

St. Stephen's Faith Formation Program Handbook



**2020 - 2021
School Year**

Mission Statement

The Faith Formation program of St. Stephen Parish seeks to provide youth and children with the knowledge, experience, and skills necessary to walk with, learn from, and participate in the mission of Jesus, within a community of disciples. In keeping with their age, they will assume responsibility as vital members of the parish to proclaim God's reign of love by living, sharing, enjoying and nurturing their faith.

St. Stephen Catholic Parish
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Philosophy

The church has always considered catechesis (religious instruction) one of her primary tasks. Just before Christ ascended into heaven he commanded his disciples to “*make disciples and teach; be my witnesses; proclaim; baptize; do this in memory of me; to love one another.*” These are the ways in which the Gospel, the Good News, is shared throughout the world. Jesus entrusted His disciples with the mission to explain to others all that He had taught them, and we, as disciples of Christ, do the same thing today.

Here at St. Stephen Parish, we believe that catechetical (faith formation) ministry is a share in Jesus’ own mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God. Catechesis enables faith to become living, conscious and active through the light of instruction. We believe that faith is not only to be believed but to be celebrated, lived and prayed. Catechesis is a life-long process for each person as well as the work of the entire Catholic Christian community.

The Church teaches that the primary responsibility for the spiritual growth and development of the children rests first and foremost with the parents. Parents may share this responsibility with others but they do not relinquish it.

St. Stephen Parish assists the parents in passing on their faith through the ministry of the Faith Formation Program. Catechists (religion teachers) echo the faith in a way that the children and youth can understand. Catechists do more than merely teach about the faith. They help children and youth build and strengthen their relationship with Jesus and the Church. Catechists do this by proclaiming the Word, building a sense of community, leading prayer and worship, encouraging loving service to others and through the example of their own lives.

Our catechists are all volunteers, from many different walks of life. They have answered a call to serve and prepare themselves in a variety of ways to serve as catechists. Above all, they are people for whom faith is important enough to share.

The aim of our Faith Formation Program is to help the children, youth, and their families discover the goodness and beauty of God reflected in the world around them and in one another. We want to invite students and their families to a personal encounter with Jesus, to form them into disciples who will make a commitment throughout their lives to live as Jesus taught us to live.

GOALS

The goals of the Faith Formation Program at St. Stephen’s are:

- Ongoing conversion to Jesus Christ
- Full participation in the life of the Catholic Church
- To foster community among the students, their families and the parish community

Program Overview

St. Stephen's welcomes all children and youth, baptized or not, to participate in the Faith Formation Program.

Ages 3-6: St. Stephen's offers a special Liturgy of the Word on Sunday morning during the 9:30 Mass from September through May. *(Due to COVID-19 Pandemic this ministry is on hold and will continue when it is safe to meet in person and Masses are open to the public again.)*

Grades 1-8: Weekly classes are held on Monday afternoons starting at 4:00 p.m.
We will meet virtually until it is safe to meet in person.
Please log in to the virtual class before 4:00 p.m. since it takes time to admit every participant into the virtual classroom. Logging in early helps us start on time.

We will meet virtually via Zoom or another digital platform. When it is safe to meet in person (according to the government and Dept. of Public Health pandemic guidelines), all students gather in front of the Church for snacks 3:45 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. then move into the church for the opening prayer at 4:00 p.m. After the opening prayer and announcements in the church the students move to classrooms either in the O'Reilly Parish Center, 451 Eucalyptus Drive, or in the Marian Room of the Church. Classes normally run until 5:15 p.m., however, our virtual classes will most likely be much shorter. **You will be notified in advance when we are allowed to meet in person.**
(refer to FF calendar for dates)

Faith Formation Themes

Jesus, our Savior
Church and Community
The Beatitudes
The 10 Commandments and the Great Commandment
The 7 Sacraments
The Mystery of God, and the Church

- Content: Old Testament, Jesus, Saints, the Church, Sacraments, church (liturgical) year, Catholic values, Nicene Creed, Liturgy planning, and involvement in the life of the parish.
- Worship: monthly "Family Mass" where a grade level is assigned to help put on the Mass (student's read, take up the offertory gifts, etc.). Students from Faith Formation work alongside students from St Stephen School. Attendance for all grade levels is expected at these monthly Family Masses whether or not your child's class is participating in the Mass. There are also seasonal opportunities to learn and celebrate Eucharistic Liturgies along with prayer services, penance services, and the development of an understanding of liturgical ministries.

- Service: Students identify and reach out to those in need both globally and locally with areas of concern emphasizing hunger, homelessness, refugees, victims of violence and prejudice.
- Community building includes parent-student nights and seasonal activities.

