

**St. Thomas Aquinas Church
&
Student Center**



**Faith Formation Handbook
For Children & Youth Program
2014-2015**

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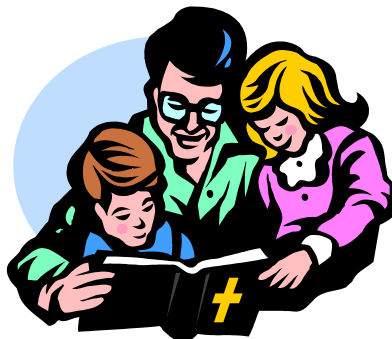
PHILOSOPHY OF CHILDREN/YOUTH FAITH FORMATION

St. Thomas Aquinas Church & Catholic Student Center

Faith Formation at St. Thomas Aquinas reflects the parish's mission statement:

*At Saint Thomas Aquinas Church and Catholic Student Center, we are
Gathered in the Holy Spirit, a diverse and vibrant community,
Transformed by Jesus Christ in the Catholic Tradition, and
Sent to be the presence of God in Ames, Iowa State University, and the world.*

We, the Faith Formation Commission of St. Thomas Aquinas, believe that Christian formation is a life-long process. We believe that parents have the primary responsibility for nurturing the faith life of their children. As primary faith formators, parents help their children make connections between learned and experienced faith. The parish community shares that responsibility by proclaiming in word and deed the Gospel message of Jesus Christ, by providing formal instruction in Catholic doctrine and practice, by liturgical, sacramental, and prayer experiences for youth, by encouraging youth to participate in parish worship, community building and service activities, and by supporting and fostering in all parish members a growing relationship with and commitment to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In addition, our parish community's commitment to students at Iowa State University challenges us to train college students in catechetical ministry. The parish community is also responsible for the Christian formation of its adult members. It does this by many of the same means described above with an emphasis on adult responsibilities and producing the next generation of parish leaders.



Responsibilities of Students

Attendance—Regular attendance at Faith Formation is very important for the continual spiritual growth of the child. Please have children arrive 5 minutes *before* class begins so that class can begin and end on time. Arriving late is disruptive to the rest of the students.

Behavior—Students are expected to:

- Respect themselves, others (including fellow students, catechists, aides, DFF, and priests), and property.
- Demonstrate a good attitude toward faith formation class and church activities.
- Participate in class discussions and activities.
- Refrain from chewing gum or bringing food and/or drink to class without the prior approval of the DFF and catechist.

Responsibilities of Parents

Parents are their children's primary formers in faith. Children learn first and foremost from their parents. Therefore, it is important that the parents, parish, and catechists work together to teach and model the Catholic faith to children. **Parents are called to**

Faith Formation at Home:

- Acknowledge that they are the primary influence on their children.
- Share faith and values with their children and openly discuss these and other religious beliefs.
- Encourage their children to respect life and property, pray, praise, and worship together and individually.
- Attend Mass as a family on Saturday evenings/Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.
- Explain to their children liturgical events, the Mass and basic Catholic traditions and customs, such as Holy Days, the Rosary, and Mary.
- Teach their children Catholic prayers and pray together as a family.

A child's daily experience of prayer as a family at meals, before bed, and spontaneously, in praise and thanksgiving is an invaluable part of their faith formation. (See pages 6-8 for a list of prayers.)



Support of Parish Faith Formation Classes:

- Bring their child(ren) to class on time.
- Take time to meet each child's catechists and maintain open and ongoing communication with them.
- Make the DFF aware of needs, concerns and success strategies for a child(ren) with special needs.
- Become aware of what each child is learning each week.
- Be supportive of the religious education catechists/aides and program.
- Check e-mail and with their child weekly for notes from the catechists or the Faith Formation Office.
- Contact the DFF when your child will be absent from class (see p. 9 for details).
- Contact the DFF if you have any questions or concerns.

Responsibilities of Catechists/Aides

Catechists for faith formation not only bring themselves to the classrooms, but they also share their time, talents, enthusiasm and faith with the children of St. Thomas Aquinas. As catechists, they are called to:

- Be witnesses of the Catholic faith and model Catholic-Christian attitudes and traditions by attending Mass and celebrating the sacraments on a regular basis.
- Share the lives and love of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and the saints with each other and the students.
- Be aware of developmental processes and individual differences of the students.
- Share the message of God in interesting and understandable ways.
- Encourage children to respect life and property, pray, praise, and worship together and individually.
- Plan the lessons and activities beforehand and arrive 20-30 minutes before class time.
- Pray for and with their class, providing students with a variety of prayer forms and reviewing the common prayers of our Church.
- Maintain open and ongoing communications with the DFF and parents.
- Be absent no more than two class-periods in a semester, unless receiving special permission prior to doing so from the DFF.
- Dress appropriately (i.e. no inappropriate areas of skin showing) as choice of clothing can reflect one's attitude towards others and the activity.

Responsibilities of the Intern

As a learning experience, the Faith Formation intern will:

- Observe the behind-the-scenes work of a DFF.
- Learn program management skills and how to work with a variety of people.
- Experience spiritual and faith development as a part of Church ministry.
- Explore working in Church ministry as a career.

