

SAINT MARY MAGDALENE CATHOLIC CHURCH



"Come to me all you who labor and are burdened"
Matthew 11:28

Parish Faith Formation Resource Guide 2023-2024

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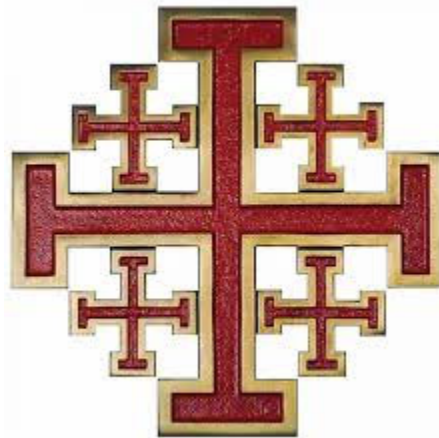
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Our staff is here to serve and support all members of St. Mary Magdalene toward lifelong faith formation. We strive to empower and enable each other to respond to Jesus' great commission to "Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28:19)

Please contact us via phone or email, keeping in mind that our office hours are variable throughout the year.

This resource guide is intended to be a collaboration tool regarding the policies and programs offered by St. Mary Magdalene Faith Formation.



WELCOME

Thank you for participating in the ongoing process of cultivating faith through evangelization and catechesis. Inspired by the stirrings of the Holy Spirit, guided by Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, our Church leaders have given us numerous exhortations, guidelines and directories to nurture us along this journey.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a domestic church. It is a community of faith, hope and charity; it assumes singular importance in the Church as is evident in the New Testament”. (#2204)

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae*, Pope St. John Paul II wrote that catechesis “has the twofold objective of maturing the initial faith and of educating the true disciple of Christ by means of a deeper and more systematic knowledge of the person and the message of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (#19) He went on to say that catechesis is intended to develop, with God’s help, initial faith, to nourish the faithful, young and old, giving growth to the seed of faith sown by the Holy Spirit at Baptism (see #20).

The goal of Faith Formation at St. Mary Magdalene is to follow the spirit and wisdom of the Church in collaboration with our United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), The Archdiocese of Atlanta and our pastor. To accomplish this we, offer a variety of formation models and opportunities, striving to meet the needs of parishioners at every age and stage of formation.

The most vital component of being formed in faith is actively participating in our liturgical celebrations (Mass) on Sundays and Holy Days. “The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; it is also the source from which all its power flows.” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy #10) Our faith journey is incomplete without our full, active, conscious participation in the Eucharist.

Formation Materials:

As appropriate, we will utilize formation materials found to be in conformity with the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and/or containing an Imprimatur and Nihil Obstat. The Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur are **declarations by the Church that a book or pamphlet is free of doctrinal or moral error.**

Formation Models:

Please refer to our Faith Formation Registration Packet for specific details on days and times of gatherings for families, children and youth. Please refer to our parish bulletin for specific details on adult formation. Our website, www.smmcatholic.org is also a great source of additional/seasonal information.

Families Forming Disciples (K-12) – A Family-focused, thematic/activity approach to faith formation.

Utilizing the Archdiocese of Atlanta session materials, groups of families meet with catechists twice per month (Once in-person & once virtually). Together, families encourage each other to grow in knowledge of faith, deepen their relationship with God and each other through Jesus and be witnesses of their sacred and holy Domestic Churches. This model is 10% catechist led and 90% family led. All are welcome!

Discover Program Sessions (K-5th) – A catechist led/family supported approach to faith formation. Utilizing the St. Mary's Press, age-appropriate curriculum, young disciples meet in-person by grade level with catechists (See calendar for dates). Within the small communities of faith, peer groups will grow in knowledge of what our Church believes enabling them to love and serve our Lord and each other. Our partnership with families consists of providing support materials to enable parents/guardians to reinforce faith concepts and empower them to also see their Domestic Church as holy and sacred. This model is 50% catechist led and 50% family led. All are welcome!

Youth Ministry – Beginning with grade 6, catechists, core team members and parents/guardians accompany youth, encounter Christ and cultivate faith. Following the USCCB Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry, *Renewing the Vision*, goals and components of comprehensive ministry with adolescents are met through a series of gatherings, events, retreats and charitable works. Together, we grow in our relationship with God through Jesus and the Church, deepen our friendships with each other and solidify our commitment to bring the light of Christ into the world through word and deed. The curriculum materials vary from year to year. All are welcome!

Home Study – Parents, who are the first witnesses of the faith to their children through their examples of love, have the first responsibility to support life-long formation. Parents who choose the option to provide catechesis in the home can expect St. Mary Magdalene Faith Formation staff to offer assistance in several areas. We will accompany parents in selecting age-appropriate instructional materials, provide a syllabus that aligns with the formation at the parish, and outline expectations for community involvement.

