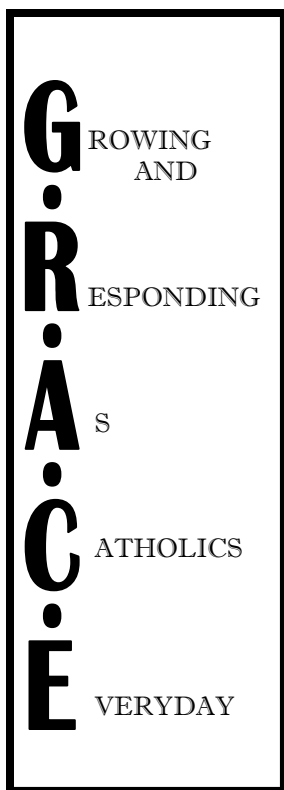


# CATHOLIC FAITH FORMATION AT SS. JOHN AND PAUL PARISH



We call our Christian formation at SS. John and Paul **G.R.A.C.E.**: **G**rowing and **R**esponding **A**s **C**atholics **E**veryday. Because G.R.A.C.E. is structured differently than many are familiar with, please read through this booklet to acquaint yourself with all of its facets. We would be happy to then answer any questions or concerns that still remain.

**Remember, weekly, active participation in the Sunday Eucharist is the cornerstone of any formational success. None of what we say here is complete without that active involvement in the parish's Sunday worship.**

## THREE COMPONENTS

There are three important components to our yearly faith formation:

- 1) **Monthly gatherings** involving the whole community, including parents and children, all young adults and adults without children.
- 2) **Age-specific gatherings** for all levels.
- 3) **Sacrament-focused gatherings** for those preparing for one of the sacraments.

These are all described in this booklet. First we will look at the total picture of formation and then explore more details on each component. Each year we provide a calendar for the year and some answers to frequently asked questions.

## **A. NINE UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE OUR FAITH FORMATION DECISIONS AT SS. JOHN AND PAUL**

- 1. Catholic faith formation is life-long and ongoing.**
- 2. Engaged, and meaningful participation in the Sunday Eucharist is the goal and cornerstone of all Catholic faith formation.**
- 3. Catholic faith formation pays great attention to preparation for and celebration of the Sacraments.**
- 4. Faith formation starts with an adult-centered model but always includes child, teen, and young adult-centered opportunities for learning.**
- 5. Faith formation involves the whole community when possible.**
- 6. Parents of children are the primary formation directors for their children and need to be actively involved in every aspect of their children's faith formation. Parents must become intentional in their responsibility to bring their children up in the Catholic faith.**
- 7. Faith formation is strengthened when intergenerational gatherings can be seen as central to the process.**
- 8. Faith formation is strengthened when catechetical formation is tied to concrete events in the life of the parish community.**
- 9. Faith formation cannot neglect age and situation-specific opportunities to develop more systematic catechesis.**

## **B. THE STRUCTURE OF FAITH FORMATION**

Given these principles we have designed our yearly formation opportunities around a core structure— seven monthly whole community sessions—and additional age appropriate gatherings. Please note that **all** are part of the expected faith formation at the parish. The monthly G.R.A.C.E. sessions form the core. The additional G.R.A.C.E. gatherings help to develop the core more specifically for various age groups and situations.

### **1. MONTHLY SESSIONS**

In the formation structure we call G.R.A.C.E., there are seven monthly sessions which form the core of catechetical faith formation for everyone in the parish. The seven monthly sessions are entire family and whole community-centered. They are mandatory for any family with a child in faith formation. They are strongly encouraged for everyone else.

No child (grade 8 and younger) is dropped off. At least one parent or related adult experiences the evenings with the child. Sessions include young adults of junior high school age and older and adults without children as well. The format for the monthly sessions can vary but always includes the following:

- **A monthly session on a specific evening of the week.** Each family and each individual adult is asked to choose a specific evening of the week and attend that night for their monthly session. Due to space limitations we have to limit some evenings to specific groups or give them first priority. Please see the G.R.A.C.E. calendar or registration form for details.
- **A meal together** to begin the evening. Meals are kept simple and brief, but they are important. They help the transition from home, school or work and offer a chance to meet and interact with some other members of the parish family. There will always be a catechetical activity connected to the meal time. Even the meal time is formational.
- **A catechetical theme from a core catechetical area.** Each

monthly session will focus on one catechetical theme taken from one of seven core areas of our Catholic and Christian faith. Whatever the groupings (families together, children in age-specific groups, adults alone, etc.) the same theme will be looked at, discussed, learned. Each monthly session ties all activities and learning into the theme that has been chosen.

