front of the parish center/school.**

Dismissal

Parents must meet their children in the school building, and younger children (in grades K-5th) at their CFF classroom. Students will be released only to their parents or an adult or older sibling explicitly authorized by the parents. Please inform the CCFF of any special custody situations. A dismissal form must be filled out and turned into the CFF Office with authorized persons listed on the form along with working telephone numbers.

Please make sure to exercise caution when walking in the parking lot. Under no circumstances are cars to block the lane in front of the school. The exit at the elementary wing is **never** to be used during CFF and under no circumstances is a child to walk home without an adult.

If your child must leave early, please first obtain a form from the CFF Office, no child will be dismissed without a signed form.

Early Dismissal

Parents **must come** to the CFF Office prior to taking their child out of class for early dismissal. A form must be obtained from us to present to the Catechist. Repeated early dismissal requests by the parent will result in additional absences.

Lost and Found

If your child loses an item, please contact our office at 703-221-3127 and we will do our best to assist you.

Supplies

Textbooks, pencils, crayons, etc. are provided. If the class is working on a special project, the parents may be requested to contribute extra supplies. Textbooks need to be brought to class each week unless otherwise notified by the catechists.

Textbooks

We use the *Christ our Life* series by Loyola Press for grades 1-7. Grade 6 will also receive the "Prove it Bible" which should be brought to class each week in 6th, 7th and 8th grades.

Additional information on the *Christ Our Life* series may be found at www.loyolapress.com.

Please be sure to review the additional Family Resources. In the case of a lost textbook, a replacement may be purchased online at loyolapress.com for grades 1-7, Christ Our Life Series, Parish Edition. If your child is in grade 8, or the Teen Sacramental preparation classes they use other textbook series, so please contact our office for information to order new books.

The 8th grade curriculum is the *Chosen* for Confirmation series from Ascension.

Learning Environment

A welcoming and respectful environment is necessary to provide an atmosphere conducive to learning and strengthening of faith. The following guidelines apply:

- A. All students are to report to their classrooms **promptly each week**. It is helpful if students use the restroom before class begins, to minimize disruption.
- B. **NO Cellphone, Earpods/Earphones or Electronics Use during class:** Students will **NOT** be permitted to use cell phones, have ear pods or earphones or any electronic devices during class time or special sessions. **All cell phones and electronics must be put away at the beginning of class.**
- C. Students are expected to be respectful and cooperative at all times and to follow the guidelines set forth by the catechists for appropriate behavior within the classroom.
- D. Students are expected to be respectful of the shared space and property in all classrooms.
- E. Students are not to leave early without a dismissal note from the CFF Office.
- F. Disruptive Behavior - The catechist will send disruptive students to the Children's Faith Formation Office and efforts will be made to address and modify the disruptive behavior. If a student is sent to the Office a second time, parents will be notified. If the student's behavior is affecting the learning process, the parents and the child will need to meet with the catechist and the Coordinator of Children's Faith Formation to explore a solution to the problem or an alternative setting for the child's learning experience.
- G. Student Progress Reports will be issued in January and will reflect attendance, participation, evidence of knowledge, and behavior. Please sign and return to your child's catechist. The Coordinator of Children's Faith Formation is available for follow-up conferences for any area of concern.
- H. Absolutely NO food is allowed in the classroom, to accommodate allergy concerns.
- I. Weapons - Any student found with a weapon (gun, pocket knife, screw driver, explosive device etc.), toy or otherwise, will be immediately removed from class and the parent/ guardian notified. The student will not be readmitted to class until parents have met with the CCFF.

Emergency Health and Safety Information

In case of injury or other emergency that affects a child, CFF staff will immediately notify the child's parents and 911 if warranted. If parents cannot be reached, the staff will call the person designated as emergency contact on the registration form. If treatment is necessary and no parent is available for consent, treatment will be sought for the welfare of the child. Personnel and catechists are not permitted by law to administer any medications or give medical advice to students. It is therefore imperative that parents provide our office with the necessary information in case it is ever needed. Parents are urged to inform the CCFF or CFF Office in case a child is diagnosed with a medical condition or learning difference after registration has taken place.

Crisis safety management: intruder lock down, weather hazard or other threat will be handled following procedures established by our school should they become necessary. No student will be released without parent's written instruction, personal identification and prior parent authorization. No student will be released to parents during an emergency situation unless a parent signs them out.

All volunteers are instructed in emergency procedures; evacuation maps and first aid information are located in each classroom. If a situation arises that requires building evacuation, the children will be brought to the church. If an offsite location is necessary, the children will be relocated to Triangle Elementary School, 3615 Lions Field Rd., Triangle, VA 22172

Curriculum Goals and Objectives

The Arlington Diocese Faith Formation curriculum guidelines are available online at <http://www.arlingtondiocese.org>. The Loyola Christ Our Life texts and curriculum are approved by the US Bishops Committee. The scope and sequence of this program may be found online: loyolapress.com.

Diocese of Arlington Child Protection Policy

The Diocese of Arlington and Saint Francis of Assisi Parish are committed to ensuring the personal safety of all children in our program. Any adult who works with or will have substantial contact with children or young people at Saint Francis of Assisi Parish are required to:

- Complete a volunteer application form
- Pass a criminal background check
- Take part in a four-hour VIRTUS training session

Class aides under the age of 18 do not receive this Child Protection training; therefore must be supervised at all times by an adult who has received this training. All catechetical volunteers and staff are mandated reporters and are instructed in identifying and reporting suspected cases of abuse as prescribed by the Diocese of Arlington.

