



SAINT PAUL THE APOSTLE PARISH

FAQs: Sacrament Formation for Children

On behalf of the Faith Formation Team at St. Paul the Apostle Parish, a warm welcome to you and your family! It is a joy to journey with you during these grace-filled and foundational years of formation in the Catholic faith. Parents and guardians of candidates for the Sacraments of First Reconciliation, Confirmation, and First Holy Eucharist are invited to partner with the Parish as together we implement the guidelines promulgated by the Bishop of our Diocese. Below are some commonly asked questions...

A. WHY A TWO-YEAR FAMILY-CENTERED APPROACH?

In 2015, the Bishop of our Diocese introduced a two-year Sacrament Preparation plan which includes formation opportunities for parents and guardians. This approach has been implemented in all parishes throughout the Diocese where parents and guardians participate in four to six gatherings each year, along with their children, to strengthen their own faith and support the formation of their children.

B. WHY CONFIRMATION BEFORE HOLY EUCHARIST (A.K.A. RESTORED ORDER)?

Many Catholics in the United States outside of Maine are unfamiliar with the practice of confirming children in elementary school. Celebrating the Sacrament of Confirmation at the time of first Holy Eucharist is rooted in the life of the early Church as well as being a decades-long practice in the Diocese of Portland. This practice is based on history and theology. For more information about the rationale for celebrating Confirmation at a younger age, please visit portlanddiocese.org/confirmation1stcommunion.

C. CAN I REGISTER MY FIVE-YEAR-OLD?

Candidates for Sacrament Formation must be at least six years old on or before October 15. If you have two children close in age, and you wish to have them attend Sacrament Formation together, you may consider waiting until the youngest is six years old to begin Sacrament Formation, although it is recommended that each child has their own unique experience of formation with their peers (even if that means one retreat per month for your family during the second year).

D. WHAT IF MY CHILD IS OLDER, IS NOT YET BAPTIZED, OR WAS BAPTIZED NON-CATHOLIC?

No problem! Depending upon your child's age and baptismal status, a family consultation may be scheduled to determine the best path of formation for your child. Each situation is evaluated by our Pastor and Faith Formation team, so please reach out to the Coordinators by early September. Our Faith Formation classes run from early September to mid-May each year. The process of Christian Initiation (OCIA) begins in early September for children, teens, and adults.



E. IS MY CHILD REQUIRED TO ATTEND WEEKLY FAITH FORMATION CLASSES?

Yes, in addition to the four Retreats each year, all candidates for the Sacraments must either be enrolled as students at All Saints Catholic School (ASCS), homeschooled, or attending in-person weekly faith formation classes. The Diocese requires a minimum of 26-30 hours of faith formation per year. Students at ASCS receive about 90 hours of religious formation, while students attending weekly faith formation classes receive about 30 hours of formation. For more information about our Parish school (grades PK-8), please visit allsaintsmaine.org; or to register for weekly classes, please visit our Parish website (stpaulbangor.me). Families are welcome to co-enroll in both ASCS and weekly classes. Homeschool families should complete the Domestic/Home Study request form found on our website by early September.

F. IS WEEKLY ATTENDANCE AT HOLY MASS EXPECTED?

Yes, going to Mass every Sunday is necessary and should be a high priority for your family. Attending weekly Mass is not only a precept of the Catholic Church and a fulfillment of the Third Commandment, but also one of the best and most important ways to help your child prepare to receive the Sacraments. Familiarity with Holy Mass—the clerics seen, the postures used, the prayers said—allows for more active participation and understanding of the liturgy on the day of your child's Confirmation and First Holy Eucharist.

G. WHY DOESN'T SACRAMENT FORMATION TAKE PLACE DURING WEEKLY CLASSES?

Sacrament formation is separate from weekly classes/ASCS religion classes primarily because not everyone enrolled in Faith Formation/ASCS is Catholic and not everyone desires to receive the Sacraments. Children of all ages, from different churches, towns, and schools come to the Parish to receive the Sacraments, making it a challenge to meet weekly at the same time/place. The retreats are a great opportunity to bring everyone together—including parents and guardians—to focus specifically on Sacrament Formation. Parents/guardians are expected to follow up with retreat lessons at home.

