



ST ANDREW
CATHOLIC
CHURCH

FAITH FORMATION HANDBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

We are so excited to have your child in our faith formation program. We hope we can all work together to bring your child closer to God through our Catholic faith. We are here because we care deeply about these students and about the love we have found in the Church. We want to be partners with you on this journey.

We hope that the information found in this handbook can help you throughout the year. We want to give you our expectations early so you can communicate any concerns early. We are here for your entire family and hope that St. Andrew can feel like home.

OUR STAFF



Virginia Olvera (Elementary & Spanish) –
volvera@standrewcatholic.org

Virginia and her family have been parishioners at St. Andrew since 2011. She and her husband Juan have been married for 32 years and have two adult children. She has been working in the Elementary program since August 2020 and she has also been our Receptionist since December 2024. She is bilingual in English and Spanish and assists us with translations. She is working on her Certificate of Catechesis from the University of Dayton. She is always available to parents and loves to help them increase their children's faith. During her free time, Virginia likes to watch movies, make jigsaw puzzles with her family, and loves to call her parents and friends in Mexico.

Christen Barrett (Middle School) –
cbarrett@standrewcatholic.org

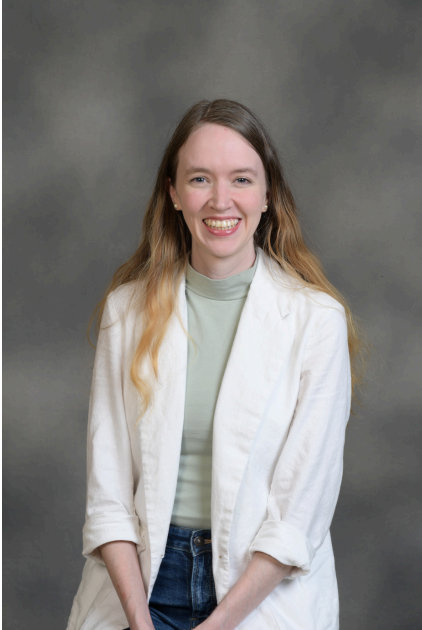


My name is Christen Barrett, and I'm the coordinator for the Middle School Faith Formation program. I became a member of St. Andrew in 2006, and I was hired as the coordinator in March 2007. My husband, Greg and I were married at St. Andrew; we have two sons. I am a Master Catechist within the Archdiocese and I have received my Certificate in Catechesis and Certificate in Youth Ministry from the University of Dayton.

Being Catholic is a huge part of my identity. I have a special devotion to the Virgin Mary. I love sharing our faith with young people, especially middle schoolers. Your child's faith development is very important to me. I'm here to help you and your child grow in faith. We are a team, and I look forward to working with you and your family. Thank you for your trust and support.

OUR STAFF

Loral Leach (Director of Communications and High School Youth Minister) - lleach@standrewcatholic.org



Loral Leach has been a parishioner at St. Andrew since birth. She has received all of her sacraments here including her marriage to her husband in 2017. Loral graduated UGA in 2016, became the interim youth minister in October of 2016, and was officially hired January 2017. She served as Director of Faith Formation from 2023-2025 when she switched over to communications. She received her Certificate in Catechesis from the University of Dayton, has completed her Master Catechist Certification, has almost completed her Certificate in Youth Ministry from the University of Steubenville, and has multiple mental health and sexual abuse trainings/certifications. She had her first daughter in 2021 and she was baptized at St. Andrew as well. Her second daughter was born in January of 2025 and joined the saints in heaven 3 days later due to a complex congenital heart condition and genetic disorder. She joyfully welcomed her third daughter in November. Loral loves coffee, Disney World, St. Therese, Marvel movies, Ignatian Contemplation, and the beach.

