



St. Stephen Catholic Church Faith Formation



PARENT-STUDENT FAITH FORMATION HANDBOOK

St. Stephen Catholic Church
Office of Faith Formation
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Phone: (813) 671-4434

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Parochial Vicar: Fr. Josh Hare
Parochial Vicar: Fr. Primus Weria
Rev. Msgr. Michael G. Carruthers
Deacon Ed Dodenhoff
Deacon Geoff D'Angelo
Deacon Shawn Ryan
Deacon Mike Sweeney

Office of Faith Formation

Director of Faith Formation: Rosie Bridges
Administrator of Faith Formation: Sue Haines
Coordinator of Faith Formation (Grades Pre-K-8)
Assistant Coordinator of Faith Formation: Margaret Hofacker
Coordinator of Youth & Young Adult Ministry: Kierra Leopard
Assistant FF Adult Education: Rene Bonetti

Dear Parents,

Welcome to the St. Stephen Faith Formation for the 2025-2026 year! We are honored that you have chosen to enroll your child in our Faith Formation Program. Our mission is to support you as the primary educators of your child. Together with you, the St. Stephen Catholic Church Faith Formation Program offers Religious Instruction and Sacramental Preparation.

We feel privileged to create a joyful and faith-filled environment for your child. We are fortunate to have a dedicated team of knowledgeable Catechists (Teachers of the Faith) who enthusiastically share the tenets of our faith, inviting students into the profound mystery of God. Please remember that your involvement at home and your participation in Sunday Liturgies significantly influence your child and enhance our Program.

We kindly ask you to take a moment to review the Parent-Student Handbook. Once you have reviewed, please sign the **Acknowledgment Form** and return it to Sue Haines at our Faith Formation Office. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to me. We will offer the Parent-Student Handbook on our parish website for your convenience.

In Christ,

Rosie Bridges Director of Faith Formation

MISSION

The gift of faith, which begins at Baptism, must be nourished throughout the entire life of each Catholic. Parents have the primary responsibility for training their children in the practices of our faith. Parents model Catholic life through their own prayer, Mass attendance, participation in the sacraments, and their gifts of time, talent and treasure. Our parish Faith Formation Program assists in this sacred duty by providing opportunities for parents and children to develop their prayer lives and their formal understanding of our faith. We offer guidance and instruction so that each individual can come to his/her potential as members of the People of God.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Our goal is to support parents in the formation of their children in the Catholic faith. To provide a program that develops and nurtures children's desire to develop a personal relationship with Jesus. To enrich their spiritual life through prayer and the Sacraments and to encourage families to actively participate in parish life.

OUR FOCUS

To provide a safe and supportive environment for the growth of each child in their spiritual formation. To give each child the opportunity to be heard, understood and valued as a precious child of God. To help each child recognize God's love in all aspects of life.

ADMISSION & RECORDS POLICIES

Families who wish to enroll children in our Faith Formation Programs are asked to be registered members of our parish. Please complete and sign all Faith Formation registration and consent forms.

Student information will be released only to the authorized people. When students receive the Sacraments of Initiation at St. Stephen, the information is recorded in the Parish Office Sacramental Registry. Records are forwarded to the Student's Church of Baptism.

REGISTRATION

Parents of all returning students register their child on our parish website. We ask that you to please complete the fillable registration form online. Class size is limited, and students are assigned day and time on a first-come, first serve basis. Registration is held in June for new students and continues throughout the year to accommodate newly registered parishioners.

Kindergarten students must be 5 years old by September 1st. Students will usually be placed in the same grade that he/she attends in school. Adjustments are made for sacraments when necessary.

When registering a child for Sacraments, you must provide a copy of their **Baptismal Certificate at the time of registration** (If this sacrament was received at St. Stephen Church, please provide us with a date your child was baptized). If transferring from another parish, we ask for documentation stating that your child has been attending a Catholic Faith Formation class or was enrolled in a Catholic School in order to be placed in our sacrament class.