While we have chosen excellent classroom resources, remember that a parent passes on the faith through lived example, storytelling (especially Jesus stories), prayer together, Mass together, and forgiveness of each other. What a teacher says or does is always put aside in favor of what the family is modeling. Handing on our faith is a tremendous responsibility and we here at St. Stephen Parish are happy to support parents in their efforts.

Parents' Role

Parents are the primary educators of their children. They serve as role models for their children. Young children often imitate their parents. Our staff is eager to work with parents to help them fulfill this responsibility and asks each parent's cooperation in the following ways:

- Celebrate Sunday Mass regularly with your family. During the Pandemic you may "attend" Mass virtually from the comfort and safety of your home. St Stephen's offers the Mass through a live stream online, on our [Facebook page](#), [YouTube channel](#), and our own [webpage](#). The live-stream starts at 9:30 a.m. but the recording is available afterwards to watch at any time convenient to you.

After the pandemic we hope to return to our regular Mass schedule which is:

Saturday 4:30 p.m. Vigil Mass

Sunday 8:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m. (Family Mass), 11:30 a.m. and 6:45 p.m.

We recommend using the website www.masstimes.org to look up churches and mass times when you have a change in schedule or while traveling.

- Participate actively in the sacramental and community life of your parish.
- Share your faith and what it means to you with your children.
- Pray with your children and help them learn the traditional prayers of the Church. Establish some family prayers and rituals.
- Attend all parent meetings.
- Familiarize yourself with scheduled Faith Formation sessions and events for your child and assure your child's punctual and regular attendance at the classes.
- Read and respond promptly to all communications from the Faith Formation Office.

Student's Role

Children have a responsibility to cooperate in order to benefit from catechetical sessions at St. Stephen's Faith Formation Program. They are expected to:

- Be respectful of the teachers and other children.
- Listen carefully, follow directions and participate in the session activities.
- Complete any homework assignments.
- Follow the attendance, emergency and safety procedures and discipline policies.
- Share what they have learned and experienced in the sessions with their parents and families.

Sacramental Preparation

First Communion

Preparation for First Holy Communion is a two-year process beginning in the first grade. If your child is beyond first grade and would like to prepare to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist, please make arrangements with the Director of Faith Formation. There is a separate online application form for First Communion, a link to it will be provided at the beginning of the 2nd grade school year. In addition to filling out the application form online there will be an information packet to download, and the student's Baptismal certificate must be turned in to the parish office. A copy will be made and the original certificate will be returned to you. There are mandatory meetings for the parents and students, see the Faith Formation Class Schedule for details.

As part of this preparation, families are required to attend Mass at St. Stephen's Church on a regular basis. Parents are expected to participate in their child's education by teaching them certain prayers and stories about the life of Jesus. Children should know these prayers: the Sign of the Cross, the Lord's Prayer (Our Father), Hail Mary, the Children's Creed, and the Act of Contrition.

Clothes for First Communion are:

Boys: Long sleeved white shirt and a long white tie. Dark slacks, socks and dress shoes. Jackets may not be worn during the ceremony. If you have trouble locating a long white tie, check with McCoy Church Goods at 1010 Howard Ave., San Mateo (800) 824-4652 www.mccoychurch.com or Cotter Church Supplies at 369 Grand Ave., South San Francisco (650) 583-5153 www.cotters.com

Girls: White dress, socks or tights, and shoes. Veils may be worn. Sometimes girls have worn flowers in their hair. Gloves, purses, etc. may not be worn during the ceremony.

Pictures: Formal pictures are usually taken the week before First Holy Communion. Dates and times will be scheduled.

First Reconciliation

Children are prepared to celebrate this sacrament before they receive their First Communion. Attire requested for the First Reconciliation ceremony is "Sunday Best" – no new outfit is necessary.

Confirmation

Preparation for Confirmation is a three-year program, grades 6, 7 and 8, for students attending public school or non-Catholic private school. Students who are attending Catholic school and receiving religious instruction on a daily basis may receive the sacrament of Confirmation after attending the Faith Formation Program for one year (eighth grade). There is a separate online application form for Confirmation that will be provided at the beginning of the 8th grade school year. In addition to filling out the application form online there will be an information packet to download, and the student's Baptismal certificate must be turned in to the parish office. A copy will be made and the original certificate will be returned to you. There are mandatory meetings for the parents, candidates and sponsors, see the Faith Formation Class Schedule for details.

Confirmation students must choose a Sponsor who will walk with them through this journey towards the Sacrament. While information about choosing a Sponsor will be provided in the informational packet it is important for families to start thinking about possible candidates immediately.

As part of this preparation, families are required to attend Mass at St. Stephen's church on a regular basis. Those preparing for Confirmation will be expected to do community service, write papers on the saint they have chosen and on other topics such as church history, or volunteer work the student has performed. Confirmation students are also expected to submit each week a short summary of the homily from Sunday Mass. More info will be provided in the informational packet.