AJ Cervantes (Director of Religious Education and Evangelization) - ajcervantes@standrewcatholic.org



Originally from Puerto Rico, I came to Georgia after graduating from Mount Saint Mary's College (now, University), in Emmitsburg Maryland. In Atlanta I attended and graduated from The Art Institute of Atlanta with an AA in Culinary Arts, then worked in restaurant management for several years before perusing a career in sales. Eventually raising to the position of Area Sales Manager for the state of Georgia for Washington Mutual Bank. I joined the staff at St Andrew in 2023 after spending 10 years at Home Depot. Back in 2005 I was asked to be a catechist and discovered I had a passion for sharing the faith. Completing the Certificate of Catechesis Program , levels 1 and 2 from the University of Dayton, I have taught all the ages from children to adults. St Andrew is a special parish and I am blessed and privileged to able to serve.

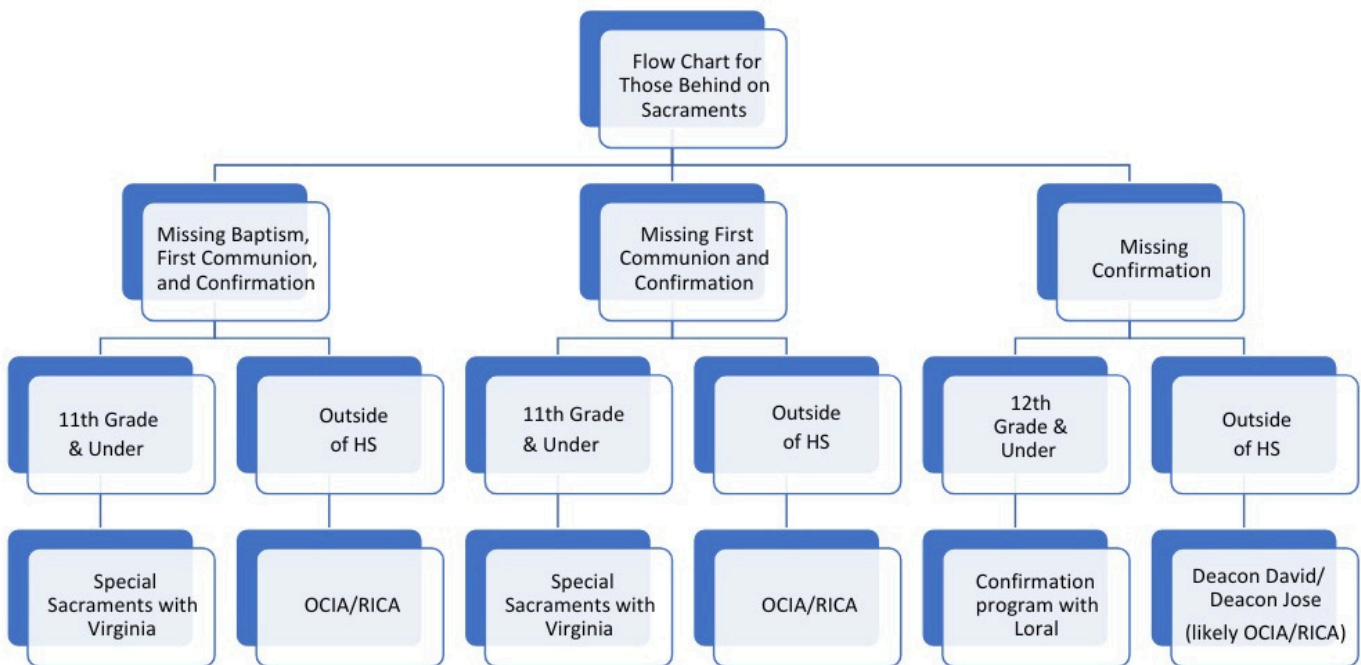
[St. Andrew Faith Formation](#)

SACRAMENTAL PREP

We have created this flow chart for students behind on their sacraments. Please utilize this to ensure your student is in the proper group.

For those who are not behind on their sacraments, sacramental preparation is a 2-year process. (Usually, 1st and 2nd grade for first communion and 9th and 10th grade for Confirmation). Your child receives the sacrament in the spring of their second year. Please contact us if you have questions about your child's class placement.

