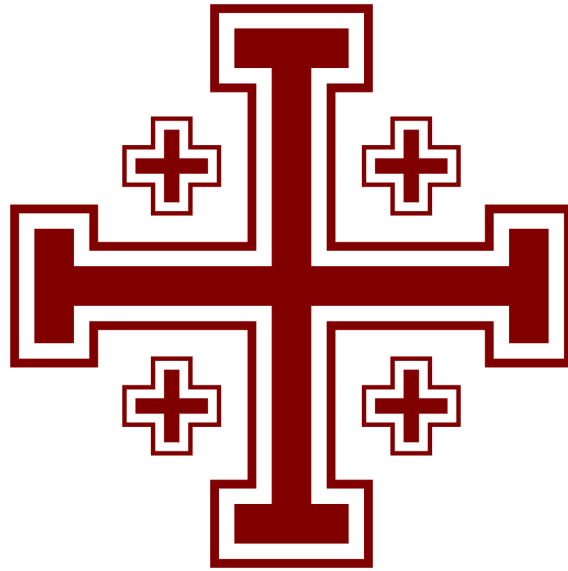


Faith Formation for Children

Grades K-5

Parent Handbook

2025-2026



**Cluster Parishes of Portsmouth and
Chesapeake**

Church of the Holy Angels

Church of the Resurrection

Saint Mary Catholic Church

Saint Paul Catholic Church

WELCOME

Formal catechesis in a faith formation education program is only one aspect of a young person's lifelong faith formation. The formative process begins at birth. Most of the religious attitudes and values that children acquire come from their parents and home and home life.

Welcome to the Cluster Parishes' faith formation program! We are excited to be working with you, as parents, to help your children grow in their faith. In presenting your children for Baptism, parents accept the privilege and responsibility "to bring him/her up in the practice of the faith" (Rite of Baptism for Children). We are happy to work with you to fulfill this promise. The Cluster Parishes provide a religious education experience for all children from kindergarten to 5th grade. Join us for some wonderful experiences as we grow in our Catholic faith.

STAFF

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2025-2026 Calendar

Date	Event
August 12	Catechist meeting @ Resurrection Hall 6:00-7:15 pm
September 13	Opening Mass followed by mandatory parent meeting
September 21	First Day of Children's Formation - <i>Catechetical Sunday - Catechists will be recognized & blessed at all Masses!</i>

September 28	Class #2
September 30	<i>Mandatory First Communion Parent Meeting 6:00-7:15 pm - Resurrection Hall</i>
October 5	Class # 3
October 12	Class # 4
October 19	Class # 5
October 26	Class # 6 - <i>Empowering God's Children Virtus Training at Resurrection, 10:00 - 11:15, parents welcome!</i>
November 2	Class # 7
November 9	Class # 8
November 16	Class # 9
November 23	Class #10
November 30	NO CLASS - Happy Thanksgiving!
December 7	Class # 11
December 14	Class # 12
December 16	Class # 13 - <i>Christmas celebration at Resurrection, parents welcome!</i>
December 21 & 28	NO CLASS - Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!
January 4	Class # 14
January 11	Class #15
January 18	NO CLASS - HAPPY MLK DAY!
January 25	Class # 16
January 31	First Reconciliation Retreat 9:00 -11:00 at Resurrection
February 1	Class # 17
February 7	First Reconciliation 10:00 am at Resurrection
February 8	Class # 18
February 15	NO CLASS - <i>Join us for our PARISH MISSION!</i>
February 22	Class # 19
March 1	Class # 20
March 8	Class #21
March 14	First Holy Communion Retreat 9:00 - 12:00 at Resurrection
March 15	Class # 22
March 20	Class # 23 - <i>Stations of the Cross, St. Paul Catholic Church, 6:00 pm, parents welcome!</i>
March 22	Class # 24
March 29	Class # 25
April 5	NO CLASS - Happy Easter!
April 12	NO CLASS - Enjoy your Spring Break!
April 19	Class # 26
April 26	Class # 27
May 2	First Reconciliation for OCIA students
May 3	Class # 28 - LAST DAY, HAPPY SUMMER!
May 9	First Communion at St. Paul 4:00 pm and at Church of the Resurrection 5:30 pm
May 10	First Communion at Saint Mary 9:00 am and at Holy Angels 11:00 (<i>English</i>) & 1:00 (<i>Spanish</i>)
May 17	<i>Catechist Wrap-up Meeting & Thank You Gathering</i>
	* Calendar subject to change

