

2025-26

Faith Formation Handbook

Program Details



For Grade Levels K –12th

St. Michael Catholic Church

1125 St. Michaels Road

Mt. Airy, MD 21771

410-489-7667

Dear Parents,

It is a joy for me to welcome you to our Faith Formation program at Saint Michael Parish! Together, we are partners in educating your child in the Catholic faith, especially as they prepare for the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation.

Thank you for the trust and confidence you place in us.

Jesus said "let the children come to me". In God's love, you have brought your child to life, and have accepted our invitation to assist you in the faith formation of your child. Our programs can communicate information and provide experiences for celebrating the sacraments, but the practice and example of your living out the faith is of equal importance.

Children in our middle school program, called "*Edge*", and teenagers in our high school program, "*Life Teen*", need to see a connection between what they learn on our campus and what they experience at home. Be assured that we are available to assist you in whatever way we can. We only ask in return for your active participation in the formation process by living your faith daily by good example, and by joining the parish community each Sunday for the celebration of Mass and the other sacraments. This is absolutely essential!

I also want to take this occasion to thank all of those who serve in our catechetical ministries. They are fellow parishioners who give their time and talent to assist you in the religious education of your child. I appreciate their generosity and love for teaching the faith.

Finally, please read the information contained in this booklet as well as paying attention to the dates on the calendar. If you have any questions, please contact the office.

In Christ,

Rev. Paul C Sparklin

Pastor



FAITH FORMATION STAFF

Sr. Ji Choi, CBS	Associate of Evangelization and Faith Formation	240-437-3672 jchoi@smpschurch.org
OPEN POSITION	Coordinator of Youth and Young Adult Ministry (Middle and High School Level)	
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Because our ultimate goal is heaven – for ourselves and for all those we love – we evangelize! St. Michael Faith Formation program is geared towards helping parents pass on the faith to their families and to ensure that their children have the tools necessary to freely choose salvation.

Guided by these goals:

- 1. Our parish Faith Formation program is offered at times that support families' attendance at Mass together.**
- 2. St. Michael will ensure open communication throughout the year to ensure parents are aware of the materials being presented /discussed during the sessions.**
- 3. Additional enrichment resources will be provided for families that reinforce the programs their child(ren) are participating in.**

KINDERGARTEN- FIFTH GRADE

FAITH FORMATION IS MOVING TO A MORE FAMILY BASED PROGRAM

The Archdiocese of Baltimore is instructing parishes to make a significant change to the Faith Formation program to become centered on Family Faith Formation.

This year (2025-2026) TWO Faith Formation Options will be offered.

****Please note-** During the following Sacramental Year (2026-2027) ONLY the new PATHWAYS FAMILY FAITH FORMATION program will be offered. We will no longer offer the drop-off classroom Pflaum Gospel Weeklies program.

Option 1- The drop-off/classroom-based program (that you have been used to!)

Kindergarten and 1st Grade will continue to be taught using the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program. 2nd through 5th grade will be taught using the Pflaum Gospel Weeklies Program. Family Life will also be a part of the curriculum.

Option 2- Family Faith Formation:



Pathways is an integrated and family centered formation suite designed to facilitate a personal encounter with the Trinity and sustain a lifelong development of faith.

Pathways:

- is hands-on, experiential, and engages the entire family
- empowers and equips parents to teach, share faith, and lead prayer
- embeds faith formation into the daily routine of home life
- invites parents to grow in their own faith
- is accessible to families at different places in their faith journeys

Pathways is designed to help our parish transform the way we form and accompany others. This intentional process more closely aligns with the example Jesus left us in the Gospel. Jesus met people in their concrete circumstances and gradually led them into the fullness of faith. This process is intended to lovingly support and form parents to confidently take up their rightful place as the primary educators of their children, through at-home and at-church experiences. The goal is to produce faith that remains 5 and 10 years after children leave the home, ultimately continuing as a lifelong pursuit.

