**Divine Redeemer Parish**

**Faith Formation**

**Handbook**



2025-2026

***Note to Parents:***

As we begin this new year of Faith Formation, please be assured that the catechists and staff of the Divine Redeemer Faith Formation program are deeply committed to helping your children to grow in their faith and become life-long, intentional disciples of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We are grateful for the opportunity to participate with you, the primary educators of your children and their best teachers in the faith. Your children learn to become followers of Christ primarily through the example you set when you pray together as a family, seek to serve one another and the wider community, and actively participate in the Mass and the sacraments. Please take some time to familiarize yourself with this handbook. As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us. We look forward to a wonderful Faith Formation Year, and we sincerely thank you for the immense privilege of allowing us to walk beside your children on their journey of faith!

Julie Thimons, Director of Faith Formation

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(412) 741-6650, Ext. 503

Alana Mesko, Associate Director of Faith Formation

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Nicholas Wolf, Director of Youth Ministry

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**OUR PROGRAMS**:

Divine Redeemer Parish is committed to helping to develop the faith life of all its members, from young children to adults. Following are the programs offered for the children and youth of our Parish:

**Traditional Faith Formation (Gr. K-6)**

Our Traditional Faith Formation program combines the talent and knowledge of our faithful and dedicated volunteer catechists with the Diocesan-approved curriculum *Word of Life* by The Augustine Institute and Ignatius Press*.* The curriculum is built upon the catechetical threads of Salvation History, Christian Anthropology, Heroic Virtue and Character Formation, and Learning through Discipleship. In addition, special retreat days are offered for 2nd graders, in preparation for the sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion. Faith Formation Family Masses are offered twice a year to give students an opportunity to grow in their faith not only personally and within their classrooms, but in the dynamic of a joyful and faith-filled community.

**Family Program (Gr. K-6)**

Divine Redeemer offers families the option to participate in the highly-acclaimed Faith Formation Family Program, *A Family of Faith*, by Sophia Institute for Teachers. Families in the Family Program meet on the 2nd Sunday of every month for adult and student learning sessions, community, and fellowship, while homeschooling together the other three weeks of the month. *A Family of Faith* follows afour-year cycle, wherein families who participate will have the opportunity to study each of the four pillars of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (The Creed, Morality and the Christian Life, The Sacraments, and Prayer) within the context of four years.

**Quo Vadis (Gr. 7 & 8)**

*Quo Vadis*, Latin for “Where are you going?” is Divine Redeemer’s 7th and 8th Grade Confirmation preparation program. It provides a fun, safe place for youth to build authentic Catholic community, to get answers to their questions about the Catholic faith, and, most importantly, to experience Jesus in a profound and personal way. Every *Quo Vadis* session begins with attending Mass together as a community, which the students participate in as lectors, altar servers, and more. As part of the *Quo Vadis* evenings, we will be utilizing *Chosen*, a dynamic Confirmation preparation video series developed by Ascension Press.

**The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (PreK)**

*The* *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* is a holistic, Montessori-based approach to the catechesis of young children. *The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* provides a sacred space for young children to explore their faith through hands on learning and to enter into communion with Christ, the Good Shepherd, as they listen to His Word.

***Amicis* High School Youth Group (Gr. 9-12)**

*Amicis*, Latin for “friends”, is Divine Redeemer’s high school youth group. The youth group participates in social, spiritual, and service events and meets every Wednesday from 6-8 p.m. All high school students are welcome and encouraged to attend.

**FAITH FORMATION DATES & TIMES**

Traditional Faith Formation (Grades K – 6)

Sunday – 9:30 – 10:45 am (St. James School)

(\*The Traditional Program does not meet on the 2nd Sundays of each month.)

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (PreK)

Sunday – 9:30 – 10:30 a.m. (St. James School) (\*CGS follows the schedule of the Traditional Program.)

Family Program (Grades K-6)

2nd Sunday of the month – 12:15 – 1:30 p.m. (St. James – Gathering Space)

Quo Vadis (Gr. 7 & 8)

1st and 3rd Sunday of the month – 6 – 8 p.m. (St. James Church & Gathering Space

**FAITH FORMATION CALENDAR YEAR**

The Faith Formation calendar year typically runs from mid-September until the end of April/ early May. Please refer to your calendar for this year for scheduled days off/ holidays and special events throughout the year.