DAYS & TIMES OF FAITH FORMATION

Classes are held on Sundays at the following parishes:

St Paul Catholic Church 10:00 am – 11:15 am at the Father Walsh Hall

Church of the Resurrection 10:00 am – 11:15 am at Caroluzza Hall

Church of the Holy Angels 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm Upstairs at the Church

FEES

The fee is \$35.00 per student. Scholarships are available by contacting the Cluster Office.

Curriculum

The Cluster curriculum plan is based on Scripture and the teaching of the church and seeks to support families in their mission as “primary educators of the faith” (GDC 255). In supporting the Diocesan curriculum for faith formation, we will be using the ***Our Sunday Visitor Alive in Christ*** parish series for grades K-5 and ***Ligouri Press Journey of Faith*** for OCIA adapted for children.

ARRIVAL PROCEDURES FOR CHILDREN ATTENDING FORMATION

Parents are asked to have their children at formation on time. Children must be walked to their classroom by a parent or adult guardian.

DISMISSAL PROCEDURE AFTER CLASS

When class is finished at your parish, Parents must come to the classroom to pick up their child. All parents are asked to complete and keep up-to-date the list of anyone picking up their child. If someone other than a parent comes to pick up a child, they will need to show identification before the child is allowed to go with them. If there are any custody issues, the latest court documentation must be on file for the directives to be followed.

No child will be allowed to wait outside for a parent. If a child is not picked up within a reasonable time and the parents have not notified us of an emergency, Child Protective Services will be called.

COMMUNICATION

Email: will be an important means of communication. Please ensure your primary email is up-to-date with us.

Flocknote: will be another means of communication. We will be uploading your email and phone number into this application so that you will receive timely texts and emails should an emergency or important notice need to be sent.

CANCELLATION OF FORMATION CLASS

We will follow the public-school weather closings. There may be additional cancellations that may occur for reasons that are unique to the Cluster Parishes. Should normal formation classes be affected because of weather or other emergency issues, the staff will make every effort to notify Catechists and parents about any cancellations. An email and/or text message through Flocknote will be sent to notify Catechists and parents about any cancellations. Please make sure the current email address is provided. If a parent does not have email access, please notify the staff so we can make other notification arrangements.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH ISSUES

Parents are required to fill out the medical information form for their children. If anything changes for your child during the formation year, please notify the Children's Faith Formation Coordinator immediately. Children should be fever-free for 24 hours before attending formation classes.

CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR ISSUES

The Formation Team at the Cluster is a partnership between the Church and the family. Please talk with your child(ren) about the importance of their faith formation and the reasons they are attending these special classes. Parents will be notified if a child's behavior is disruptive and a meeting with the parents will be scheduled to discuss disruptive or disrespectful behavior. This is to make sure that all students may benefit from their faith formation opportunity.

The following are not allowed on the premises and could result in immediate dismissal from the program: any form of weapons, real or play; any illegal substances, drugs, or tobacco, any language or behavior not representative of our Catholic faith.

CELL PHONE USE

Cell phones must be silenced and put away during class time. If a student is using a phone during class without permission, it will be taken and given to the Catechist and only returned to the parent.

ATTENDANCE

Please see the calendar for the schedule of classes for the year. If your children are absent from class for 3 weeks in a row, parents will be called, and they may be dropped from the roster. Please notify the Catechist or the Formation Coordinator if there is a reason for absence.

For children preparing for Sacraments, they must attend consistently. **Children who are preparing for Sacraments may only miss 3 classes for the year.**

Missing more than 3 classes will cause a delay in receiving Sacraments. Illness and family emergencies will be taken into consideration.

Is my child ready to receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist?

- Has your child been baptized and reached the age of reason (2nd grade or above)?
- Is your child interested in making reconciliation and receiving Holy Communion?
- Is your child able to distinguish between mistakes or accidents and deliberate wrongdoing?
- Does your child participate in the Sunday Mass according to his/her ability?
- Does your family make attending Mass a priority on Saturday/Sunday or Holy days of obligation?
- Do you, as parents, celebrate the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist?
- Does your child relate to Jesus as one who forgives and who loves and cares for him/her?