I invite you to imagine for a moment what this could look like. Imagine feeling the support of a community who shares similar values. Imagine children having meaningful and positive experiences at-church with other children. Imagine parents participating in intentional conversations of faith with their children that have the capacity to transform their life at home. Imagine beautiful, accessible, and quality tools that help lead families in these conversations step by step. Imagine hearing the stories of others who share similar joys and struggles, sitting side by side at tables. Imagine feeling empowered through experiences that build the confidence needed to live out faith in daily life. Imagine encountering Jesus and being renewed in faith, hope, and love. Imagine faith becoming not just one more thing to do, but instead the roadmap for the journey of life.

We are blessed to have the opportunity to partner with this innovative ministry as we begin to make a new way forward for families with the Pathways Formation Suite. Imagine footsteps, returning home.

Below you will find a more in-depth explanation as it relates to each grade level Kindergarten through Fifth Grade:

OPTION 1

Catechesis of the Good Shepard, Pflaum Gospel Weeklies, Family Life

These classes will be offered on:

- **Sunday mornings from 9-10:15a starting September 21, 2025 through March 29, 2026**
 - *Please see the corresponding calendar for more specifics*

OR

- **Thursday evenings from 6-7:15p starting September 18, 2025 through March 26, 2026**
 - *Please see the corresponding calendar for more specifics*

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Kindergarten and First Grade

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) program is offered to our Kindergarten and First Grade students and is based in liturgy and framed around Maria Montessori's principals of education. The child receives and enjoys the most essential elements of our faith—the announcement of God's love especially experienced through Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who died and is risen. Materials on the life of Jesus Christ and his teachings help to make the mystery of God concrete for the child. Jesus announces that he is the Good Shepherd who calls each one by name. The sheep listen to the voice of the Shepherd and follow him.

(CGS) provides a sacred space for Christian faith formation of children. It is like a mini retreat center for children, providing a place where they can form a personal relationship with Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Once the children are presented with the materials, they are encouraged to work with these materials that represent essential proclamations of the Christian message. The atrium is a special place where children can be with and enjoy God, listen to the Word, and to pray. It is designed to reflect the beauty of creation and God's abiding love.

Pflaum Gospel Weeklies

Elementary through 5th Grade

The Pflaum Gospel Weeklies program is catered to each grade level. Students gather to learn about the Gospel and related Church teachings through games, discussion, and activities. The program encourages students to live the Gospel in their daily lives and share it with others.

Family Life

Kindergarten through 8th Grade

The RCL Benziger Family Life program addresses key concerns of today's Catholic families by integrating child safety content within the framework of moral catechesis/virtuous living, while strengthening Catholic family living and Catholic identity.

OPTION 2

Family Faith Formation – Pathways Formation Suite



Option 2 is to pilot the new Family Faith Formation Program known as PATHWAYS. This program is not gospel based like the Pflaum Weeklies Program; it is FAMILY ORIENTED! PATHWAYS is an integrated and family-centered formation suite designed to facilitate a personal encounter with the Trinity and sustain a lifelong development of faith. While you will participate in various programs as you “walk the pathway”, the focus is on attending mass each week, attending Children’s Liturgy of the Word (CLOW) if age appropriate for your family, and participating in Community Parish Activities (a yearly liturgical calendar of these activities will be available Fall of 2025). Family Life will also be a part of the curriculum.

At this time childcare for families with kids aged 0-5 is not available. Children are welcome to stay with the parents during the small group time or choose only one parent to participate with your older child(ren).

In the Fall, we will embark on the first step along the Pathway.

The name of the program is “SEEK”.



Seek is presented through at-church experiences and extended through at-home activities. Parents and children/teens meet separately and then come together for the closing prayer. This experience is meant to feel like a small retreat in which parents and children/teens are renewed in a positive expression of faith. Parents and children are invited to experience the kerygma, the good news of the Gospel again! To hear it, reflect on it, and share it with others on a similar journey. Parents will experience the content and hands-on experiences as part of a small group. This will not be overwhelming but instead a safe place to explore faith and life.