REGISTRATION AND RETREAT FEES

FEES	RETREAT FEES
\$ 75.00 one child	\$ 50.00 First Eucharist & First Reconciliation
\$ 100.00 two children	\$ 75.00 8 th Grade & High School Confirmation Retreat Fee
\$ 125.00 three or more children	\$ 20.00 Baptism registration fee
\$ 25.00 Adult Confirmation	\$ 25.00 OCIA Retreat Fee

It is our hope that every child and youth in our parish attends a Faith Formation class. If financial assistance is needed, please contact the Director of Faith Formation.

Catechists receive a discount equivalent to a "one child fee" (\$75.00).

SACRAMENT PREPARATION

The family has an essential role in the preparation for and celebration of a sacrament. Parent meetings and Sacramental Preparation Workshops are essential parts of these Programs. There is a separate sacrament fee at the time of registration. This fee covers expenses for materials, workshops and retreats.

BAPTISM

Your children's baptism is a time for celebration and joy. Thank you for allowing us to be a part of this blessed celebration. Please contact our Faith Formation Office to set up an appointment to meet with our Director of Faith Formation. At the time of the meeting, we will go through the baptism process and give you a parent packet which will include all necessary paperwork to schedule your child's baptism. We are always in need of volunteers! All the information is also on our Parish Website.

FIRST RECONCILIATION & FIRST EUCHARIST

We ask that Children be in the second grade and have completed one year of Catholic faith formation. Please refer to the Sacrament Information page included in your parent packet. To register for one of these programs, children need to have attended at least one year at a Catholic School or Catholic Faith Formation Program, with good attendance, prior to the year they receive these sacraments.

CONFIRMATION for YOUTH AND ADULTS

Students in the 8th grade and have completed one prerequisite year of Catholic faith formation are asked to register in our Confirmation Program. The 8th Grade classes are held on Sunday at 8:00 am, Monday at 6:00 pm and Wednesday at 6:00 pm.

For High School Students: Classes are held on Sunday beginning with 4:30 pm Mass followed by dinner, fellowship, and class at 5:30 – 7:30 pm at the Family Life Center. Please refer to the Sacrament of Confirmation Information in your parent packet. To register, students must have attended at least one year at a Catholic School or Catholic Faith Formation Program, with good attendance, prior to the year they receive these sacraments. High School, Young Adult & Adult classes are arranged through the Faith Formation Office.

ORDER OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS (OCIA) is for adults who desire to learn more about the Catholic faith and receive the Sacraments of Initiation. The adults are held on Sunday mornings, usually culminating at the Easter Vigil for those who are not baptized and at scheduled times throughout the year for those who are baptized. For youth, please contact Faith Formation Office for more information.

MIDDLE SCHOOL (EDGE Youth Group Program)

EDGE is a dynamic Catholic Middle School Youth Group Program for youth in 6th, 7th and 8th grades. Middle School EDGE meet Wednesday evening from 6:00 – 7:15 pm in our Family Life Center (FLC). It is designed to meet the educational, spiritual, emotional, and social needs of young adolescents. The program strives to meet the spiritual needs of our catholic youth as they transition from elementary to their high school years. Youth are always welcome to bring a friend!

HIGH SCHOOL (Life Teen Youth Group Program)

High School youth meet Sunday nights at 4:30 PM Life Teen Mass at the Family Life Center. Following Mass teens enjoy dinner, fun and fellowship. Please refer to the church bulletin or visit our web site for additional events. Parents are encouraged and invited to get involved with these programs.

YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY

Young Adult Ministry is for men and women out of (high school, through age 39) Bring a friend! They don't have to be parishioners to accompany you. Home from college for a visit? Please join us for one of our events. Contact our office or check the church bulletin for upcoming events. Our Young Adult Bible Study meet on Monday evenings at 7:15 – 8:30 pm at the Faith Formation Conference Room (School Building).

ADULT LIFELONG FORMATION

Many opportunities exist for adults to be involved in our parish: Catholics Welcome Home (for those who have been away from the Church for some time), Bible Study Groups, Book Study Groups, Prayer & Share Group, etc. Please visit our parish website for up-to-date studies. For more information, please contact the Faith Formation Office for more information.

SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE BRINGING YOUR MARRIAGE INTO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH (CONVALIDATION)

Convalidation is the means by which a marriage celebrated outside the Catholic Church (a civil marriage or one in a church of another faith tradition) is recognized as valid and receive the formal blessing of the Catholic Church. Catholics who have married outside the Catholic Church are encouraged to have their civil marriage recognized. We call this a “Convalidation”. Please complete our marriage contact form on our parish website. to set up an appointment with our Priest and/or Deacon.