If your child is in sacramental prep, please be aware of any extra requirements / communications



Grades based on August 23, 2026. Please reach out to the appropriate coordinator if you have any specific questions. If the student is not in high school, they are not allowed to take part (including their second year of preparation) in the high school Confirmation Program without VIRTUS certification

MASS ATTENDANCE

Throughout the years we have seen Mass attendance among our faith formation families be an issue. Due to this, our pastor and the faith formation team have decided to help hold families accountable in their Sunday obligation. Each Sunday, after Mass, your child will have their card signed by a member of the clergy. They will turn in their card at the end of each semester.

We are not doing this to add more to your plate as a family, but to help expose our faith formation children to the source and summit of our Catholic faith. "The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason, the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin" – CCC 2181. We have also included Holy Days of Obligation to assist you in remembering these sometimes tricky dates.

We understand that sometimes things get in the way (illness, transportation, etc.) and you may be unable to attend Mass one week. You are allowed 2 unsigned weekends before you will need to repeat the faith formation year or schedule an appointment with Fr. Juan. If you have extenuating circumstances, please let a member of the staff or clergy know. Keep in mind that these are faith formation allowances and you still may have a canonical obligation to attend Mass as a Catholic.

If you have been away for a while, no matter the reason, we want to offer our sincerest "welcome home." We are glad you are here and are excited to be a part of this journey with you. You are the primary catechist of your children and we are here to support you however we can. We believe that instilling the importance of Mass is doing just that. Please let us know if you have any questions.

St. Andrew Faith Formation | 2026-2027 Calendar

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Parent Formation Meeting Dates

Green- All Grades Meet
 Yellow- Special Date
 Red – No meeting

September 13 English and Spanish together
 October 4 English/ 18 Spanish
 November 1 English/ 15 Spanish

February 7 English/ 28 Spanish
 March 7 English/ 21 Spanish
 April 18 English/ 25 Spanish

CLASS RULES

We ask that students

01 — Treat their catechists and fellow students with respect

This means not talking while someone else is talking, no gossip, no bullying, no cell phones during class, no bad language, etc.

02 — Bring nothing to class unless specifically told.

03 — Respect the Space

no graffiti, rough housing, abusing materials, etc. Clean up after yourself.

04 — Stay in the classroom at all times unless given permission.

05 — Refrain from bringing any inappropriate material

This includes drugs, alcohol, weapons, and clothing with drug, alcohol, pornographic, or weapon references

06 — Refrain from bringing any nut products

There are serious allergies in our preschool program. If your child brings a snack, please pay attention to the ingredients.

07 — Come to class on time

We may allow a small grace period, but being late can be a disruption to the entire class and your student will miss out on important material.

If a student breaks these rules, they may be removed from class. The parents and/or a clergy member will be contacted.

CLASS STRUCTURE

In order to make our program more engaging, your child may participate in games, crafts, etc. as well as prayer and group lessons. We utilize a small group model most weeks in middle school and high school to digest and apply the taught material.

PHOTOS

We know we have some exciting events and we are so thankful for our catechists' creativity. We understand that you may want to take pictures during this time. However, we ask that you only take pictures of your child(ren). We have many students whose parents have not given photo permission and are keeping their children off social media. Please respect their wishes.

PARKING FLOW

If you are picking up or dropping off your child, please park in a parking space. Do not pull to the side. Parents must sign their child in and out in Elementary and Middle School. However, if the parking lot becomes an issue, we will add High School sign in/out as well. If you are taking a taxi, we ask that you pull around the building and use the fire lane.

TOPIC SENSITIVITY / HOW WE CAN HELP YOUR CHILD

Please let us know if any topics may be difficult for your child to talk about/engage with. For example, we've had lessons on God as Father that have been difficult for students whose father is deceased or absent from their life. A mental health topic may be difficult if a student has lost someone to suicide. Please let us know if you think something may come up so we can keep a special eye out for your child. Also, feel free to keep us informed throughout the year as things arise.

Please let us know of any special needs/ IEPs your child may have and how we can best address these needs. For example, if your child has ADD, we may be able to provide/allow a quiet fidget toy or clay. If your child has Autism, we can discuss how much to push/hold back with them in small group discussion.

We want to serve your child the best we can, so please feel free to give us any details you think could help us help them!