Regular attendance on Monday afternoons is very important. One class builds on another over the three-year period. Missed sessions can result in delaying receiving the sacrament until the ninth grade.

Dress Code for Confirmation:

Boys: dark slacks, long sleeved white shirt, tie, and dress shoes. A sweater or dress jacket may be worn. Suits are acceptable, but since this is a growth period for our young people you may choose not to do this.

Girls: dress (or skirt and blouse), long or a length that respects modest decorum (mini-skirts are not acceptable). Care should be taken that the dress has a conservative top. Spaghetti straps or strapless tops for this occasion are not appropriate, so a simple jacket may be necessary. Shoes should be chosen for ease of walking. Makeup and accessories should demonstrate good taste.

Baptismal Information

New students must submit a copy of their Baptismal certificate. Children who have not yet been baptized are welcome; parents should simply inform the Director that the child has not yet been baptized. We are happy to work with the family to prepare the child for the Sacrament of Baptism.

General Policies

Change of Address

Please notify the parish Faith Formation Office of any change of address or telephone number (work or home) immediately so that the staff will be able to contact you in the event of an emergency involving your child.

Emergency Information

Each student must have an emergency card on file in the office. Please make sure that this information is current and accurate. Registration is not complete without this information and students will not be allowed to come to class unless the emergency form is on file.

Attendance Policy

Promptness and regular class attendance is important because one class builds on the next. Absences are to be reported **before** class begins by calling the Faith Formation Office at (415) 681-2444 ext. 4 or email: FaithFormation@SaintStephenSF.org.

After three (3) unexcused absences the student may be dropped from the class roster. Students preparing to receive a Sacrament will be required to make up work missed due to absences, or they may be delayed from receiving the Sacrament with their classmates.

Parent Teacher Communication

Parents or guardians and Faith Formation Program staff work in partnership in helping children and youth grow in faith, therefore good communication is essential. If problems develop, they should always be solved at the lowest level possible. If a parent or guardian wishes to talk with a teacher, they may do so after the session or they may make an appointment for a mutually convenient time. Parents or guardians may also call or visit the Faith Formation Office if they wish to talk with the Director.

The Faith Formation Office will communicate with parents/guardians by phone, email, mail, or by sending notes home with the students.

Discipline Policy

The Faith Formation Program's first concern is to maintain an atmosphere in which the students can form a community, share faith, and enjoy an optimum-learning environment. As part of a Catholic Christian learning environment students are expected to:

1. Be respectful and cooperative with all teachers and volunteers in the program
2. Be respectful of one another. Inappropriate behavior includes disrespectful verbal and body language.
3. Respect parish property and the property of others.
4. Participate positively and be attentive in class.

Parents or guardians will be called if their child repeatedly disrupts the class session. The Director of Faith Formation, in consultation with the Pastor, is the final recourse in all disciplinary situations.

Harassment

St. Stephen's Faith Formation Program believes in the sanctity and integrity of all persons: that we are all created in God's image and are of inestimable value. Any form of harassment is completely contrary to this belief and St. Stephen's is committed to providing an environment free of harassment.

Harassment occurs when an individual is subjected to treatment that is hostile, offensive, or intimidating because of the individual's race, creed, color, national origin, physical ability, or gender. Harassment of any student by any other student is prohibited and will not be tolerated.

A charge of harassment shall not, in and of itself, create the presumption of wrongdoing. However, substantiated acts of harassment will result in disciplinary action up to and including expulsion from the program. Students found to have knowingly filed false or frivolous charges will also be subject to disciplinary action up to and including expulsion from the program.

Child Abuse

As required by state law, evidence of apparent non-accidental injury, suspected neglect or child abuse will be reported to the proper authorities.

Custody Arrangements

The primary responsibility for seeing that custody arrangements are carried out rests with the parents. The Faith Formation staff wishes to cooperate with special custody arrangements of families to the best of their ability. Parents are asked to meet with and submit in writing detailed information regarding such arrangements to the Director.

Medical Emergency

In the case of an accident or sudden sickness, the teacher, director, or delegate will give appropriate immediate care and notify the parents/guardians. The staff without written parental permission can give no medication. **The student's Emergency Card should be on file and it is the parents'/guardians' responsibility to keep it up to date.**

Dangerous Materials

The Director or designated persons have the right and duty to protect the health and welfare of all the students in the Faith Formation Program. This includes the right to inspect property of individuals suspected of possession of alcohol, drugs, weapons and other illegal materials. Teachers have the right to take and not return all such items. If any such items are found, the parents/guardians and Pastor will be notified.

Field Trips

Individual classes may plan field trips. Permission slips must be signed and returned by each child, and parents volunteering to drive must have adequate insurance as specified by Archdiocesan policy.