ADULT FAITH LIFELONG FORMATION ENRICHMENT STUDIES

Please call the Faith Formation Office for all the book and bible studies that are offered and their schedules (813-671-4434). All studies are listed on our parish website for your convenience.

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

Vacation Bible School is offered during the summer, usually in June, for children in rising Kindergarten through Grade 5. We rely on Youth and Adult Volunteers to make this event happen: crafts, music, storytelling, snacks, games, and more! Please call the Faith Formation Office for more information or to be a part of this fun and rewarding event! We are always in need of “Coordinators” to oversee the event. Please contact the Faith Formation Office. We also offer a Vacation Bible School at St. Juan Diego/San Jose Mission in Dover, FL once a year.

KINDERGARTEN THROUGH 8TH GRADE

Classes are held on Sunday, Monday and Wednesday. Please refer to Calendars.

YOUTH GROUPS

EDGE Middle School Youth Group – Wednesday, 7:15 – 8:30 pm at the Family Life Center. **Life Teen High School Youth Group** – Sunday, beginning with 4:30 pm Mass followed by dinner, fellowship and fun at the Family Life Center.

Calendars will be sent home on the first day of class. Please note the dates classes will not be held. Additional dates for sacrament meetings, Rites, and Retreats will be distributed at Parent Orientation.

CURRICULUM

Copies of all religious education texts are available for parent/participant review in the Faith Formation Office. If you would like to review our material, please call the Faith Formation Office to arrange a time.

A. Elementary Program

Text: Sadlier “We Believe”

Visit: www.webelieveweb.com to review Scope & Sequence/Sacramental Preparation (Sadlier Sacrament Program)

B. Middle School Youth Group Ministry

Resource: EDGE (Youth Ministry Program)

Visit: www.catholicyouthministry.com

Resource: Confirmation – Pflaum – Grades 7 & 8

C. High School Youth Group Ministry – Life Teen

Resource: Catholic Youth Ministry

Visit: www.catholicyouthministry.com

ARRIVAL & DISMISSAL

Elementary:

Arrival Policy: Parents/Guardians are asked to park in the school parking lot and walk their child(ren) to their assigned classroom(s). Please be on time, as late distractions disrupt the classroom. Any child(ren) arriving more than **15 minutes late will need to report to the Faith Formation Office.**

- Dismissal: Parents/Guardians are asked to park in the school parking lot and enter through the main entrance of the school. Doors will be opened exactly at class time dismissal for parents/Guardians to pick their child(ren) up in their assigned classroom. Children who remain in the classroom after 10 minutes from dismissal will be brought to the Faith Formation Office. Please contact the office at **813-671-4434** if you are running late or have an emergency.

Middle & High School:

Arrival Policy: **Parents/Guardians are asked to drop off their youth at the FLC using the car line procedure found in the parent handbook.** Any youth arriving more than 15 minutes late will need to check in with the Assistant Coordinator of Youth & Young Adult Ministry at the reception desk at the FLC.

Dismissal: FLC pick up - Parents/Guardians are asked to **park their car and pick up their youth from the FLC.** Youth are only allowed to exit to the west **main entrance** of the FLC. We encourage any youth remaining after 15 minutes after dismissal will be asked to contact their parent/legal guardian.

ELECTRONICS/PHONES/VALUABLES

Use of Electronics are asked to be left at home. If your youth brings his/her cell phone, they will be asked to silence their phones during class time. St. Stephen Catholic Church will not be responsible for lost or stolen items.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Our programs rely on the support of our volunteers. Please consider teaching, assisting, or helping with activities offered. Call the Faith Formation Office for a list of volunteer positions or check out the parish website. We appreciate your assistance!

Catechist Certification, Safe Environment Training, and other enrichment activities are available. Please call the Faith Formation Office for information.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

The Diocese of St. Petersburg has mandated that all adult staff and volunteers who are entrusted with the care or supervision of children, youth, and vulnerable adults must be trained on the Safe Environment Policy. This parish follows the Diocese of St. Petersburg's Policy on Safe Environment and provides training for subject to catechists, assistants, and other volunteers. In addition to this training, volunteers are also

background checked. Safe Environment Program classes are also provided for parents and children (age-appropriate material is presented).