CLASS OBJECTIVES

We hope that students “graduate” each year of the program knowing these things. Please partner with us in teaching your children!

Year One First Communion Preparation

- Learn the 7 sacraments and a little about each (ie. holy matrimony is marriage, reconciliation is penance/confession, the Eucharist is communion/Jesus)
- Eucharist is the source and summit of the Catholic faith, all of the sacraments are ordered around it
- Deeper look into Baptism and original sin
 - Adam and Eve
 - We are basically “good” and not “depraved”
 - Made in His image – all of us with equal dignity
 - We have free will
 - We have to form our conscience
- Basic knowledge of the trinity
- Sign of the cross, Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be
- Beginning exposure to “sin” and “virtue” concepts
- Salvation through Jesus
- Exposure to 10 commandments and Beatitudes
- Old Vs New Testament and highlighted stories from each
- Exposure to the idea of faith and works
- Basic knowledge of Pentecost
- Basic knowledge of liturgical seasons – Ordinary Time, Advent, Christmas, Lent, Triduum, Easter

Year Two First Communion Preparation

- Act of Contrition
- Definition of a sin (offense against God, neighbor, and self, a violation of the duty of love) virtue (good habit, ie faith, hope, charity), penance, contrition, absolution
- Familiarity with an examination of conscience
- Difference between a mortal and venial sin (grave matter, full knowledge, full consent)
- Prodigal Son story
- Basic understanding of the order of reconciliation
- Basic understanding of the priesthood/ Holy Orders (in order to understand the priest being in persona Christi for the sacraments). Only God forgives sin, though He uses a priest as His agent
- Basic understanding of the Mass, order of the Mass/parts of the Mass
- Connection of the Eucharist to the Last Supper and Passover
- Precepts of the Catholic Church (attend Mass on Sundays and days of obligation, confess your sins at least once a year, receive the Eucharist at least once a year, observe days of fasting and abstinence, provide for the needs of the church)
- Catholic teaching that the Eucharist is the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. It is a representation of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. A single crumb is not any “less” Jesus
- Reception of Jesus in the Eucharist unites us with Christ and each other, separates us from sin, erases venial sin, and protects us from commission of mortal sin

CLASS OBJECTIVES (CONT.)

Cliff (Grades 3-5 who have received First Communion)

- Exposure to Catholic Social Teaching
- Continued discussion of the sacraments
- Familiarity with rosary, Mary, saints
- Deeper understanding of liturgical seasons
- Exposure to Bible basics

Edge (Grades 6-8)

- Exposure to Catholic Social Teaching
- Familiarity in discussing the faith with peers
- Developing their own style of prayer/ finding prayer they “click” with

Year One Confirmation Preparation

- Overview of the sacraments
- Connection of Confirmation to Baptism
- More deeply discover who the Holy Spirit is

Year Two Confirmation Preparation

- Learn the Gifts of the Holy Spirit
- Fruits of the Holy Spirit
- Pentecost
- Connection of Confirmation to evangelization

Life Teen (Grades 9-12)

- Learn various forms of prayer and what personally works best for them
 - Develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ
- Exposure to Eucharistic Adoration
- Exposure to different saints and stories they can relate to
- Exposure to a more mature examination of Conscience
- Learn how to look up answers to questions about Catholicism and familiarity with Catechism
- Learn how to use and read a Bible
- Exposure to Catholic Social Teaching
- Definitions of Incarnation, Pascal Mystery

RESOURCES FOR YOUTH AND THEIR PARENTS

PLEASE REACH OUT TO LORAL LEACH
(LLEACH@STANDREW.CATHOLIC.ORG)
IF YOU NEED ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



DISCLAIMER:

The Archdiocese of Atlanta does not endorse or promote particular counselors or counseling centers, nor does inclusion on this list imply the suitability of the following professionals. This list is provided solely as a help to parish leadership ministering throughout the Archdiocese

PREGNANCY

Pregnancy Aid Clinic
Crisis/Unplanned
Pregnancy/Post abortion
healing/ abortion pill reversal
(Forest Park, Atlanta, Roswell)
Phone: 404-763-HELP (4357)