**STUDENTS ATTENDING CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

Faith Formation is a requirement for all Catholic students in Grades 1 – 8. Students attending Parochial and Private Catholic Schools are exempt from attending Faith Formation classes, but are still required to participate in sacramental preparation programs offered by the Parish (2nd Grade First Reconciliation & First Communion retreats and the 9th Grade Confirmation retreat). Families whose children attend Catholic schools must notify the Faith Formation office if they would like for their child(ren) to receive their sacraments at Divine Redeemer Parish.

**SACRAMENTAL RECORDS**

The Faith Formation Office requires a copy of the Baptismal certificate of all students in our program. *Students who are not yet baptized are welcome to participate in Faith Formation classes, but parents are asked to make an appointment with a member of the clergy to discuss preparation for the sacrament of Baptism*.

**SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION**

Parents have a right and duty to be intimately involved in preparing their children for First Reconciliation, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation. Religious education in preparation for the reception of the sacraments thus involves required parent informational meetings and family-based retreat days, especially regarding preparation of the sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion.

Preparation for the sacraments is considered a two-year process. Parents are expected to enroll their children in Religious Education classes by the beginning of First Grade to make sure they are adequately prepared to receive the sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion in the Spring of their 2nd Grade year. Students preparing for Confirmation must attend religious formation classes (*Quo Vadis*) for at least two years prior to receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Fall of 9th Grade.

**TEXTBOOKS/ BIBLES**

It is the responsibility of the students to keep their textbooks and Bibles in good condition throughout the year, and to bring their textbooks and Bibles to class each session. Students who have misplaced their textbooks or Bible will be required to pay a replacement fee for new materials.

**FAITH FORMATION ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Because Faith Formation sessions are only held once a week (at most), absences should be avoided if at all possible. That being said, students with a contagious illness of any kind are asked to remain home until they are cleared to return to in-person learning. Students who must miss class are asked to complete their lesson at home (following the syllabus provided), and to give their completed work to their catechist at their next in-person class.

**FAITH FORMATION FAMILY MASSES**

Faith Formation Family Masses are a very important part of the Faith Formation program at Divine Redeemer Parish. Family Masses provide an opportunity for prayer and fellowship, and give our students an opportunity to participate in the Mass in a special way. Participation in the Family Masses are required for all families with students in Grades 1 – 6, regardless of program.

**VOLUNTEERING**

Parents and high school/college students who are interested in volunteering for our Faith Formation program are always welcomed with gratitude and appreciation! Please speak with a member of the Faith Formation team if you or your high school/college student is interested in helping as a catechist, classroom assistant, substitute catechist, office assistant, traffic assistant, Middle School mentor, youth group team member, or hospitality aide. There are also plenty of opportunities for middle school students to earn service hours by volunteering to help in various capacities throughout the Faith Formation year.

**COMMUNICATION**

Communication between the Faith Formation office, catechists, and parents will take place through both emails and Flocknote. Please make sure that you are able to receive emails from [mail@flocknote.com](mailto:mail@flocknote.com) and that these emails are not blocked/ sent to a spam folder. Please feel free to communicate with the Faith Formation office staff either through phone or email (provided on the first page).

**PHOTOGRAPHY OF STUDENTS**

Throughout the year, particularly during special events, we may be photographing the students for the purpose of sharing our program with the wider Parish community in the bulletin and/ or on the Parish website. If you do not want your child photographed, please check the box “do not photograph” on the online registration form. We fully respect your right to privacy in this matter.

**RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES**

All families in our Parish are blessed with a complementary subscription to FORMED.org. Please visit the FORMED website (Enter your email and find “Divine Redeemer Parish” to create your account) to view dynamic instructional videos and entertaining films for families and children alike. In addition, please see the Parish bulletin for events (retreats, talks, Bible studies, etc.) offered for adults and families throughout the year.

**PROCEDURES FOR ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL**

Sunday students in the traditional program are asked to arrive in St. James Church by 9:30 a.m., where we will begin with prayer and a brief group mini-lesson. They will be dismissed in the Gathering Space or in the car line on Bank Street, according to parent preferences, which are to be communicated at the start of the school year. Parents of students in Grades K-3 using the Gathering Space dismissal option are asked to park and come into the Gathering Space to pick up your child(ren) at the time of dismissal**.**

**CUSTODY ARRANGEMENTS**

In the case of divorce or separation, it will be assumed that both parents have access to their child(ren) unless court records stating otherwise are handed in to the Faith Formation Office. Please note that such records will be kept in strict confidentiality.