CHILD ABUSE

Pursuant to State Law, we are required to report suspected child abuse and we follow Diocesan policy on such matters. The Faith Formation Office has a copy of this policy on file.

HEALTH CONCERNS/MEDICATION/FIRST AID

Parents will be directed to complete an emergency information listed on the student registration form. This information is confidential and will assist us in better serving your student in cases of medical emergencies. In case of an emergency, we will use prudent judgement in determining action, and in all cases, make every attempt to contact a parent or designated adult and in serious matters “Emergency Personnel” will be contacted. Any special medical or behavioral needs of your children should be addressed on the registration form. The personnel and volunteers in the Faith Formation programs do not dispense medications to children and youth. If a child is diagnosed with a medical condition after registration, please inform the Faith Formation Office as soon as possible.

Middle & High School Youth: Parents are asked to complete a Middle & High School Youth Group Registration Form which includes all health concerns and medication/first aid information, and emergency contact information requested. Please know your youth will be asked to sign in each evening prior to class or gathering. It is very important that registration form is completed before attending any Youth Group. The cost for registration is \$20.00.

ACCIDENT POLICY

If a child sustains an injury while participating in a Faith Formation class or other activity, parents will be called immediately. If parents cannot be reached, we will call the emergency contact person. **It is very important that the phone number of your designated emergency contact person be accurate. If your number changes throughout the year, please notify Sue Haines at the Faith Formation Office asap.**

The personnel and volunteers in the Faith Formation programs can only dispense ice packs and bandages to children and youth. In the event of a serious accident, a Diocesan Student Injury Accident Report will be completed.

INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY

PLEASE NOTE: Should a tropical storm or hurricane be in the forecast, it may be necessary to **cancel classes. If the Hillsborough County public schools close, we will NOT HAVE CLASSES.** Please use your best judgment if a storm happens prior to any classes. We will make an earnest effort to notify you of cancellations. Check our website and Facebook page, Cornerstone and Flock note for the most current information. Parents who consented to our text message program may receive text information. Please be sure we always have your current contact information. Should any information change, please contact Sue Haines at 813-671-4434 or you can email Sue@ststephencatholic.org.

FIRE SAFETY AND DISASTER PREPARATION

1. Fire Safety

- a. According to Diocesan Policy, two fire drills will be conducted during the course of the year. All students, staff, and catechists will depart the facility.

- b. In case of a real emergency, children will be taken to a designated area on the property away from the school or church buildings.
- c. An evacuation map is located by the door in each classroom and bathroom facilities.

2. Natural Disasters

In the event a natural disaster (tornado, hurricane, etc.) occurs, catechists will be warned (if possible) of the approaching danger. Students and catechists are to move to the center of the building away from windows. Emergency & evacuation instructions can be found on each class attendance folder.

THE DIOCESE OF SAINT PETERSBURG SAFE ENVIRONMENT HARASSMENT POLICY

The Diocese of St. Petersburg requires that each parish adopt a policy that prohibits any form of harassment by any individual. The Diocese strives for the establishment of a Christian, professional, and supportive educational environment for all persons engaged in or involved with religious education and youth ministry programs in non-employment situations. No parish will be responsible for off-campus harassment, unless it occurs at a parish-sponsored event.

PURPOSE OF THE POLICY: This policy intends -

- that each individual is free from physical, psychological, or verbal intimidation and harassment in religious education and youth ministry settings.
- that each individual involved in religious education and youth ministry programs maintain and further develop attitudes and behaviors which express respect for others and are reflective of each person's God-given dignity.
- to encourage a heightened sensitivity toward behaviors that others may find offensive and intimidating, whether these behaviors refer to race, religion, color, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, age, marital status, familial status, veteran status, or disability.

This policy is not intended to otherwise limit the expectation of staff, children, students, and volunteers to engage fully in the traditions of teaching, celebrating, participating in and being formed by the Catholic faith, including but not limited to curriculum, catechesis, the Sacraments, other liturgies, worship services and ministries.