ABUSE

DFCS (Reporting child abuse): 1-855-GACHILD
Archdiocesan 24-hour Abuse
Reporting Hotline: 1-888-437-0764

OTHER

Drug Rehabilitation

www.drugrehab.com

Pornography Help

archatl.com/ministries-services/pastoral-care-ministry/pornography-help/

Teen Culture

<https://ltparentlife.com>

Cycle Charting/ GYN

<https://www.rhm gyn.com>

COUNSELING

Catholic Charities Atlanta

Spanish and English
Phone: 404-920-7725
Website: Catholiccharitiesatlanta.org

Holy Family Counseling Center

(Duluth, Roswell, Cumming, Norcross, Woodstock, Flowery Branch, Snellville, Marietta, Atlanta)
Spanish and English
Phone: 678-993-8494
Website: holymfamilycounselingcenter.com

The Summit Counseling Center

Many office locations as well as locations in schools
Phone: 678-893-5300
Website: summitcounseling.org

For The Love of Ryan

5 free sessions to fit your needs (parent, child, young adult, or family) Use code FTLOR when scheduling an appointment at Summit Counseling. Contact Loral Leach (lleachstandrewcatholic.org) or a member of our clergy for additional financial resources

SUICIDE/CRISIS HOTLINES

Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: 988
Crisis Text Line: Text "HOME" to 741741
Online chat service: suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat

SIGNS OF DEPRESSION

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill themselves.
- Looking for a way to kill themselves, such as searching online or buying a gun.
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live.
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain.
- Talking about being a burden to others.
- Increasing their use of alcohol or drugs.
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly.
- Sleeping too little or too much.
- Withdrawing or isolating themselves.
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge.
- Displaying extreme mood swings.



PICK UP PERMISSION

26-27



Child's Name: _____

Classroom #: _____

Please allow _____ Phone # _____

_____ Phone # _____

_____ Phone # _____

To pick up my child from Faith Formation Class if I/we (parents) are unable to pick him/her up.

(Por favor permita que las personas listadas anteriormente puedan recoger a mi hijo/a si yo/nosotros (padres) no podemos venir a recogerlo/a.)

Parent's Name: _____

Parent's Signature: _____ Date: _____



CELL PHONE POLICY

26-27



Purpose: Presence and Community

In our Faith Formation program, we strive to follow the example of Christ by being truly present to one another. To foster an environment of prayer, reflection, and authentic face-to-face communication, we maintain a "Phone-Free Zone" during all sessions.

Our goal is to eliminate distractions so that students can more clearly hear God's word and build meaningful relationships with their peers and catechists.

Policy Guidelines

- **Arrival & Storage:** Upon entering the classroom, all students are required to silence their cell phones (and smartwatches) and place them in the Designated Tech Station (e.g., a numbered hanging pocket organizer or a secure bin).
- **Duration:** Devices must remain in the designated area for the duration of the session, including transitions and breaks, unless otherwise instructed by a catechist for a specific lesson activity.
- **Retrieval:** Students may retrieve their devices only after the closing prayer and dismissal.
- **Responsibility:** While we provide a designated area for phones to keep them safe and out of sight, the parish is not responsible for lost, stolen, or damaged devices. Students are encouraged to leave expensive electronics at home.

Expectations & Consequences

We ask for the cooperation of both students and parents to uphold the sanctity of our learning environment:

1. **First Instance:** If a student is found using a phone during class, the device will be collected by the catechist and returned at the end of the session.
2. **Second Instance:** The device will be turned over to the Program Director, and a parent will be asked to retrieve it.
3. **Emergency Use:** If a student needs to contact a parent urgently, they may do so through the Parish Office or with the direct permission and supervision of a catechist.

A Note to Parents

We appreciate your support in helping your child "unplug" for this short time each week. By encouraging them to follow this policy, you are helping them prioritize their spiritual growth and practice the virtue of temperance in a digital age.