H. WHAT HAPPENS DURING EACH YEAR?

- Year One: The first year provides an introduction to Catholic teachings. There are four retreats required during Year One. Retreat topics are based on the four pillars of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: *The Profession of Faith (Creed)*, *The Celebration of the Christian Mystery (Sacraments)*, *Life in Christ (Morality)*, and *Christian Prayer*. Each candidate's baptismal status must be verified by the end of Year One. If your child was baptized outside of our Parish, a copy of their baptism certificate is needed. If you need help obtaining your child's baptism certificate, please let the Coordinators know.



- Year Two: Upon successful completion of Year One, candidates are invited to begin Year Two. There are four retreats required during Year Two which focus more intensely on immediate preparation for the Sacraments: *Holy Mass*, *Reconciliation* (also called Penance or Confession), *Confirmation*, and *First Holy Eucharist* (also called Holy Communion). First Confession takes place during Advent, and the Bishop's office usually announces the spring date for the Confirmation/Holy Eucharist Mass by the end of January. A professional photographer is hired by the Parish for this celebration (families are asked to refrain from using cameras).

I. WHY FAMILY RETREATS?

The Catholic spiritual practice of ‘going on retreat’ is rooted in the prayer life of Christ, who often stepped away from the practical demands of His earthly ministry, going to places of calm and quiet to pray, speaking to the Father in the depths of His heart. We too need opportunities to step away from the busyness of our daily lives, to be able to quiet the many distractions and interruptions that surround us and focus only on God and the great gifts He has given us in the Sacraments of the Church. Rather than separate families, the retreats are a time for families to gather in the sacred space of our churches, in the presence of Christ, to acknowledge His central place in our lives while deepening our understanding and practice of our Catholic faith.

J. WHEN AND WHERE ARE THE RETREATS HELD?

Retreats are held during the months of October through May on a Tuesday evening (5-7:30 p.m.) at St. Mary’s Church Hall in Bangor, and a Saturday morning (9:30-11:30 a.m.) at St. Joseph Church Hall in Brewer. The same retreat is offered two times each month. After reviewing the yearly calendar, please choose which retreat date works best for your family. Year One retreats take place during the months of November, January, March, and May. Year Two retreats are offered in October, December, February, and April. Sign-ups and further information will be sent to families via email in advance of the retreats.

K. WHO SHOULD ATTEND THE RETREATS?

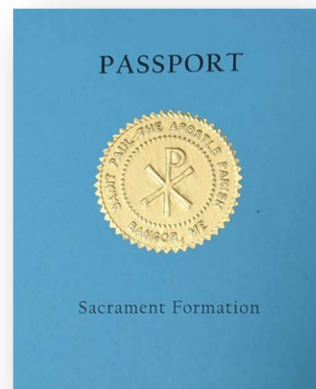
The retreats are mandatory for parents/guardians and children preparing to receive the Sacraments—including students at ASCS, homeschooled children, and those enrolled in Faith Formation classes. Although it is ideal if both parents attend the retreats, we understand if only one parent is able to attend. Written permission from a parent/guardian is needed if another adult, such as a grandparent or sponsor, will attend the retreats *in the place of the parent*. This ‘designated chaperone’ should be used only for exceptional situations and does not apply to Domestic/Home Study families, where the primary educator must be present. We are reminded during the Sacrament of Baptism that parents accept the responsibility of training their child in the practice of the Catholic faith and this commitment should not be taken lightly. Free childcare is offered by reservation for younger siblings at all retreats, and older siblings are also welcome to attend and/or volunteer. Confirmation sponsors are invited to attend the Confirmation Retreat with your family in February.

L. WHAT HAPPENS AT THE RETREATS?

Retreats are led by our clerics (priests/deacons/seminarians) and Faith Formation Coordinators. We are also very grateful for the assistance of other volunteers, catechists, and ASCS teachers. The Tuesday retreats begin with an optional pizza dinner during the first half hour. Part I includes a warm-up activity, opening prayer, catechesis/video, small group discussion, and/or song. During Part II, the children participate in learning centers while the parents/guardians attend a parent talk/video and discussion. Everyone comes together during Part III for closing prayer. Retreats always start and end on time out of respect for your time. Please honor our staff and volunteers by showing up on time and not leaving early. Attending only half of the retreat does not count toward attendance requirements.

M. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE TOTE BAG, BINDER, & PASSPORT?