Adult Formation – The Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, says, “In the wonder of God’s gracious plan, stretch new opportunities to proclaim the Good News of Jesus to all the world. To do their part, adult Catholics must be mature in faith and well equipped to share the Gospel, promoting it in every family circle, in every church gathering, in every place of work, and in every public forum. They must be women and men of prayer whose faith is alive and vital, grounded in a deep commitment to the person and message of Jesus.” (#1-2) Wow! How do we do this? One size does not fit all! Adult formation opportunities can include small communities of faith in bible studies, book clubs, support groups, study clubs, adult sacrament formation, etc. Each year we evaluate the needs of our adult community along with regional and national initiatives then structure programming framework to nurture growth towards mature faith. All are welcome!

Preparation for the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation

The Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, are celebrated with great joy by our parish community. In general, preparing for the reception of the sacraments of initiation is a “stand alone” process. It involves preparing to receive the graces of the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation for the *first* time, and for a lifetime of sacramental habits in the Eucharist. All are welcome! The following are some fundamental guidelines in accordance with Canon Law and the Archdiocese of Atlanta:

BAPTISM:

While the norm is that parents baptize infants within the first few weeks after birth, baptism can take place in the following manner up through age six. At the age of seven through seventeen, the sacrament of Baptism is received per the guidelines of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults adapted for children (See Christian Initiation Section).

The Catholic Rite of Baptism’s final blessing states, “bless the father of this child, so that, together with his wife, they may, by word and example prove to be the first witnesses of the faith of their child, in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The Archdiocese of Atlanta guideline says that “Prior to baptism of their infant children, parents are required by the Church to attend a pre-Baptism preparation course so that they understand the responsibilities they are about to undertake with respect to educating their children in the faith.” (pg. 13)

St. Mary Magdalene offers pre-baptism formation for parents and godparents throughout the year. Details can be found on our website and/or parish bulletin.

FIRST RECONCILIATION & PENANCE AND FIRST HOLY COMMUNION:

The norm for preparation for these sacraments is the age of reason (Age 7) or beyond. One year of formation is expected prior to the “stand alone” preparation process.

St. Mary Magdalene collaborates with parents and catechist for the preparation process. Details are outlined during our yearly Sacrament Orientation Session. The basic format is that parents will be provided with preparation materials to journey through the process in their Domestic Church and then gather with other families and catechists two or three times for “mini-retreat” sessions throughout the catechetical year.

The Pastor, in consultation with the parents, makes the decision about the readiness of the child for receiving these sacraments.

CONFIRMATION:

In the Archdiocese of Atlanta, the norm for being sealed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of Confirmation occurs in the 10th grade or beyond (through 12th grade). The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, “Reception of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace and recipients of the Sacrament ‘are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed,’” (#1285, 1303, 1830) The Archdiocese guideline states, “The “free-standing” parish-conducted Confirmation *formation* program must be distinguished from the ordinarily required two year prerequisite *foundational* religious education program.” (page 16)

At St. Mary Magdalene, the two-year foundational formation pre-requisite is defined as the 9th grade year and at least one year in the middle grades (6, 7, 8). The candidate must be a Baptized Catholic having also received the sacraments of Holy Communion and Reconciliation. During the 10th grade year, in addition to participation in ongoing formation, the candidate is required to participate regularly in Sunday Liturgies, our yearly Confirmation Immersion Sessions and a retreat experience. Details are explained during our yearly Confirmation Orientation Session.

The candidate has the right to make the decision about readiness to receive this Sacrament. Adult Confirmation preparation is available for candidates seeking to be confirmed after graduation from High School.

THE CHRISTIAN INITIATION SEQUENCE:

Non-Catholic or Non-Christian individuals seeking to receive the Sacraments of Initiation are welcome and proceed according to the Rite of the “restored order” sequence. The journey of faith for individuals who are unbaptized, validly baptized but uncatechized, or children over the age of seven involves four periods and three rites of preparation.

This process known as the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) or Order of Christian Initiation (OCI) happens when an individual comes to some knowledge of Jesus Christ, considers his or her relationship with Him and is attracted in some way to the Catholic Tradition of Christianity. The initiation team accompanies the catechumens and candidates and their families through foundational and specific preparation steps, periods, and rites over time culminating in being received into the Church (Usually during the Easter Vigil or Easter Season).

The first step in this process is to meet with a member of the Faith Formation/RCIA Leadership Team, pastor or deacon. All are welcome!

SPECIAL CONSIDERATION FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

“The Church continues to affirm the dignity of every human being, and to grow in knowledge and understanding of the gifts and needs of her members who live with disabilities. All members of the Body of Christ are uniquely called by God by virtue of their Baptism. In light of this call, the Church seeks to support all in their growth in holiness, and to encourage all in their vocations. Participating in, and being nourished by, the grace of the sacraments is essential to this growth in holiness.” (Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities, USCCB 2017).