SACRAMENTS

Preparation for the sacraments of First Reconciliation, First Communion, and Confirmation require two full years of enrollment in our Faith Formation classes. The preparation for First Reconciliation and First Communion may not be completed any earlier than the child's 7th birthday.

Children beyond 1st grade who need preparation to receive the sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Communion will be enrolled in a CFF class corresponding to their current school grade for both years of preparation. In addition, those students and their families will be required to attend the Family Sacramental Preparation sessions held during regularly scheduled CFF session times. The calendar of required family attendance dates will be provided. Students beyond 8th grade who need preparation to receive the sacrament of Confirmation will be enrolled in High School Sacramental Preparation for both years.

First Communion Preparation

The best preparation for children to receive the sacrament of First Communion is to attend weekly Liturgies, accompanying their parents and family each week at Mass as they grow to have a sense of community and understand the importance of the Mass in the life of a Catholic Christian. Preparation for the sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Communion typically takes place during first and second grades. Children beyond 1st grade who need preparation to receive the sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Communion will be enrolled in a CFF class corresponding to their current school grade for both years of preparation. In addition, those students and their families will be required to attend the Family Sacramental Preparation sessions held during regularly scheduled CFF session times. The calendar of required family attendance dates will be provided. Children must receive First Reconciliation before First Communion and children are required to attend retreats and parents are required to attend all parent sessions prior to First Communion.

Confirmation Preparation

For Confirmation preparation, the Diocese of Arlington requires two years of enrollment in Faith Formation classes. While this typically takes place during 7th and 8th grades, St. Francis of Assisi has a high school Sacramental Preparation class for students beyond 8th grade who have not yet been confirmed.

****New requirement beginning 2026-2027 – All students preparing for Confirmation must complete the 6th grade Old Testament curriculum *before* they may begin Confirmation preparation. Any 7th or 8th grade students who have not completed the 6th grade Old Testament curriculum will need to complete that requirement before they can be placed in a year I Confirmation preparation class.****

All Confirmation candidates and a parent must attend a mandatory meeting to review Confirmation preparation program requirements in the fall of the first year of preparation.

Young people are confirmed in their faith by being incorporated into a community of believers. This is an on-going process in which the adult community plays a vital role. These young people must witness a community that learns, shares, worships and serves together. It is the responsibility of parents and other adult members of the community to help those who are newly confirmed to understand that Confirmation marks the beginning of their renewed commitment to the Church.

The Confirmation program seeks to achieve a balance between establishing and deepening a relationship with Jesus, with a clearly academic faith formation program and with an informal, practical program. It is academic in that students are expected to learn specific material and it is informal in that the curriculum itself is conversational and engaging. Lesson plans encourage student involvement, require minimal lecturing by catechists and challenge students to live their faith. Each year of preparation is supplemented with retreats, special presentations and learning experiences.

During Confirmation preparation, candidates participate in two mandatory parish service projects, Special Olympics and Bread for Life. Project specifics will be reviewed at the mandatory Confirmation candidate/parent Year I meeting. Participation in the mandatory parish service is not counted toward the requirement of 15 additional service hours. In addition to participating in the parish projects, candidates are required to earn an additional 15 hours of service, with no more than 5 hours each of any one specific form of service.

Confirmation is NOT a graduation, but rather marks the beginning of a commitment to LIVE AS A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST!

Confirmation is the third of the Sacraments of Initiation, thus indicating that one is equipped and ready to live the life of a committed Christian. Our newly confirmed are encouraged to continue their commitment to grow in their understanding of what it means to live the Faith as a Confirmed member of the Church.

Adult Faith Formation Opportunities

All adult Catholics are encouraged to strengthen their own faith. We cannot pass on a vibrant faith to our children if ours is not vibrant as well. Check our website frequently for adult faith opportunities. www.stfrancis.org click on learn in the top menu and then adult faith formation.

Catechetical Volunteers

Catechists are women and men who are members of our parish family and who have agreed to represent our parish in a specific area of ministry. In this ministry, catechists work as assistants to parents who are the primary teachers of the faith. Our role is to assist, not to replace the vital role parents have as the primary catechists. We seek to walk alongside parents as they journey with their children to deepen their faith and love for our Lord. We would like to thank all the young

people and adults who are not mentioned here but who volunteer their time in so many ways to help create a wonderful environment for learning, prayer and worship.

Volunteer Opportunities

Our program is only possible through the help of many volunteers! Please consider helping in the following ways:

- Catechists (teachers): Introduce students to Jesus and our wonderful Catholic tradition by allowing them to witness a love for Christ and the teachings of the Church. Training is available in the summer. We are always in need of Catechists!
- Substitute Catechist: lesson plans will be provided
- Catechist Assistant: Help the primary catechist (We welcome High School students!)
- Hall Monitors: Monitor activity in the hall during class time.

If you are interested in any of these volunteer positions, please contact the Children's Faith Formation Office.

Please be aware that all volunteers who have contact with children must:

- Submit to a Criminal History Background Check before beginning their volunteer assignment
- Attend a VIRTUS session
- Adhere to the practices stated in the Volunteer Code of Conduct
- Review the Safe Environments Policy set by the Diocese of Arlington
- Sign and return the "Confirmation of Receipt"

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