- **A parish event.** Each monthly session will tie the catechetical theme to some parish event. That event can be specifically religious (Easter, Lent, Christ the King Sunday, May Crowning, Pentecost, etc.) or a parish community event (Parish Picnic, hosting the warming shelter for the homeless, a parish anniversary, etc.) or even secular (Thanksgiving, Memorial Day, upcoming elections, etc.). G.R.A.C.E. tries to deepen our Catholic Christian participation in and experience of whatever event is chosen. The events vary year to year.
- **A packet of take-home material with a home activity.** This allows an individual or family to continue to learn about, explore and apply the catechetical theme more deeply to their lives. The families who use the home activity included in the packet will find that the learning from the monthly session is greatly enhanced and better remembered.

## **2. AGE SPECIFIC G.R.A.C.E. GATHERINGS**

The monthly sessions form the core of G.R.A.C.E. but they are **not** its only component. We have as well separate, age specific G.R.A.C.E. gatherings a few times a year. When these involve children and teens, parents are not in attendance, though we will need some adults to act as catechists and facilitators for these sessions.

- **Adults.** There are opportunities during the year for Scripture study, evenings of reflection, adult formation topics of interest and so forth. These are listed in the Sunday bulletin and on the parish website well in advance of the events.
- **Adults in their 20s and 30s.** In addition to the sessions for all adults, the North Macomb vicariate support various activities and opportunities for formation for those young adults who are

past high school, whether in college or not, whether single or married. These are advertised in the Sunday bulletin, on the parish website and on the vicariate website ([www.nmvonline.org](http://www.nmvonline.org)).

- **Teens.** The youth ministry component of the parish invites high school teens to gather on some of the Sundays of the year for fun, sharing, service, and learning. There will be opportunities in the course of the year for retreats and gatherings with other Catholic teens. These opportunities are for all high school youth and all are part of their Catholic faith formation. Teens are also encouraged to be catechist aides and helpers for the junior high monthly G.R.A.C.E. sessions.
- **Junior High.** Seventh and eighth graders have extra gatherings as part of our junior high youth ministry program. They are given a Catholic catechism for young adults, have interviews with the pastor and youth minister, and are given opportunities for learning and service. These are part of the religious formation requirements at the parish, and attendance is taken. These opportunities help to prepare for the sacrament of Confirmation in 9<sup>th</sup> grade.
- **1<sup>st</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grade.** There are four sessions in the fall and five in the winter for elementary age children (see the G.R.A.C.E. calendar for specific dates). These sessions are focused on deepening their understanding of Scripture, prayer, the sacraments, and vocabulary and concepts of our Catholic faith. The sessions are part of their religious formation requirements at the parish. Attendance will be taken.
- **Early Childhood** (late 3s, 4s, and 5 year olds). Three times a month during the school year we have an early childhood program on Sunday during the 9:30 a.m. Mass. This allows parents and older children to attend Mass more fully, while the younger ones have a chance to learn at their own level. This is a separate program with its own registration form and fee. On those Sundays that Early Childhood does not meet, parents are strongly encouraged to bring them to Mass, to help them learn about participation and involvement in the Eucharist.
- **Children's Liturgy of the Word.** On Sundays of the year

(September-May) at the 9:30 and 11:30 a.m. Masses, we have catechists who take children grades 1 to 4 (grades 5 and 6 are also invited to act as helpers for the younger ones) for the first part of Mass and help them explore the Sunday Scripture readings at their own level.

- **Vacation Bible School.** This takes place in the summer each year and is a separate program with its own registration form and fee. Families with children grades 1-5 are strongly encouraged to participate. Grades 6-8 and high schoolers are asked to act as aides/helpers for the week, along with other parish volunteers.

