



# GOOD SHEPHERD CATHOLIC CHURCH

*Strengthened and sustained by the Bread of Life*

8710 Mount Vernon Highway, Alexandria, VA 22309 • 703-780-4055 • gs-cc.org • office@gs-cc.org

September 1, 2025

Dear Parents and Guardians,

We want to extend to you, and your family, our warmest welcome to our parish faith formation program. We are aware of how precious your children are, and we thank you for entrusting them to our care in the time they are a part of our program.

We are here to share our faith and the love of Jesus with your children. Our catechists will convey the message of the Gospel by word and example. We also recognize that your role in handing on our faith, especially in your home, is even more significant than the time we have with your children during class time. Children will learn from what they see and live in your homes every day even more than what they hear in a classroom one day per week. We look forward to working together with you to provide a strong foundation so that your children may continue their faith journey into adulthood.

We look forward to working with you to help your children develop a better understanding of our Catholic way of life. We will provide many resources we hope will assist you as parents in your efforts to hand on to your children our Catholic Christian traditions. Our Team is grateful to accompany you in all you do to provide for your child's faith formation, and we are ready to assist you in your vocation as their primary Catechist.

If you have questions or need any information or help, please do not hesitate to contact our office.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Father Tom". The script is cursive and fluid.

Reverend Thomas P. Ferguson  
Pastor

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stacy Austin". The script is cursive and fluid.

Stacy Austin  
Faith Formation Team

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marie Gemperline". The script is cursive and fluid.

Marie Gemperline  
Faith Formation Team

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Miguel DeAngel". The script is cursive and fluid.

Miguel DeAngel  
Faith Formation Team

### **Prayer For My Family**

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for the gift of my family. We pray that you oh, Lord will be the center of this home. We ask you, Lord, to protect and watch over this family, so that in the strength of your grace its members may enjoy prosperity, possess the priceless gift of your peace, that the Church is alive in our home. Forgive us our sins and help us to extend that forgiveness unto each other. Guide us and protect us, Lord. Root us in your word. Let our actions be ones that bring honor to your Holy name. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Prayer For Parents**

Dear Lord, Today, I bring my child to You. Please show me how to parent this precious gift that you have given me. Help me to be the best mother that I can be. I pray that your Holy Spirit will teach me, Your wisdom will guide me, and Your love will move me. Most of all, Lord, I give this child to You. Please make him/her a servant after Your own heart. In Jesus Name I pray. Amen.

## **Parental Involvement**

The Faith Formation of any child begins long before he or she is enrolled in any program. At Baptism, parents are entrusted with their child's life that God gave them. It is through the living witness of parents that children first experience the faith. The single most powerful force in a child's religious formation is the spiritual personality of the parent. We know the parental factors that make a significant difference in promoting faith in children and youth include:

- Parents' personal faith and practice.
- A close and warm parent-child relationship.
- Parent modeling and teaching a religious faith
  - This includes daily prayer, going to Mass, and talking about the Sunday readings
- Grandparent religious influence and relationship

It is critically important that parents are authentic examples of what they claim to believe. Their authenticity includes faithful living as well as sharing with their children their struggles and failings.

We encourage parents to review the lessons with their children and discuss with them what they have learned after each class. Activities and resource materials will be provided. Please understand that this is not homework for the student but a family faith activity. All students should know the following prayers:

- The Sign of the Cross, Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be, Prayer Before a Meal, and additional prayers as your child matures.

The following pages provide important information including, class processes, attendance, calendar, Mass attendance and much more. The website [www.gs-cc.org](http://www.gs-cc.org) has information on the program and resources. Please contact the Faith Formation team at [faithformation@gs-cc.org](mailto:faithformation@gs-cc.org) with questions regarding the faith formation classroom program.

## **Mission and Purpose**

We will strive to:

- Provide practical resources and support needed to foster the faith development of their children.
- Be attentive to the varied needs of the average modern-day family.
- Provide a healthy environment for young people to experience the love of Jesus and the Catholic faith.
- Support catechists in their own formation process so they may in turn provide quality Faith Formation and Religious Education for our young people and families.
- Set forth a curriculum that is comprehensive, age appropriate, and firmly grounded in Scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church.
- Present curriculum in a way that lovingly, relevantly, and effectively facilitates the learning and active participation of all those enrolled in our programs.
- Lead families through a process of sacrament preparation that will prepare the minds and hearts of students to experience God's grace.
- Include programming options for members of our community with special learning needs.
- Appreciate the diversity of the Body of Christ and providing information and effective communication with those for who English is a second language.

## **Mass and Liturgical Year**

Our curriculum is always presented within the context of the liturgical year. Children and families learn primarily about the faith by worshiping together, fully engaging in the prayer of the Church throughout the year and participating in parish life. Our regular religious education sessions are intended to complement, not substitute for regular Mass attendance. All families registered in our program are expected to attend Mass regularly. Since it is such an integral part of our program, children will discuss the Sunday Readings as part of the lesson. Weekly Mass attendance will help your child to participate fully in and class.