Photo Release

We occasionally take pictures of our activities. These photos may be featured in the vestibule of the church, in a church bulletin, email, on the church website or Facebook page. We are required by law to have your permission to display any photos of your child. If you do not want your child's photo to be used please notify the Faith Formation Office in writing (letter or email).

Summary of Disaster Plan

The U.S. Geological Survey estimates that there is a 50-50 chance that a great quake will strike California in the next 30 years. The events of September 11, 2001 have created a heightened awareness that we need to be prepared for any catastrophic event. In case of any disaster, the following plans will be put into effect.

When the quake strikes:

- Get under your table or desk.
- Stand in a strong doorway
- If possible, shield your head with a coat.
- Stay away from windows, mirrors or any glass that might shatter

Evacuation:

Students will evacuate the building with their teacher, walking, not running, and remain with their teacher.

Pick-up site after emergency situation:

When teachers determine that it is safe, we will gather in the schoolyard near the Parish Center. Parents will be able to pick their children up at that gate only. In other words, parents should drive into the Stonestown parking lot and park near the Parish Center.

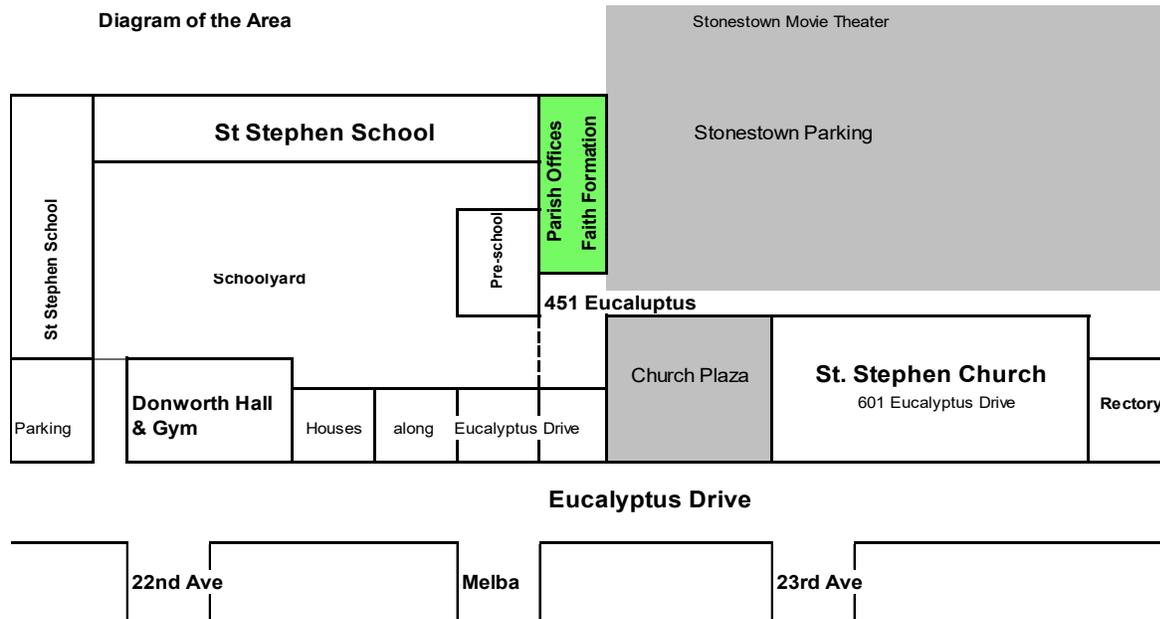
Children/youth will be released only to a person listed on the emergency form. That designated person must be able to show an ID and sign that they have picked up the child/youth.

Should it be necessary to evacuate the premises during a major disaster there is no pre-designated mass-casualty care facility. Notification regarding all of these matters will be via the Emergency Broadcasting System.

Supplies:

We will maintain a supply of water and snacks in the Parish Center. Supplies will also include flashlights, a battery-operated radio and an additional copy of the emergency forms.

Diagram of the Area



Information from the Catechism of the Catholic Church about Faith Formation and the important role parents play:

CCC 2221 “The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute. The right and the duty of parents to educate their children are primordial and inalienable.”

CCC 2222 “Parents must regard their children as children of God and respect them as human persons. Showing themselves obedient to the will of the Father in heaven, they educate their children to fulfill God’s law.”

CCC 2223 “Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues.”

CCC 2224 “The home is the natural environment for initiating a human being into solidarity and communal responsibilities.”

CCC 2225 “Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the responsibility and privilege of *evangelizing their children*. Parents should initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the ‘first heralds’ for their children. A wholesome family life can foster interior dispositions that are genuine preparation for a living faith and remain a support for it throughout one’s life.”

CCC 2226 “Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child’s earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel.”

CCC 2226 “Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God. The parish is the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents.”