As parents are ministered to, their children/teens will enjoy fellowship with other children/teens as they participate in activities and teachings that follow similar themes, all aimed at pointing them to the love of Jesus. Parents will engage in interactive prayer experiences with their children/teens at the end of each Session. The intimacy of God's nearness will be felt by all. Families are encouraged to enter this experience open and hopeful, knowing they are held in prayer by our community.

Seek consists of four, two-hour, at-church sessions every other week. This program will be offered 4 times throughout the Fall. Each family is to choose one session that works best for them. You need to commit to all the dates within a session; you cannot pick and choose dates from various sessions. If a session is missed, the materials will be shared with you to complete at home.

Session 1: **9/7, 9/21, 10/5, 10/19**

Session 2: **9/10, 9/24, 10/8, 10/22**

Session 3: **11/2, 11/16, 11/23, 12/14**

Session 4: **11/5, 11/19, 12/3, 12/17**

Over the summer, before the Fall SEEK session begins, a staff member from St. Michael will meet individually with each family for a “VISIT” (in-person or via zoom). This is an opportunity to assess where each family is along their path. This is a genuine dialogue that facilitates an experience of feeling known and seen. Meeting our families where they are and establishing a relationship of trust will encourage a willingness to fully commit and follow the program.

In the Winter/Spring we will embark on the second step along the Pathway. The name of the program is “ROOT”.



Root is presented through both at-home and at-church experiences. The material is meant to provide a foundation of faith for families to rest on. As families come to understand more about who God is, they can better build a relationship with Him. Parents are the biggest investment in their child's faith. Root is an investment into the faith of each parent. For many parents it may have been sometime since they engaged in the Scriptures and teachings of the Catholic faith. With fresh eyes, many new insights will be revealed as they study the Creed. Root for Parents is a reflection on the first part of the Catechism broken into a Mini Series and written in accessible language. Small group discussion with other parents, during at-church Sessions, will bring wisdom and practical life experience to the studying. Root for Teens, while similar to the parent content, is written in teen-friendly language. During the at-church Sessions, teens will participate in small group discussions and activities with other teens to prepare them for conversation with their parents before the closing prayer. Parents will begin leading Family Meetings at home with their children using the tools and resources provided in Root for Children. These gatherings will be simple opportunities to begin conversations of faith and a rhythm of shared prayer in the home. Children/teens will benefit from learning about faith through both at-home and at-church experiences. Time with other children/teens and parents will continue to build community connections with parish families. As families continue to invest in their faith together, they will be supported in prayer by our faith community and experience a God who is near.

Root consists of a total of 20 sessions. 7 of the sessions are held at church and 13 of the sessions are held at home. The at-church sessions will be two hours, every other week. Two at-home sessions (totaling about 2 hours) will need to be completed between each at-church session. There is an online management program, "MARTHA", which will help you keep track of your progress so you do not get behind. This program will be offered 2 times; Sunday from 1:30-3:30p and Wednesdays from 6:00-8:00p. Each family is to choose one session that works best for them. You need to commit to all the dates within a session; you cannot pick and choose dates from each session. If an at-church session is missed, the materials will be shared with you to complete at home.

Session 1: **1/11, 1/25, 2/8, 2/22, 3/8, 3/22, 4/19**

Session 2: **1/14, 1/28, 2/11, 2/25, 3/11, 3/25, 4/15**

Middle School and High School Grade Levels

St. Michael is actively looking for a new Coordinator of Youth & Young Adult Ministries. In the meantime, last year's fearless leaders, Katie and Shauna, have graciously volunteered to continue working with our youth.

The program for the Middle School and High School students will look a little different. Instead of the classroom model in conjunction with Mass and Family Dinners; it will be more like a youth group with social gatherings roughly once a month. Additional activities, such as retreats, service opportunities, "field trips", and paraliturgies (adoration, Stations of the Cross, reconciliation) will also be offered each month both off and on the church campus.