An effective strategy in getting your family to Mass is to plan your weekend schedule in advance. Pick a time to review weekend activities, set Mass attendance as a priority, and review Mass times to select a Mass. If you have difficulty finding time to attend Mass regularly it may be time to take a closer look at your family's activities and to prayerfully discern adjusting the schedule in order to ensure regular participation at Mass.

## **Weekly Classes**

Our program consists of 24 weeks of in-person classes at Good Shepherd with a curriculum faithful to Church teachings.

### **Attendance**

- Students need to attend class on a regular basis to have the best learning experience and develop community. Consistent attendance ensures your child has the formation and information needed to grow in their faith and receive the sacraments.
- Much like attendance in daily academic life, absences can influence your child's faith journey. If your child is regularly absent, we will work with you on the curriculum. Please adjust your schedule to make faith formation classes as important as sports, and other extra-curricular activities.
- If your child is not able to attend class due to illness or a family emergency, please contact your student's catechist or email [faithformation@gs-cc.org](mailto:faithformation@gs-cc.org).

## **Arrival/Dismissal**

The safety and security of your child is important.

- Students are expected to arrive on time for Faith Formation class, but no earlier than 10 minutes prior to class start time.
- Please do not drop students off -all students must be signed in and signed out by a parent, guardian, or designated adult before and after each class.
- Please be on-time for dismissal.

## **Inclement Weather Policy**

Good Shepherd follows Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) for cancellations.

- If FCPS is closed, including evenings or weekends, all parish activities are canceled.
- If schools have an early closure, all evening activities are canceled.
- Parents will be notified of cancellations by email and the parish website will be updated.

## **Discipline**

To foster a Christian atmosphere of hospitality, caring and courtesy and to promote maximum learning in the classrooms, the following guidelines are used:

- All students attending Faith Formation Programs are expected to treat themselves, one another, and the facilities with respect and always demonstrate Christian-like conduct.
- If a discipline issue arises, we will address the situation with an attitude of Christian charity. Should a discipline issue persist, parents will be contacted.

## **Cell Phone Usage**

- No cell phone or other electronic use is allowed during class.
- We prefer that your child/teen leaves their cell phone at home or with the parent during class.
- Cell phones brought to class will be placed in cubbies and returned after class.

## **Emergency Procedures**

Evacuation plans are posted in each classroom.

## **Safe Environment**

Good Shepherd Catholic Church, clergy, staff, and catechists care about all children, and their safety is of the utmost importance. We all want our children to be treated with love, care, and respect. The Diocese of Arlington requires all parish staff members and volunteers, who work with children/teens, participate in a workshop called "VIRTUS: Protecting God's Children." It is designed to provide the facts about child abuse and motivate people to action in preventing abuse. In addition to participating in VIRTUS, all volunteers are required to complete forms including a release of information to allow for background checks.

## **Circle of Grace**

Circle of Grace is the children's safety curriculum of the Diocese of Arlington. It serves the dual purpose of prevention/safety education and informing children and youth about the value of positive relationships with God and others. Curriculum information can be found at

<https://www.arlingtondiocese.org/child-protection/youth-training-programs/circle-of-grace/>

**Circle of Grace is not a sex education program; the Diocese of Arlington reserves that conversation for parents.** The Circle of Grace curriculum will be taught on **October 5, 6, and 7, 2025** during regular class time.

## Sacramental Preparation: First Reconciliation, First Eucharist, and Confirmation

It is important to know that sacraments are not an ending, but are gifts of God's grace that we receive to strengthen us for our faith journey and continued growth. Families are encouraged to take sacrament preparation seriously and consider the importance of the daily practice of the faith, participation in parish life, and weekly attendance at Mass. Continued faith formation is encouraged after the celebration of the sacraments.

In addition to the weekly classes outlined below, sacrament preparation has additional requirements, including parent meetings, retreats, and other activities. Information will be provided to parents and will be posted on the website.

**Sacrament Preparation** is conducted primarily at home with curriculum tailored to each sacrament and is provided for students in first grade and above. Sacrament preparation is two years for First Reconciliation, First Communion, and Confirmation.

- Children usually begin First Reconciliation and First Communion preparation in 1st grade and receive Reconciliation and Eucharist for the first time at the end of their 2nd grade year.
  - Students receive First Reconciliation in December, during Advent. First Communion is received the following May, during the Easter season.
- Confirmation preparation usually begins in 7th grade and students are confirmed in the fall of their freshman year.
  - Students are receiving Confirmation this year on October 18.
- If your child is not starting sacramental preparation in the typical year, he/she will complete an age-appropriate two-year preparation. Contact the Faith Formation team at [faithformation@gs-cc.org](mailto:faithformation@gs-cc.org) so we may start your child in the appropriate program.