**BACKGROUND CHECKS/ MANDATED REPORTING**

All catechists and staff are required to obtain FBI-approved background checks as well as to attend mandatory courses for the protection of children. They are likewise required by law to report to proper authorities any suspicion of abuse or neglect of any kind.

**CELL PHONES/ SNACKS**

Cell phones and snack foods are prohibited at the St. James School site during the Traditional and Family programs. Parents are welcome to call the Faith Formation Office at 412-741-6650, Ext. 503 to relay a message.

**HEALTH AND SAFETY**

Students with COVID symptoms, head lice, pink eye, strep throat, influenza, or other communicable diseases are to remain home until symptoms are no longer apparent. Students who feel ill during class are asked to come to the Faith Formation Office, and a call will be made home to parents. The Faith Formation Office will not dispense any medication (including cough drops) to students. Bandages may be given for minor cuts and scrapes.

**STUDENT BEHAVIOR POLICY**

In order to ensure student learning, disruptive behavior in class will not be tolerated. Catechists have been instructed to call the office if a student is being disrespectful or disruptive. A staff member will accompany the student to the office, where the student will complete their lesson for the day. Repeated referrals to the office for misbehavior will result in a meeting with the student and his or her parents to determine the best way to accommodate the student’s learning needs.

**WEATHER CLOSING POLICY**

If it is necessary to cancel Faith Formation classes, cancellation notices will be posted on the Faith Formation page of the parish website: ([www.divine-redeemer.com](http://www.divine-redeemer.com)) and emails will be sent to all families. Parental judgement concerning road conditions in your neighborhood should be a deciding factor in all cases.

**IMPORTANT DATES**:

Sept. 14 – CGS New Parent Orientation

Sept. 21 – First Day of Classes for Quo Vadis & Traditional Program/ Quo Vadis New Parent Meeting

Sept. 30 – Family Program Parent Meeting

Oct. 11 – Confirmation Retreat (9th Grade)

Oct.12 – First Family Program Session

Oct. 26 – Confirmation (9th Grade)

Nov. 11 – Gr. 2 (First Communion) Parent Meeting

Dec. 21 – Faith Formation Family Mass

Feb. 1 – 8th Grade (Confirmation 2026) Parent Meeting

Feb. 10 – First Reconciliation Retreat (Gr. 2)

Mar. 7 – First Reconciliation

April 14- First Communion Retreat

May 3 – Faith Formation Family Mass

May 10 & 17 – First Holy Communion

**THANK YOU to our 2025 -2026 Catechists and Classroom Assistants:**

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Ms. Julie Thimons, Ms. Kathleen Green & Mrs. Lisvet Yancheski

Traditional Program

K – Ms. Gina Hutton

Gr. 1A – Mrs. Sheri Persuit

Gr. 1B – Mrs. Erin Rigney

Gr. 2 – Mr. J.P. Scanga

Gr. 3A – Mrs. Barb Kotarba

Gr. 3B – Mrs. Kelsey Monyok

Gr. 4A – Mrs. Megan Mouas

Gr. 4B – Ms. Kelly Lovato

Gr. 5A – Mr. & Mrs. Matthew & Amy Dwyer

Gr. 5B – Mrs. Maria Donohue/ Mrs. Gail Becker

Gr. 6A – Mrs. Michelle Saad & Mr. John Roppo

Gr. 6B – Mrs. Alana Mesko

Family Program

Gr. K & 1 – Mrs. Joanne McDaniel & Ms. Michelle Nichols

Gr. 2 – Mr. & Mrs. Jeffrey & Carolina Moran

Gr. 3 & 4 – Mrs. Christian Stampfel

Gr. 5 & 6 – Mrs. Alana Mesko

Quo Vadis (Gr. 7 & 8) Team

Deacon Jason Corsetti

Deacon Steve Deskevich

Mr. Nicholas Wolf

Mrs. Taylor Wolf

Ms. Julie Thimons

Mrs. Alana Mesko

Ms. Victoria Graham

Mrs. Jessica Carlson

Mrs. Christy Bedford

Mrs. Lori Sachs

Mrs. Judy Spanos