St. Mary Magdalene utilizes the materials and general principles provided by the USCCB and the Archdiocese of Atlanta to seek to meet the needs of individuals living with a disability to participate fully in the life of the parish. All are welcome!

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

In 2002, the USCCB first published *Promise to Protect, Pledge to Heal*, the Charter for the Protection of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults. With subsequent revisions (most recently in 2018) the charter affirms the deep commitment of the Church of the US to sustain and strengthen efforts to maintain a safe environment for all, especially children, youth and vulnerable adults.

St. Mary Magdalene is committed to comply with these norms and follow the comprehensive procedures established by the charter. Under the guidance of the office of Safe Environment in the Archdiocese of Atlanta, whose mission “is to insure that children, young people, and vulnerable individuals who worship, study, or participate in activities sponsored therein can do so in the safest and most secure setting possible”

(<https://archatl.com/ministries-services/safe-environment/>) we participate in a number of initiatives throughout the year:

- *All volunteers and staff over the age of 18 are required to complete a comprehensive safe environment training (VIRTUS) with ongoing follow-up and continuing education components.

- *All volunteers and staff are required to submit to criminal background checks every five years.

- *In collaboration with parents and through the *Empowering God’s Children Program*, yearly training/materials are provided for families and young people. This training is “designed to help parents have frank and effective conversations with their children about the dangers of child sexual abuse and to help parents educate their children about the warning signs of abuse, and to help parents to better evaluate the safety of those who interact with their children”. (website noted above)

- *All staff and volunteers are mandated reporters of any suspected abuse.

A safe environment must also include **GENERAL SAFETY PROCEDURES**. Each year we evaluate and update safety procedures. Following are some of (but not all) current practices:

- *Buildings where activities are being held with children/youth are locked at all times. Entrance to facilities is restricted to participants and safe-environment compliant adults only.

- *Most areas of our buildings and campus is under 24 hour video surveillance.

- *Fire, tornado, and active shooter drills are held annually.

- *Ratios of adult-to-youth are adhered to – 2 adults per 10 children or youth.

- *Arrival & Dismissal procedures are supervised by staff and/or leadership at all times. Only custodial parents/guardians are permitted to drop off or pick up a child or teen without prior written notice of a change/carpool situation.

- *High Schoolers with appropriate licenses are permitted to drive themselves to and from events at the parish. Generally, they are not permitted to drive to off campus events/activities.

- *At the discretion of the parish staff, and in cooperation with catechists and parents, incident reports are created and appropriately filed for any/all injuries/incidents/illness.**

MISCELLANEOUS

All parish staff and volunteers function under the Archdiocese of Atlanta Safe Environment Standards of Conduct (Revised June 2021). We would be remiss if we did not ask the same of our families/participants. The following is intended to frame the conduct of all in accordance with the Scripture and Tradition of the Catholic Church:

1. Thou shall not be late arriving or picking up children or youth!
2. Thou shall not miss more than 80% of our sessions (If at all possible)!
3. Thou shall not miss the Sunday Mass!
4. Thou shall not dress inappropriately when in attendance at parish events/activities!
5. Thou shall not disrespect other participants at any time!
6. Thou shall not exhibit disruptive behavior during sessions/events/activities!
7. Thou shall not disrespect catechists, volunteers, or staff at any time!
8. Thou shall not abuse the use of cell phones during parish events/activities. This includes no photos/videos/voice recordings of any person or activity or posting *anything* on social media without appropriate written permissions!
9. Thou shall not disrespect St. Mary Magdalene property, facilities, or furnishings!
10. Thou shall not use inappropriate language or gestures!
11. Thou shall not disregard any of the safe environment procedures/policies/practices!
12. Thou shall not exhibit unacceptable behavior during any safety training sessions (fire, tornado, active shooter drills)!
13. Thou shall not attend sessions/events/activities if feeling sick or if fever within the last 24 hours!
14. Thou shall not attend sessions if weather emergency exists and/or if Coweta County School district has cancelled public school!
15. Thou shall not attend any offsite event/activity without completing appropriate permission/release forms!

Open and honest communication is key to successful discipleship development. Violations of our commandments will be addressed promptly with positive, appropriate review of expectations along with reminders of opportunities to receive the graces of the sacrament of reconciliation!