At the start of Sacrament Formation, families are given a tote bag, binder, and one ‘passport’ per child. Please bring these items with you to every retreat. Handouts will be added to the binder, and the passport will be stamped at each retreat as an incentive tool for attendance and memorization of prayers and Church teachings.



N. WHAT HAPPENS IF WE HAVE TO MISS A RETREAT?

In the event of an illness, family emergency, or other crisis situation, please reach out to the Faith Formation Coordinators as soon as possible. Retreats are designed with busy families in mind—dates are shared well in advance for your planning purposes and there are always two options to attend each month. We generally do not offer make-up retreats and candidates are required to attend all eight retreats. Thank you for making your attendance at the retreats a top priority. * Please note that if two or more retreats are missed during either year, that year must be repeated. *

O. ARE RETREATS OFFERED IN A HOME-STUDY OR VIDEO FORMAT?

Retreats are not offered in a home-study or video format because their very purpose is for candidates and their families to experience the communal aspect of the Church into which they are preparing to be received. Since the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist will all be received in a Church setting within our faith community, it is important for children to be comfortable in and familiar with this setting. The communal aspect of each retreat is unique and unrepeatable. Gathering in community has many benefits for all who are present—please consider how the witness and presence of your family may support other families within the Parish.

P. WHAT IF MY CHILD HAS A DIFFERENCE OR DISABILITY?

He or she is most welcome! If your child has a special need and/or if you anticipate some degree of social/emotional distress/difficulty related to your child not being with you during Part II of the retreats, please invite another adult or older sibling/relative/friend to stay with your child while you attend the parent talk/video; or notify us of your situation so that we can recruit an extra volunteer. Part of the preparation for reception of the Sacraments is providing opportunities for children to thrive on their own, especially considering that parents are not directly beside them as they receive the sacraments of Reconciliation, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist.

Q. WHAT IF MY CHILD/TEEN NEEDS ONLY THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION?

Please reach out to the Faith Formation Coordinators by early September to schedule a family consultation. In addition to being enrolled in six or more months of Faith Formation classes/Youth Ministry, your child/teen seeking the Sacrament of Confirmation will need to attend the Confirmation retreat held in February of each year. There may be additional classes/retreats required based on their previous Faith Formation. Depending on their age, they would then be confirmed by the Bishop either with the Year Two candidates in early spring or with the teen/adult candidates in late spring.



R. HOW DO WE FIND A SPONSOR?

At the start of Year Two, you will be asked to find someone to be your child's sponsor for Confirmation. This person could be your child's godparent, relative, or neighbor, and must be a practicing Catholic. Parents cannot serve as sponsors (although they can stand in as proxy for one). If there are two sponsors, they must be male and female. Sponsors must be age 16 or older; fully initiated Catholics—baptized, confirmed, receive Holy Eucharist regularly, and living Church laws on marriage, which means married in the Catholic Church, and not living together if unmarried. Please note: sponsors must be registered members of their parish, including St. Paul the Apostle. Please reach out to the Faith Formation Coordinators if you need help finding a sponsor who fits these criteria.

S. WHAT ABOUT CHOOSING A CONFIRMATION NAME?

Neither the *Order of Confirmation* nor the *Code of Canon Law* mentions taking a new name. While candidates are encouraged to use their baptismal name (John, Elizabeth, etc.) which emphasizes the connection between Baptism and Confirmation, choosing a “confirmation name” is optional. A good approach is to choose the name of a saint or holy person whose life inspires your child to live faithfully. Please notify the Coordinators by the February retreat if you wish to have a Confirmation name for your child. Last-minute requests are not possible. The Confirmation name will be included on your child’s name tag, spoken by their sponsor to the Bishop during the Confirmation Mass, and recorded in the Confirmation registry. (The program and certificates will include your child’s full baptismal name only.)

T. IS THERE A DRESS CODE FOR THE CONFIRMATION/FIRST EUCHARIST MASS?

While there is no specific dress code, candidates are asked to wear their ‘Sunday best.’ Ties and suits are optional for boys (please no shorts/t-shirts). Shirts should be tucked in. White dresses are commonly worn by girls (please no shorts/mini skirts, cropped/tank tops). Shoulders should be covered while in Church. Please do not wear dark nail polish. Veils are optional and should not prohibit the anointing of the forehead by the Bishop. White gloves are optional but must be removed prior to receiving Holy Eucharist. Please ask us about our extensive inventory of gently used formal attire. All others attending Holy Mass should dress in a way that reflects the dignity and sacredness of the celebration.