We will continue to utilize the Edge/LifeTeen Program materials for a portion of the gatherings. Due to the change in age for Confirmation, no sacramental prep will be a part of the youth group gatherings.

At this time we do not have specific dates or a fee in mind to complete a registration. What we do ask is that you respond in the registration stating your interest in this "youth group type program" and we will be sure to reach out when more information becomes available.



LIFETEEN (including Edge-the middle school ministry program offered by LifeTeen) is an international Catholic youth ministry and catechesis program that seeks to lead teens closer to Christ. The program emphasis will be on small groups led by adult core team leaders and peer ministers. Leaders are active in the life of the parish and work each week by praying for the teens, connecting with them in a relational setting, and sharing the truth in a comfortable but content-filled program.

The catechetical resources are fully referenced with Scripture, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Encyclicals, and sound doctrine from great saints. The curriculum guides follow the USCCB (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops) Doctrinal Framework for High School Catechesis.

There are three kinds of sessions – Catechetical, Issue, and Social. Issues deal with specific “real world issues” that teens deal with (i.e. drinking, gossip, chastity, divorce, peer pressure, etc.). These sessions help teens see how their Catholic faith is relevant to every aspect of their lives. Socials build Christian community and friendships through both on-site and off-site fun.

During EDGE (geared toward Middle School Aged Youth) and LIFETEEN (geared toward High School Aged Youth), your child(ren) will encounter Christ in topics such as Prayer, Scripture, Mass, Creed, Morality, Sacraments, Person of Christ, Paschal Mystery, Church, Social Justice, Vocation, and Liturgy.

Especially for our High School Youth, we invite them to focus on developing parish, pastoral, and discipleship leadership skills. Some will discern service as Peer Ministers for the Youth Programs. They will come to a greater understanding of which Catholic practices are most suited to their personalities and extra-curricular lifestyles. The goal is to enable them in the sustaining and fulfilling call both within and outside of the Parish, in college, and beyond.

Our St. Michael EDGE/ LIFETEEN program is open to all teens of different social and economic groups and different cultures and races. Teens are also encouraged to invite friends of different faiths, including the ‘unchurched.’

In addition to participating in the youth group program, families of middle school and high school students are ALSO encouraged to help pilot the new Family Faith Formation Program known as PATHWAYS. PATHWAYS is an integrated and family-centered formation suite designed to facilitate a personal encounter with the Trinity and sustain a lifelong development of faith.

While you will participate in various programs as you “walk the pathway”, the focus is on attending mass each week and participating in Community Parish Activities (a yearly liturgical calendar of these activities will be available Fall of 2025). Family Life for middle school students and Created to Love for high school students (Adolescent Catechesis for Human Sexuality and Child Protection) will also be a part of the curriculum.

GENERAL INFORMATION & POLICIES

Attendance

Our programs are designed to follow the national scope and sequence for the individual grade level curriculum guidelines. Each grade level focuses on a specific aspect of our faith; therefore, it is important to maintain strong attendance throughout the program. If a session is missed due to illness or family obligations, it can be made up by asking the catechist or Faith Formation Department what can be done at home for completion in accordance with Archdiocesan policy.

****Please be aware that in accordance with Archdiocesan policy revised in 2022, a child no longer requires a minimum of one full year of faith formation sessions (or enrollment in Catholic school faith formation) prior to the year in which they prepare for First Reconciliation, First Eucharist and Confirmation. It is however, strongly encouraged that your child attend the available faith formation opportunities as reinforcement of their catechesis instilled at home. For additional information regarding Sacraments, please visit the website to view the Sacramental Handbook.**

Parents and guardians who recognize the benefit of living a lifelong faith formation practice truly lead their children to faith through their own lived experiences. We invite all parents to reach out to us for more information on how to engage in this effort.

Kindergarten through 5th grade dismissal policy

For the safety of all Kindergarten through 5th grade level children, a parent, guardian, or a teen sibling 13 years or older must pick up the child at the assigned room. The teen sibling needs to be introduced to the catechist by the parent.

