



ARCHANGEL GABRIEL
P A R I S H

Family Catechesis PARENT HANDBOOK 2025-2026

This year, the Church will celebrate Catechetical Sunday on September 21, 2025 and will focus on the theme: *“Always be ready to give an explanation...for a reason for your hope”* (1 Peter 3:15). The theme encourages us to be prepared to share the basis of our faith, the Lord, and the hope He provides. In the same manner Saint Peter encouraged the believers of his time, the scripture reminds us, the sharing should be done with gentleness and respect.

Those whom the community has designated to serve as catechists will be called forth to be commissioned for this ministry.

Catechetical Sunday is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the role that each person plays, by virtue of Baptism, in handing on the faith and being a witness to the Gospel. Catechetical Sunday is an opportunity for all to rededicate themselves to this mission as a community of faith.

VISION STATEMENT

*Empowering parents as the primary catechists of their children
to lead the family into missionary discipleship.*

We **thank you** for your cooperation with all the listed policies and look forward to a very successful year with your family. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact the parish's Faith Formation Director, Steven Swank, at 412-787-2140 ext. 106 or sswank@archangelgabrielparish.org.

FAM CAT SECTIONS

Blessed Mother Section – Meets on October 5, November 2, December 7, January 11, February 1, March 1, and April 12 **from 8:15 AM to 9:45 AM** (grades K-7 only)

Saint Joseph Section – Meets on October 5, November 2, December 7, January 11, February 1, March 1, and April 12 **from 10:45 AM to 12:15 PM** (grades K-5 only)

CALENDAR

A printable Fam Cat calendar is available online at ArchangelGabrielParish.org/FamCat under the “Resources for Parents” section. First Penance, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation dates will be announced.

FAM CAT ATTENDANCE

Since there are only seven (7) sessions per section, it is critical that families attend each and every session. If a family misses a session, they will miss the opportunity to collaborate with other families and grow in the Faith together. Therefore, the expectation is that families attend the entirety of all seven (7) of the sessions for their section. Early dismissals are strongly discouraged. **Children who arrive at the classroom after 8:25 (Blessed Mother section) or 10:55 (Saint Joseph section) will be marked “tardy”** (see the FAQ for more information regarding the session format). If your family misses a session due to illness, please contact the Faith Formation Director.

ENTERING AND EXITING THE BUILDING

Sessions are held at the Archangel Gabriel Parish school building on the Holy Trinity Campus in Robinson. Families should enter the facility by way of the cafeteria doors in the rear of the building. The glass doors in the front of the building are locked and cannot be used as an entrance. However, families going to Mass after their Fam Cat session may use the front glass doors to exit the building near the church. Alternate arrangements for entering or exiting the building can be made for students with special needs (crutches, wheelchair, etc.). Please contact the Faith Formation Director to make such arrangements.

SPECIAL NEEDS

Children with special needs are always invited to our ministry. We will do our best to make accommodations to meet your child's needs. Please contact the Faith Formation Director for more information.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Our goal is to instill in each student a deep respect for God, self, and others.

Students are expected to:

- ❖ Bring their Activity Book to each session
- ❖ Arrive on time for each session
- ❖ Attend each full session
- ❖ Respect the authority of the parish catechists and other Fam Cat personnel
- ❖ Respect the thoughts and feelings of other students in the session
- ❖ Actively take part in class discussions and activities
- ❖ Demonstrate respect for books and materials

Respect for God, themselves and others is a hallmark of our students. This is shown by the particular care students take of their book, parish furniture, equipment, and property.

DISCIPLINE

If there is a discipline problem with your child's behavior, it will be brought to your attention either by the catechist or the Faith Formation Director. One or more of the following will occur:

- correction of student or isolation of offending student
- student/catechist conference
- student/Director conference
- request for a parent to attend Fam Cat session in classroom with the child
- provision of alternative means of Family Catechesis
- temporary suspension
- permanent suspension

LOST TEXTBOOKS

If a textbook is lost, a new one must be purchased. Parents should notify the Faith Formation Director if this occurs. Parents will be required to pay for a new textbook. The cost of a new textbook is \$20.00.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Students are permitted to have, but not to use, cell phones and other electronic devices during Family Catechesis sessions. If these devices are used during the session, they will be confiscated, and parents will have to retrieve them after the session concludes. Also, Archangel Gabriel Parish assumes no responsibility for broken, lost, or stolen personal items.

FIRE ALARM

The fire alarm system in our building is hooked directly to the fire department. If a student pulls the alarm and the firefighters arrive, there will be a fee which the student's parents will be responsible for paying.

EARLY DISMISSAL POLICY

As mentioned previously, early dismissals are strongly discouraged. If you absolutely must remove your child from the classroom early, you will need to follow these steps:

- See the Faith Formation Director or Faith Formation Assistant to obtain an Early Dismissal Form.
- Complete the form and have the Director or Assistant sign it.
- Take the completed/signed form with you and give it to the catechist when you pick up your child (catechists will not release children early unless you present a completed/signed form).

SACRAMENT PREPARATION

The preparation process for the reception of the sacraments (First Penance, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation) takes place outside of regular religious instruction (Family Catechesis or EDGE). This outside "track" provides immediate preparation for the sacraments. Candidates, along with a parent/guardian, must attend the track in addition to their regular instruction for the child to receive the sacraments at Archangel Gabriel Parish.

SESSION CANCELLATION

Cancellation of sessions due to inclement weather will be announced via Flocknote.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why did Archangel Gabriel Parish switch from a traditional model of catechesis to a family model of catechesis in 2020?