### **3. G.R.A.C.E. SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION**

Sacraments form us as Catholics and provide the framework within which we live our Catholic Christian identities. Each sacrament has its own set of preparation requirements so that the sacrament can be celebrated fully and actively. For those who are seeking one of the sacraments, in addition to the monthly sessions and age-specific sessions, the following preparation occurs.

- **First Eucharist.** From second grade on, when a parent believes their child is ready for full participation in the Eucharist, and if the child has been part of the religious formation program for two years (this includes the current year), they can bring their child forward as a candidate and prepare their child for First Eucharist. First Eucharist preparation is separate from the required monthly G.R.A.C.E. sessions and the extra age-specific G.R.A.C.E. sessions. There are three parent/child evenings and one mini-retreat Saturday, during which a deeper understanding of the Mass and Eucharist takes place. A First Eucharist book is provided for the parents to help their child prepare for the sacrament. An interview with the Coordinator of Faith Formation takes place prior to the celebration of this sacrament.
- **First Reconciliation.** From second grade on, when a parent believes their child is ready for the sacrament of Reconciliation, and if the child has been part of the religious

formation program for two years (this includes the current year), they can bring their child forward as a candidate and prepare their child for First Reconciliation. A letter is sent to all parents of 2<sup>nd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grade whose child has not received the sacrament, offering insights as to when a child might best receive this sacrament. First Reconciliation preparation is separate from the required monthly G.R.A.C.E. sessions and the age-specific G.R.A.C.E. sessions. There are two parent/child evenings and one mini-retreat Saturday to better prepare them for the understanding of the sacrament. A First Reconciliation book is provided for parents to work with their child at home. An interview with the coordinator takes place prior to the celebration of this sacrament.

- **Confirmation.** Confirmation is most often celebrated by teens in the fall of their 9<sup>th</sup> grade year. All 8th graders (and other teens who have not yet celebrated Confirmation) are invited to consider becoming a candidate for the sacrament of Confirmation in the spring of each year. A minimum of two years connection to the formation program as a teen is required for Confirmation. Confirmation preparation includes a parent/candidate session; celebrating candidacy at a parish Mass; willingness to participate in the faith and service life of the parish; interviews with the Confirmation coordinator; candidate only sessions; involvement by the sponsor; a retreat; a rehearsal; and finally the celebration of Confirmation with the bishop. A pre-requisite for entering into Confirmation candidacy is an interview with the pastor or other appropriate staff person that makes sure the candidate has a basic understanding of Catholic faith, prayers, language and symbols. The age-specific sessions in grades 1-6 are designed to cover that basic knowledge and prepare for that interview, which usually takes place during the 7th grade year.
- **Initiation.** Full initiation into the Catholic Church takes place through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and First Eucharist. For those who have not celebrated these sacraments as yet, the following preparation takes place, in addition to involvement in the monthly G.R.A.C.E. sessions.

- ◆ **Adults.** The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (R.C.I.A.) is the process that allows an adult to journey toward full initiation. Since each person's background and previous connection to the Christian faith differs, there is no set time table for adult initiation. Rather, there are distinct stages and rites that are celebrated when the person is ready to take the next step. The first stage is inquiry, where an adult explores their own reasons for becoming a fully initiated Catholic, asks the questions that are on their minds and hearts, especially those that seem to be stumbling blocks to becoming Catholic, and prays with the community. When ready, the parish celebrates the Rite of Welcome/Acceptance with them as they officially become candidates for the sacraments of initiation (called catechumens, if they have never been baptized). During this catechumenal/candidate time, they meet with parish sponsors and catechists, explore the main doctrines and practices of the Catholic faith, and share in the Liturgy of the Word on Sundays. They will be part of the monthly G.R.A.C.E. sessions as well. Prior to Lent in any given year, if they find themselves ready to commit fully to the Catholic faith, we celebrate with them the Rite of Election/Call to Continuing Conversion and work with them during Lent for final preparation for the Easter Vigil celebration of the sacraments of initiation.
- ◆ **Children.** When children come into the parish and have either not been baptized or are past the usual age for one of the sacraments, the parish formation program works with them and their families to prepare them for all the appropriate sacraments. The family and child must be involved in the monthly G.R.A.C.E. sessions and the child must attend the additional age-specific G.R.A.C.E. sessions for two years (including the year that initiation is taking place). During the second year, the family and child meet with similar families/children in a few extra monthly sessions to prepare them for the celebration of the sacraments.
- ◆ **Infants.** Parents with infant children are encouraged to contact the parish, even during the pregnancy, to begin