EXPLANATION OF HARASSMENT:

Harassment can result from a single incident or from a pattern of behavior involving verbal, written, or physical conduct or communication.

Harassment encompasses a broad range of behaviors, which could include, but are not limited to:

- Physical, mental or verbal abuse
- Insults, jokes, or derogatory slurs based on one or more of an individual's protected status(es)
- Unwelcome sexual advances or touching
- Implicit or explicit requests for sexual favors
- Unwanted sexual comments (serious or humorous)
- Unwanted sexually suggestive telephone calls, letters, e-mail, etc.
- Comments or jokes based on issues of modesty and developing social awareness
- Unwanted forced involvement in activities (e.g., physical, religious, etc.)
- Coercion of religious styles or personal beliefs upon a participant
- Intimidation in front of a group or forced personal sharing in groups
- Inappropriate media or music use which would violate this policy

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The right to confidentiality, both of the complainant and of the accused, will be respected to the extent possible, but will be consistent with legal obligations and with the necessity to investigate allegations of misconduct and to take corrective action when this conduct occurred.

PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES (for PreK-Kindergarten through Middle School students)

Faithful **class attendance** is expected. For Sacrament Preparation: Retreats and Workshops are included in addition to regular class attendance. Parents are encouraged to have their children in class on time. Tardiness is a distraction to both students and catechists and disrupts valuable instruction time. Please do not drop children off more than ten minutes prior to the start of class. Children are only allowed in classrooms when the teacher or assistant is present.

Parents must follow our **dismissal** policy. Children will not be allowed to leave the supervised dismissal area unless accompanied by an adult. Please notify the Faith Formation office if someone other than a parent will be picking up your child. If parents cannot pick up their child, **it is required to have the designated person pick-up information in the student file before we can release a student in their care.**

Our volunteer catechists are expected to handle routine classroom **discipline** and will not be asked to deal with situations beyond their control. Every effort will be made to instill the love of God in your child during class time. If a child continually disrupts class, that child will be sent to the Faith Formation Coordinator. If this behavior continues, it may be necessary for parents to be contacted. We ask for your support.

Please make known to us any **special learning or physical needs** of your child so that he/she may be better served in the classroom. All information is confidential.

Families are expected to attend **Mass** regularly. Faith Formation classes are not a substitute for Mass.

We are very fortunate to have a talented staff of volunteer catechists giving their time, talent and love to our young people. But we are always in need of additional help. Please consider **volunteering** in the classroom, becoming a substitute teacher, or being a part of our support staff.

COMMUNICATION

We ask that you please check the forms of communication which are updated weekly. .

- ANNOUNCEMENTS Weekly Bulletin
- Parent notices and letters sent home with children
- Parent meetings
- Mailings Email announcements (We need a current email and postal address on file)
- Phone number – please be sure we have your current contact information on file.
- Flocknote
- Facebook
- Cornerstone



**PARENT/STUDENT PARISH FAITH FORMATION POLICY
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I acknowledge that I have received, read, understand and agree to abide by the Policies contained in the Parent/Student Faith Formation Handbook including the local Parish program policies and procedures, the Harassment Policy in Non-Employment Situations and the Safe-Environment Policies of the Diocese of St. Petersburg.

(Signature) Parent/Guardian (Signature) Parent/Guardian

(Name Printed) Parent/Guardian (Name Printed) Parent/Guardian

Student Name (s) Printed Signature(s) Student(s)

Date: _____

Name of Student

Thank you for being a dedicated parent and for your commitment to teaching your children the Catholic Faith. You are their primary educators, and by encouraging them to participate in **Faith Formation and Mass**, you enable us to support you in this role. As the most significant influence in your child's life, it's vital that you reinforce what they learn in class at home. We are here to assist you and accompany you on your child's faith journey.

In Christ,

- Rosie Bridges, Director of Faith Formation
- Sue Haines, Administrator of Faith Formation
- Kim Davis, Coordinator of Pre-K-8th Grades
- Margaret Hofacker – Assistant Coordinator of Pre-K-8th Grades
- Kierra Leopard – Coordinator of Youth & Young Adult Ministry
- Rene Bonetti, Assistant Youth & Young Adult Minister