PARISH REGISTRATION

Families must be registered at one of our cluster parishes, either Holy Angels, Resurrection, St. Mary, or St. Paul, in order to prepare for and receive the Sacraments with us. The Diocese of Richmond prefers and encourages families to prepare for the Sacraments at the parish where they will be celebrating them regularly. The exception is St Mary's, as their children may attend any of our other parishes for formation. If your family is registered at another Catholic Church, a letter of permission is needed from the pastor granting permission for your child to prepare for the Sacraments at any of our parishes instead of your home parish.

RECONCILIATION

“Since the family is intimately involved with the formation of a child’s moral conscience and ordinarily integrates the child into the wider ecclesial communities, parents should be involved in the preparation of their children for this sacrament of Penance, so that they can affirm and reinforce frequent participation in the sacraments. They orient the child toward God and encourage continual growth in the understanding of God’s mercy and love.”

-National Directory of Catechesis

PARENT WORKSHOP AND CHILDREN’S RETREAT

First Reconciliation: Saturday, January 31, 2026, 9:00 – 11:00 am, Church of the Resurrection

CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF FIRST RECONCILIATION

Students will celebrate their First Reconciliation on Saturday, February 7, 2026, at 10:00 am. We will begin in the Church with a prayer service, then students will be called to go to confession.

EUCHARIST

In obedience to Christ's command, "Do this in memory of me," the church has continually celebrated the Eucharist. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes" Cor 11:26. This action sustains us as the Christian faithful.

FORMS NEEDED: Formation registration form; Eucharist registration form; Baptism certificate.

PARENT WORKSHOP AND CHILDREN'S RETREAT

The parent workshop and children's retreat is **March 14, 2026, from 9:00 am to 12:00 noon**. Families will meet in Caroluzza Hall at Church of the Resurrection and check in at 8:45 am. We will start the morning together with prayer, then the students will be dismissed to the retreat and the parents will attend the workshop.

CURRICULUM

The curriculum for First Communion will be *Blessed, by Dynamic Catholic*. Students, with the help of parents, must complete weekly homework.

OCIA

(Order of Christian Initiation of Adults and Children)

“The Order of Christian Initiation is designed for adults (and children of catechetical age) who, after hearing the mystery of Christ proclaimed, consciously and freely seek the living God and enter the way of faith and conversion as the Holy Spirit opens their hearts. By God’s help they will be strengthened spiritually during their preparation and at the proper time will receive the sacraments fruitfully.” OCIA Introduction 1

Children of Catechetical age (age 7) who have not received the sacrament of Baptism may enroll in the OCIA process. OCIA will prepare them for full relationship in the Catholic faith through Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, and Reconciliation.

Families must attend the mandatory Reconciliation and Eucharist retreats.

FORMS NEEDED: Registration Form, OCIA Form, birth certificate, and Godparent/Sponsor forms.

The OCIA process is also available for adults who are not baptized, baptized in a non-Catholic faith, and those who are baptized but have not received the Sacraments of Confirmation or First Communion. For more information about adult classes contact Katherine Kardok at adultformation@clusterparishes.com or call the office (757)-484-7553.

HELPING YOUR CHILD GROW IN FAITH

Every day can be an opportunity to grow in faith with your child! You naturally offer your love to your child in many ways. Be aware that God's love is all around you. It is never too early to read the Bible aloud to your child, sharing the stories and pictures. Take your child to Mass each Sunday. Pray for your child each day – maybe by greeting them in the morning with a blessing and a sign of the cross on their forehead. As they get older, bless them as they leave for school. Set up a bedtime routine that includes a nightly prayer. Teach your child the prayers that they are learning in formation. Prayer is an important part of the Christian faith! Spontaneous prayer, praying in your own words, comes easily to many children. Teach the traditional prayers but also encourage your child to pray their own prayers. Here are some prayers to start teaching your children:

Sign of the Cross

Glory Be

Lord's Prayer

Hail Mary

Act of Contrition (2nd grade)

Nicene Creed

If you are not familiar with these prayers, they can all be found online by googling them or at USCCB.org.