preparation for the sacrament of Baptism. A family has to have at least three months involvement in the parish (or a previous parish, if moving into the parish). An initial interview takes place with the pastoral associate or other appropriate staff person. There are two baptism-focused gatherings with all the parents and godparents. During the pregnancy the parents are invited to have a blessing at one of the Masses. Before the date of baptism, we then anoint the child with the oil of catechumens, as all prepare for the baptism. In addition, baptismal parents are strongly encouraged to attend the monthly G.R.A.C.E. sessions.

- **Marriage.** Couples planning marriage participate in an initial interview with the pastor or other appropriate staff person. They attend several discussion sessions that explore all the areas any engaged couple should be looking at, as they prepare for marriage. In addition, couples are to participate in one of the area pre-marriage seminars, led by married couples, and are encouraged to be part of at least a couple of the G.R.A.C.E. sessions so that they can experience other adult couples sharing faith. At least one of the marriage partners needs to be registered in the parish or have a clear family connection to the parish at least six months and preferably one year prior to the marriage.

## **HOW TO CHOOSE A MONTHLY G.R.A.C.E. SESSION**

The seven monthly G.R.A.C.E. sessions have four options as to which day one signs up for: Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Friday. A family or individual is asked to pick one day for the whole year and stay with that day so that we can plan for the preparation of food, materials, classroom space and catechists. However, if situations arise in a given month, a family is able to switch for that month to another night. Each session lasts for 2 ½ hours. All sessions begin at 6 p.m. and end at 8:30 p.m. The entire family attends on the same evening.

Those with junior high age children are asked to choose between Sunday and Friday evenings. If they have younger brothers and sisters, these would attend the same evening as well. We try to get a fairly even split between these two days for those families, if at all possible. High school students can act as catechist aides for the junior high sessions and do not need a parent to attend to do so, although it is a great way for the entire family to share in a catechetical formation topic. All other children must have a parent or other relative with them in order to attend. If parents have a 4 or 5 year old (no younger) registered in and attending the Sunday Early Childhood program and want them to be at the monthly G.R.A.C.E., then Wednesday is the only option that has a grouping for this age. All other families are asked to choose a first and second option from among Tuesday, Wednesday or Friday.

With the above in mind, the evenings will look like this:

**Sunday:** Significant number of families with junior high age children and their younger siblings; high school students helping; any adult.

**Tuesday:** Families with children grades 1-6; any adult.

**Wednesday:** Families with children grades 1-6; a few families who also have a 4 or 5 year old; any adult.

**Friday:** Significant number of families with junior high age children and their younger siblings; high school students helping; any adult; other families with children grades 1-6.

## **AGE APPROPRIATE SESSIONS**

### **◆ Grades 1-6: Choosing a Monday or Tuesday**

The eight extra catechetical times for grades 1-6 (four in the fall, five in the winter) take place on Mondays or Tuesdays. Parents have an option to choose the Monday 4:45 - 6:00 PM, Tuesday 4:45—6:00 PM, or Tuesday 6:30 - 7:45 PM time.

### **◆ Grades 7-8:**

### **◆ Grades 9-12:**

Extra catechetical events for junior and senior high take place throughout the year. Families are informed of these as far in advance as possible (we cannot finalize the parish calendar until we know some of the key school dates).

## **CONCLUSION**

We encourage all families and parish members to register early in order to ensure their first choice of day for the monthly sessions. The calendar and some frequently asked questions are on a separate sheet of paper. Please review this material in preparation for registering for the religious formation program.

The diagram on the next page gives a visual sense of the whole G.R.A.C.E. formation structure. If you have questions or would like to talk to a staff person, please contact any of us. We also invite you to go to the parish website and review all the material related to G.R.A.C.E. Thank you.

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