

Children's and Youth Ministry, Nurturing Our Catholic Faith

The foundation for lifelong spiritual growth

BY MELISSA STREIT

The faith formation programs for children and youth at The Basilica of Saint Mary encompass a broad approach encouraging our growing parishioners to continually develop, nurture, and live out their Catholic faith. This hopefully begins lifelong processes of strengthening and deepening their faith and relationship with God through Jesus Christ.



“Our goal is to nurture each student’s faith, morals, family, and friendship,” explains Doris Ortiz, The Basilica’s Coordinator of Learning for Children and Youth. “We do this in a safe and caring environment while supporting parents and guardians as the first and primary educators of their child’s Catholic faith. Our textbooks and activity books are approved

by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to be in conformity with the Catechism of the Catholic Church.”

The preschool and elementary curriculum, for children age three through fifth grade, prepares students to celebrate the Catholic sacraments. Classes are on Sundays from 9:15-11:00 a.m. The preschool program incorporates free play, music instruction, and RCL/Benziger curriculum Stories of God’s Love.

Preschool volunteer catechist Viveca Pinto is passionate about combining her graduate degrees in education with her Catholic faith. “A lot of what we do in our room involves practicing our gross and fine motor skills,” shares Viveca. “Music and art are essential parts of our curriculum. Our class will always have an art or craft component to each lesson. Usually our lessons are tied to a passage from the Bible or learning about the church, altar, and how much God loves us. We start by doing a picture walk, and our observant preschoolers will often have a lot to say, tying what they see and learn to their daily life experiences.”

Children’s Ministry also works closely with our Music Ministry team to integrate the music the students hear in church. “Music class is fun and interactive. The children learn songs with ASL signs or with actions which makes for an engaging experience,” Viveca explains. “The children learn music they hear in church and this helps make connections to our faith and what they witness in their daily lives. The children learn about the liturgical calendar through song and will add the appropriate colored altar cloth based on the time of the year.”

Elementary aged children (kindergarten through fifth grade) use the Finding God curriculum, which seeks to form discipleship in children through Ignatian spirituality, weekly studies of sacred artwork, scripture, Catholic social teaching, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Students receive their own workbook and parents also have access to online resources that support the curriculum including prayers, videos, and other helpful tools at home.

“The parents of our faith formation students chose the curriculums,” Doris

says. “They were invited to a session to review several curriculums from different publishers and agreed upon the one that we use today. Our curriculum has been chosen to seek something that keeps their interest, challenges them, and speaks to their maturity level. The materials we use catechize and inspire our children and youth. In this age of exceptional digital and print media, our curriculums offer engaging resources that tell the story of Jesus Christ and challenge them to live an authentic faith.”

Another treasured tradition, music, is

an important part of our program. In addition to the weekly music lessons on Sundays, students participate together in a special Christmas Musical each December.

Our youth programming for students in sixth through twelfth grades is on Sunday from 3:30–5:15 p.m. The focus is on growing in faith with one another and the church, building friendships and relationships with others in Christ through spiritual growth, service, and social activities.

Our junior high curriculum, Finding God, is designed for young people at this unique time of growth in their lives and reaches the whole person through multiple points of engagement, accompanying young people as their place in the story of the Catholic faith is revealed through art, music, authentic witness, media, prayer, substantial content, and service to others.

After confirmation, our high school program focuses on the youth community and includes ways in which students can grow and learn in their own Catholic faith, enjoy each other’s company, and enhance their understanding of what it means to be a member of the Catholic community.

Vital to faith formation programming at all these ages are our volunteer catechists. “Faith Formation volunteers genuinely love children and desire to help them know, love, and serve Jesus Christ,” Doris gushes. “They also have a desire to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ and to share that relationship with children in our parish. Catechists typically are required to attend training workshops, commit to the church’s liturgical and sacramental life, obey the church’s moral teachings, and be present for every session. Our parish’s catechists are required to participate in VIRTUS, a safe environment program training, before they begin their ministry.” ✚



Youth Ministry Catechists Team 2024-2025
 Back: Kerri Ruch, Lili Sojos-Ortiz, Doris Ortiz, Gretchen Amigon, Allison Eykholt, Will Moy.
 Front: Katie Wethli, Tom Latimer, Elise Bender

Pondering if and how The Basilica’s faith formation programs can benefit your family? Doris offers these considerations:

Formal faith formation enhances and complements what families do at home by providing a structured curriculum, community support, and deeper theological understanding to reinforce the foundational faith practices already established within the family unit. This allows parents to further develop their children’s faith through guided learning experiences and shared participation in religious activities with other families within the community.

Attending faith formation classes allows children to connect with peers who share similar beliefs, fostering a sense of belonging and a shared faith journey.

Formal faith formation often includes dedicated programs to prepare children for sacraments like First Eucharist and Confirmation, deepening their understanding of the rituals and their significance.

Formal faith formation can tackle more complex theological questions or ethical dilemmas that may arise in a child’s life, providing a safe space for discussion and reflection.

Faith formation complements home practices, including bible study at home, family prayer time, and service projects.

For additional information about The Basilica’s faith formation programs, please contact:

Doris Ortiz (dortiz@mary.org)
 Coordinator of Learning
 for Children and Youth
 – or –

John Auger (jauger@mary.org)
 Administrative Assistant