Cancellations

St. Michael follows the **Howard County Public Schools inclement weather school closing policy** on schooldays. If weekend activities and sessions are canceled because of inclement weather, a notice will be posted on the parish website. No decision will be made until 3:00pm unless Howard County has closed their schools early. We will post our Sunday session cancellations by 7:15am.

Catholic teaching on family life and morality component

The Archdiocese has required that all Christian Formation programs for youth contain the element of personal body safety and morality. The intent of the Archdiocese is to have parish programs ASSIST the parents/guardians in presenting this subject from a Catholic Christian perspective.

Kindergarten through 8th Grade

We use the RCL/Benziger Family Life Program which is taught both here in our faith formation sessions and in partnership with parents in the home. The home piece is called the Parent Connection.

Some updated curriculum pieces include personal body safety in regards to bullying, respecting others as fellow Christians, and raising awareness as to what is a healthy relationship and what is potentially not. The goal is to strengthen the dignity of the human person as one of God's creation. You are welcome to come in and review the materials.

Middle School and High School

EDGE and LIFETEEN include the family life component built into their curriculum called "Issue Nights." Parents are encouraged to discuss the issue notes previously emailed to them on the drive to and from the session. This is to foster open and honest communication in the session, at home, and in your teen's daily life. We will get your feedback on sensitive topics during the orientation. Created to Love for high school students (Adolescent Catechesis for Human Sexuality and Child Protection) will also be a part of the curriculum.

ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE STUDENT HARASSMENT POLICY

I. Policy

It is the policy of the Archdiocese to prohibit discrimination, including harassment on the basis of race, color, gender, national origin, religion, age, disability or handicap or protected activity, (i.e. opposition to prohibited discrimination or participation in the complaint process) in its education programs and activities. Each Catholic school shall adhere to this policy with respect to students. (Employees are similarly protected from harassment by a separate Archdiocesan policy.)

II. Scope

This policy applies to all students in Archdiocesan elementary, middle, and secondary schools. The Archdiocese neither condones nor tolerates harassment of students at school, school-related activities or functions, or in any school-related setting. Harassment of students, whether engaged in by other students, teachers, administrators, or others, is prohibited. Violation of this policy is grounds for disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment, suspension, or expulsion from the program, depending on the nature and severity of the offense and the individual's disciplinary record.

III. Prohibited Conduct

For purposes of this policy, "harassment" means any verbal or physical conduct that shows hostility or aversion toward an individual because of his or her race, color, national origin, religion, age, disability, handicap, or protected activity, that:

- has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.
- has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's performance; or otherwise adversely affects an individual's educational opportunities.

Harassing conduct includes, but is not limited to, epithets, slurs, negative stereotyping, or threatening, intimidating, or hostile acts. Sexual harassment includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as the basis for educational decisions or has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's academic performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

FAITH FORMATION SESSIONS

Kindergarten – 5th grade level

- **SUNDAY(K - 5th) Sessions 9:00am – 10:15am - Sessions begin September 21st, 2025. The last session will be March 29th 2026.**
- **THURSDAY(1st - 5th) Sessions 6:00pm – 7:15pm - Sessions begin September 18th, 2025. The last session will be March 26th, 2026.**

Please be sure to meet your child's catechist in-person and partner with them in passing on the faith to the next generation. We can't do this without you.

TUITION FOR IN-CLASS FAITH FORMATION

	Kindergarten – 5 th Grade
1 child	\$110
2 children	\$160
3 children	\$210
4+ children	\$260

Pathways Family Faith Formation Program

(Offered to families with children 6 years to 18 years old)

Tuition is \$150 Per family including Fall and Winter/Spring Sessions

REGISTRATION CAN BE FOUND ON OUR WEBSITE. IF YOU NEED TO PAY BY CHECK OR NEED TUITION ASSISTANCE, PLEASE CONTACT ANDREA SQUITIERI AT 240-437-3670.