We switched to Family Catechesis (Fam Cat) to better accomplish our mission of supporting parents in their role as the primary catechists of their children (a catechist is someone who passes on the Faith). This change is explained in detail in the video located here:

https://youtu.be/uuAbv8upR_I

What are the days/times of the two sections of Family Catechesis?

- Blessed Mother Section – First* Sunday of the month from 8:15 AM to 9:45 AM
- Saint Joseph Section – First* Sunday of the month from 10:45 AM to 12:15 PM

**Will be held on the second Sunday of the month in January and April due to holidays.*

What are the dates of the seven sessions for my section?

Each section meets seven times, once per month from October to April, on the following dates: October 5th, November 2nd, December 7th, January 11th, February 1st, March 1st, April 12th

Which grade levels are offered during which sections?

- Blessed Mother Section – Kindergarten to grade 7 only
- Saint Joseph Section – Kindergarten to grade 5 only

What is the format of a session?

1. Gathering (10 minutes)

- Parents accompany their child(ren) to the classroom where they will be greeted by the child's grade-level catechist.
- Parents then make their way to the cafeteria for coffee and fellowship before the parent session begins.

2. Large Group Learning (45 minutes)

- While the child(ren) is in class learning from their grade-level catechist, the parents are also exploring the theme in preparation to pass on the Faith at home.

3. Small Group Discussion (30 minutes)

- While the child(ren) is still in class, groups of approximately four to eight parents use discussion questions to guide their conversation.

4. Sending Forth (5 minutes)

- The parent session ends with prayer and then the parents meet their child(ren) at the classrooms.

Who attends the in-person Fam Cat sessions? Children? Parents? Entire Family?

Both children AND parents must attend the sessions. Children participate in a class session in a classroom with their grade level catechist. Parents participate in a parent session in the cafeteria with a special presenter. THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THE SESSIONS IS TO EQUIP THE PARENTS WITH THE TOOLS NECESSARY TO PASS ON THE FAITH TO THEIR CHILDREN AT HOME. Consequently, it is critical that the parents attend.

Do both of the child's parents/guardians need to attend the Fam Cat sessions?

Whichever parent/guardian is going to be doing the activities with their children at home needs to attend so they are properly equipped. So, if both are doing the activities, then both need to attend. If only one parent/guardian is doing the activities, then only that parent/guardian needs to attend. However, both parents/guardians are certainly invited and are most welcome to attend the sessions, regardless of who is doing the activities.

I am a parent who attended CCD/Religious Education/Faith Formation as a child and received my sacraments. Aren't I done learning this stuff?

We are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Being a disciple is more than being a follower, it is also being a learner. "To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to be engaged in a lifelong process of learning from and about Jesus the master, Jesus the teacher" (Fr. James Mallon, *Divine Renovation*, page 20). Family Catechesis enables the entire family to grow together on the journey of *lifelong faith formation*.

Is there an absence policy for Family Catechesis?

Since there are only seven (7) sessions per section, it is critical that families attend each one. If a family misses a session, they will miss the opportunity to collaborate with other families and grow in the Faith together. Therefore, the expectation is families attend all seven (7) of the sessions for their section. Also, families are expected to attend the entire session, therefore, early dismissals are strongly discouraged.

If my family misses the session for which we are registered, can we attend a different session as a "make-up."

No. Families may only attend the session for which they are registered. The reason for this is because a crucial component of Family Catechesis is the parents' small group discussion. For this discussion to be fruitful, it is important that the small group has the same participants each week, and not new people popping in and out.

So, what do we do if we miss due to illness or some other very serious reason?

If you miss due to illness, emergency, or some other very serious reason (participation in sports is not considered a very serious reason), then email your child's catechist to see what he/she missed. There is also a video of the parent portion, which you can receive by emailing Steven Swank at sswank@archangelgabrielparish.com.

I work on Sunday mornings, so my family cannot attend then; is there another option for us?

Yes. Parents who work on Sunday mornings may choose online learning for their family. More information is available on the parish website:
ArchangelGabrielParish.org/FamCatOnline

What materials will we use for Family Catechesis?

Each family receives a Parent's Guide and each child receives an Activity Book. Some of the activities in the Activity Book will be completed during the child's monthly in-person session with the parish catechist, and the remainder of activities for each month will be completed at home with the parents using the Parent's Guide.

I have children in different grades, do I have to do separate activities with each of them?

No. The family catechesis curriculum we are using, *A Family of Faith* from Sophia Press, is designed so that you can do an activity with all your children simultaneously, regardless of their age.

How does Sacrament preparation for First Penance, First Holy Communion, & Confirmation at AGP work?

Sacrament prep is separate tracks which take place outside of and in addition to Family Catechesis. Please visit ArchangelGabrielParish.org for more information.

How can we get updates regarding Family Catechesis?

Our weekly parish bulletin is the best place to stay up to date about what is happening with all of the ministries at Archangel Gabriel Parish. If you go to Mass at a different church and do not get an AGP bulletin, you can still read it online on our parish website: ArchangelGabrielParish.org/Bulletin (you can even sign up to get the bulletin emailed to you each week).

FAMILY COMMITMENT PRAYER

Dear God, our Father, you have called all Christian families to be a sign of your love to the world.

Help us to be generous with the gifts of life and love that you have showered on our family. May we share them so that our homes become true signs of uniting and fruitful love.

Let us never forget to thank you each day for all that sustains us and to look to Christ, who comes to us in the events of family life, in the sacraments of the Church, and in service to the poor.

In all of this, our family becomes a living expression of your Church, a hallowed home of life and love. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may all of us – spouses, parents, and children – share, as members of his Body, in Jesus' mission to build a civilization of love.

Father, we ask this in Jesus' name in union with the Holy Spirit.

Amen