ESPECIALLY FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Some parents might be wondering... what happened to weekly sessions in the parish, that is what I did growing up...is once or twice a month enough? Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Church has been moving toward a model where evangelizing catechesis is inclusive of the *entire family* – growing together in faith. The new *Directory for Catechesis*, published in 2020, quotes Pope Francis, “Believing parents, with their daily example of life, have the most effective capacity to transmit the beauty of the Christian faith to their children”. (#124) The greatest challenge is for couples to overcome the mentality of delegation; that growing in faith should be done by “specialists” in religious education. (see#124)

So, **YES**, once or twice a month is enough **IF**:

**Your family is utilizing the resources the parish provides to intentionally engage in a life of discipleship.*

**Your family is attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days.*

**Parents are committed to be ministers of God’s Love in Domestic Church Life.*

The Examen prayer process below is an excellent way for parents to evaluate success (or lack thereof) on a daily basis. God does not expect perfection, He only asks for an effort toward Holy Households of Faith.

Prayerfully Reviewing Your Day

The Daily Examen

Part of the rich tradition of the Catholic Church is recognizing the need to reflect on the day’s activities—to remember God’s invitation and our response or lack of response. Saint Ignatius of Loyola developed a simple method by which you can review each day in a way that will help you grow in self-understanding and free you to follow God’s will. This practice is often called the Daily Examen. Many people choose to practice this prayerful review of their day before going to bed at night by following the five steps below.

Stillness: Recalling God's Presence

Relax in God's presence in your favorite prayer place and posture. Be aware of how God shows his love for you in all his gifts to you. Be thankful as you think of God the Father's love, the love of his Son Jesus, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Ask the Holy Spirit to come into your heart and to help you to look honestly at your actions this day and how you have responded in different situations. With the Spirit's inspiration you can recognize what draws you close to God as well as what pulls you away from God.

Gratitude: Expressing Thankfulness

Review your day and give thanks to God for his gifts. Try not to choose what to be thankful for but rather to see what springs to mind as you reflect. Think of the concrete details of your day—the aroma of coffee brewing, a smile from a co-worker, or a beautiful rainbow. Recall the gifts that God has given you that you can share with others—your ability to help in a crisis, your sense of humor, or your patience with children. Pause and express your gratitude to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Reflection: Looking Back on Your Day

Again, review the events of the day and notice how you acted in the many situations in which you found yourself. Recall your feelings and motives to see whether you considered all of the possibilities and freely followed God's will. Ask yourself when you were conscious of God's presence. Think about opportunities you had to grow in faith, hope, and charity. When we think about why we did or did not take advantage of these opportunities, we can become aware of how we might change our actions in the future. Be grateful for the occasions when you freely chose a course to help others. Perhaps you let a shopper with a small order go ahead of you in line or did not join in a conversation critical of a co-worker. These are examples of responding freely as God wants us to. When we reflect on the times we did or did not act with God's grace, we can be more sensitive to developing habits of positive responses.

Sorrow: Asking for Forgiveness

After you have asked for the Holy Spirit's guidance in recalling and reflecting on the actions of your day, spend time talking with God or Jesus. Express sorrow for the times you failed to follow his direction and ask him to be with you the next time you encounter a similar situation. Give thanks to God for the grace that enabled you to follow his will freely. Feel the sorrow and gratitude in your heart as you converse with God.

Hopefulness: Resolving to Grow

Ask God to help you as you look forward to a new day tomorrow. Resolve to cooperate and trust in the loving guidance of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Conclude the day's prayerful review with the Lord's Prayer.

By prayerfully reviewing your day, you will experience the difference it can make in the way you live. If you make a habit of practicing the Daily Examen, you will grow closer to God in your thoughts and deeds and will be free to choose to follow him.

(<https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/prayer/personal-prayer-life/different-ways-to-pray/prayerfully-reviewing-your-day-daily-examen/>)

“On the Judgment” by Kathleen Chesto

I have a vision of all the parents gathered before God on judgement day.

The Lord will say to us:

“I was hungry, and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink, naked and you clothed me, homeless and you sheltered me, imprisoned and you visited me...”

And we will interrupt, protesting, “Not I Lord. When did I see you hungry and feed you?”

And the Lord will say:

“How could you ask, you of the three- and-a-half million peanut butter and jelly sandwiches!”

“But thirsty, Lord?”

“I was in the Kool-aid line that came in with the summer heat and the flies and left fingerprints on your walls and mud on your floors, and you gave me a drink.”

“But naked, Lord, homeless?”

“I was born to you naked and homeless, and you sheltered me, first in wombs and then in arms. You clothed me with your love and spent the next twenty years keeping me in jeans.”

“But imprisoned, Lord? I know I did not see you in prison. I’ve never even been in a prison.”

“Oh, yes. For I was imprisoned in my littleness behind the bars of a crib, and I cried out in the night, and you came. I was imprisoned inside a twelve-year-old body that was exploding with so many new emotions, I didn’t know who I was anymore, and you loved me into being myself. And I was imprisoned behind my teenage anger, my rebellion, and my phone, and you waited outside my locked door for me to let you in.

Now, Beloved, enter into the joy which has been prepared for you for all eternity.”

(Family Centered Intergenerational Religious Education (Sheed & Ward, 1980, pp. 29-30)