U. WHAT HAPPENS ONCE MY CHILD IS FULLY INITIATED?

Following reception of the sacraments, newly initiated children gather with their parents/guardians for a celebration that includes reflection on the experience (*Mystagogy*), sharing photos from the Confirmation Mass, and promotion of the Faith Formation options for the post-Sacrament years. Families are encouraged to stay engaged in the practice of their Catholic faith by attending weekly Mass, going to Confession at least once a year, getting involved in the life of the Parish (altar serving, Choir, Faith Formation, VBS, Youth Ministry, etc.), and sharing of their time, talent, and treasure. If you feel called to a particular ministry or would like to help out at the retreats, please reach out to the Faith Formation Coordinators.



V. IS THERE A FEE FOR THE SACRAMENTS?

While there is no fee to receive the sacraments themselves, there are costs involved with Sacrament Formation and Retreats. A registration fee is collected at the beginning of each year. Please consider which tier below best suits your family. If you are unable to pay the fee or prefer to make small donations at each retreat, please advise our staff.

- **TIER 1** (\$70 per child per year): Most accurately reflects the yearly cost of Sacrament Formation including staff wages, volunteer expenses, photography, building use, meals, supplies, and sacramentals.
- **TIER 2** (\$45 per child per year): A partially subsidized fee for those who can afford to pay more than just the basic costs associated with Sacrament Formation including all supplies and meals.
- **TIER 3** (\$30 per child per year): This is an adjusted fee. It covers just the basic costs for supplies, not including meals, photography, or building/staff costs.

**Please note this fee is separate from Faith Formation class fee/ASCS tuition costs. The fee for the Christian Initiation process will be discussed at the start of the year.*

W. WHAT IF WE NEED MORE TIME OR ARE STILL DISCERNING OUR COMMITMENT?

Although there is a typical timeline for Sacrament Formation, there is no pressure and no hurry to complete this process in the typical grade 1/grade 2 sequence. Families may opt to delay formation for different reasons and Sacrament Formation may be put on hold at any time, for any length of time at your discretion. Canon Law requires that anyone seeking to receive the sacraments have the intention of maintaining a permanent relationship with Christ and the Catholic Church (Can. 868). Please reach out to the Pastor or Faith Formation Coordinators if you have a particular need.

X. WHAT CAN I DO IF MY SPOUSE AND I ARE NOT ON THE SAME PAGE?

Couples with interfaith marriages and parents who are not Catholic (whether single, married, or divorced) are always welcome to Parish events, including Sacrament Retreats. While it is ideal if both parents—regardless of their religious affiliation—agree to raise their child in the Catholic faith as promised at baptism, the permission of only one parent is required by Canon Law (Can. 868). If your differences on matters of faith are a source of contention in your marriage, or if you would like more information about getting your marriage blessed (convalidation), we recommend you speak with a priest or deacon. Please call the Parish Office at 207-217-6740 to schedule an appointment.

Y. HOW CAN I OFFER FEEDBACK/SUGGESTIONS?

At the end of every retreat, there is an opportunity to complete an evaluation. We welcome your suggestions and comments. You may also contact the Pastor or Faith Formation Coordinators to offer feedback or suggestions at any time. Please note, we reserve the right to block emails of a suspicious or threatening nature.



Z. HOW WILL I BE CONTACTED?

Email is our primary mode of communication. Please be sure we have an email address on file that you check regularly. Your email address will be kept strictly confidential. We occasionally send text messages/make phone calls and also recommend that you download the myParish app to receive notifications about upcoming events and cancellations due to weather. If your family is not currently registered in the Parish—which is a requirement for sacrament documentation—you can sign up on our Parish website at any time or request a form to be sent to you in the mail. Please note our contact information below:

St. Paul the Apostle Parish Office
217 York Street, Bangor ME 04401
Office Phone: 207-217-6740 x1300

Julie Sanclemente
julie.sanclemente@portlanddiocese.org

Dawn MacKay
dawn.mackay@portlanddiocese.org
Website: stpaulbangor.me