PARENT PARTICIPATION POLICY 26-27



The Vision: Walking Together in Faith

The Church teaches that the home is the "Domestic Church." Our Faith Formation program is designed not to replace the role of the parent, but to support and supplement it. To ensure our children see faith as a lived reality rather than just a classroom subject, we require active participation from the entire family.

By enrolling your child in this program, parents commit to the following three pillars of participation:

1. Parent Formation Sessions

Faith is a lifelong journey for adults as much as for children. To help parents lead their families spiritually, we require attendance at six (6) Parent Sessions held throughout the year.

- **Timing:** These sessions occur concurrently with your child's scheduled Faith Formation time.
- **Purpose:** These meetings are designed for adult fellowship, deeper theological understanding, and practical tips for bringing the Gospel into your home.
- **Requirement:** At least one parent/guardian must attend each of the six sessions. If a conflict arises, please contact the Director of Faith Formation in advance.

2. Parish Stewardship & Volunteering

Our parish is a family of families. To model the servant heart of Christ to our children, each family is asked to volunteer within the parish community during the program year.

- **Options:** Volunteering can include serving as a Catechist, hall monitor, or traffic monitor assisting at liturgical events, or joining a parish ministry (e.g., St. Vincent de Paul, Knights of Columbus, Choir).
- To run our Faith Formation program at its full potential, we've set a goal to recruit 50 volunteers.



PARENT PARTICIPATION POLICY 26-27 (CONT.)



3. The Sunday Obligation: Attending Mass Together

The Eucharist is the "source and summit" of our Catholic life. No classroom lesson can replace the grace received at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

- Expectation: Families are expected to attend Sunday Mass (or the Saturday Vigil) together every week.
- Integration: Our curriculum often refers to the Sunday Gospels; being present at Mass allows your child to connect what they hear in the pews to what they learn in the classroom.

Commitment Statement

"Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where prayer, tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule." — Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2223

I understand that my active participation is essential to my child's spiritual development. I commit to attending the six parent sessions, volunteering my time to the parish, and prioritizing Sunday Mass as a family.



ATTENDANCE POLICY

26-27



The Importance of Consistency

Faith formation is a communal journey. When a student is absent, the entire group misses their unique perspective and presence. To ensure a fruitful year of growth, we have established the following attendance standards.

1. Attendance Requirements

- **The 80% Rule:** Students are expected to attend all scheduled sessions. To successfully complete the formation year, a student must attend at least 16 out of the 20 scheduled classes (80% attendance).
- **Credit for the Year:** Falling below the 16-session threshold may require a meeting with the Director of Faith Formation to determine if the year needs to be repeated or if supplemental summer work is required. This is especially critical for those in Sacramental Preparation years (First Communion or Confirmation).

2. Health & Wellness (Sick Policy)

Out of love for our neighbor, we ask that you do not send your student to class if they are sick (fever, cough, or contagious symptoms).

- **Protecting the Vulnerable:** We have students, catechists, and family members with high-risk health conditions. Staying home when ill is an act of Christian charity.
- **Make-up Work:** Absences due to illness will still count toward the four allowed absences, but make-up material will be provided so the student does not fall behind in their spiritual lessons.



ATTENDANCE POLICY

26-27 (CONT.)



3. Inclement Weather & Cancellations

In the event of inclement weather or a facilities issue (such as a power or water outage), decisions regarding the cancellation of events and meetings should be made by our facilities team, clergy, and relevant staff members or ministry leaders at least two hours prior to the scheduled events. We will operate under the assumption that Masses will proceed until stated otherwise.

- Communication: We will notify families of cancellations via our primary communication methods (Email and/or Text).
- Stay Connected: Please ensure your contact information is up to date in our system and check your messages at least two hours before class begins if weather looks uncertain.

4. Tardy & Early Dismissal Policy

- Arrival: Class begins promptly at 11:15. Arriving late is disruptive to the opening prayer and the flow of the lesson.
- Late Policy: Three "tardies" (arriving more than 10 minutes late) will be recorded as one unexcused absence.
- Early Departure: If a student must leave early for a valid reason, a parent must sign them out. Consistent early departures will be treated similarly to tardiness.

Commitment to the Community

"Let us not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another." — Hebrews 10:25