Responsibilities of the Parish

- Call forth catechists and aides from the parish community (both resident and college student parishioners) and provide for their training.
- Provide facilities and materials for effective catechesis.
- Provide opportunities for catechists/aides to grow in their faith.
- Be familiar with diocesan policies in order to develop parish policies in conjunction with diocesan norms.
- Pay catechists a stipend—Policy #4140, Archdiocesan Faith Formation Commission.

Responsibilities of the DFF & Youth Minister

- Organize and implement programs to meet the religious education needs of the total parish by
 - Developing educational and sacramental programs for adults and children.
 - Preparing schedules.
 - Coordinating youth activities and events.
- Be aware of educational resources and current catechetical methodology.
- Observe and evaluate catechists/aides on a regular basis.
- Work with the parish Faith Formation Commission.
- Evaluate programs and prepare monthly reports for the Faith Formation Commission.
- Maintain communication with and support of parents.

Enrollment Policy

Because of limited classroom space, Sunday morning Elementary grades 1-5 FF Classes are limited to a maximum of 20 students per class. Enrollment for registered STA families begins in August and ends the 2nd Sunday of September. After this date, students will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.

Discipline Policy

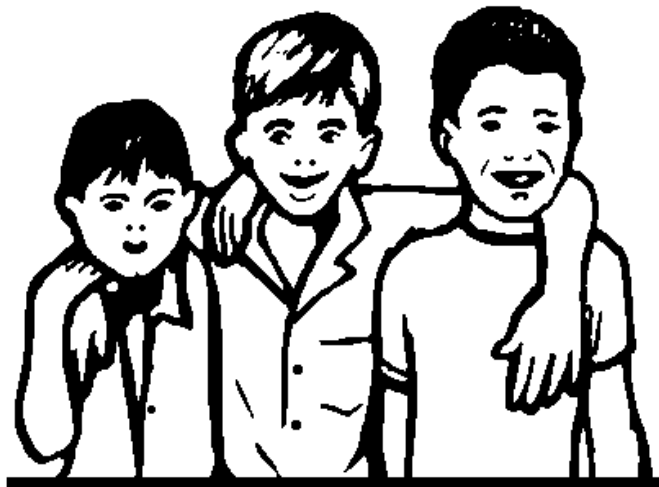
We recognize that learning cannot take place unless the environment is one with order and purpose, where every person and all property are respected. Furthermore religious education classes are short in length. In order for catechists to have enough time to teach the necessary concepts, they are not expected to spend a lot of time on discipline.

The Discipline Policy

1. Minor discipline problems are handled directly by the catechists in the classroom.
2. The first time a major problem occurs, the student is dismissed from class and reports to the Director of Religious Education (DFF's) office. The DFF meets with the student to discuss the problem and possible solutions. The student remains in the office for the remainder of that class period. The DFF also visits with the catechists after class that morning/night. Parents are contacted and made aware of the disciplinary action.
3. If the student is asked to leave class a second time, he or she again reports to the DFF's office. The DFF again visits with the student and talks to the catechists. Parents are contacted, and the student is not allowed to attend class again until a conference has been held with the parent, student, DFF and catechists. At this conference, options on disciplinary actions in the future are presented and agreed upon by all present.

Electronic devices, such as cell phones and iPods, are a distraction in class. They are to be turned off and put on the counter in the classroom at the beginning of class. They will be returned to students at the end of class. IF a student is seen with an electronic device in their possession during class (whether or not they are using it), they will immediately be sent to the DFF's office for disciplinary action.

For any concerns about the learning environment, parish facilities, or any other factors within our jurisdiction regarding the well-being of a child, parents are encouraged to contact the DFF.



Prayer in the Classroom

Prayer is an integral part of our faith and is included in each class. Students will experience a variety of ways to pray including both formal, memorized prayers, and informal, spontaneous prayer. Prayers to be learned at each grade level are on the following two pages. Parents are asked to help children learn these prayers and make them a part of their lives. Prayer listeners will sit outside the classroom once a month to review prayers learned by students in Gr. 1-5, and progress reports are sent home. The following list of prayers is endorsed by the Archdiocese of Dubuque's Office of Catechetical Services and includes those that have been changed by *The New Roman Missal*.

Preschool:

Sign of the Cross
Our Father (introduction)
Hail Mary (introduction)
Glory Be (introduction)
Angel of God (introduction)
Spontaneous Daily Offering

Kindergarten:

Sign of the Cross (introduction)
Our Father
Hail Mary (introduction)
Glory Be (introduction)
Angel of God (introduction)
Spontaneous Daily Offering

Grade 1:

Sign of the Cross
Our Father
Hail Mary
Glory Be
Angel of God
Review those previously learned

Grade 2:

Prayer Before Meals
Prayer After Meals
Prayer of Sorrow (Act of Contrition)
Review those previously learned

Grade 3:

Apostles' Creed
Review those previously learned

Grade 4:

The Rosary—Praying the Rosary & the Joyful,
Sorrowful, Glorious & Luminous Mysteries
The Ten Commandments
Review those previously learned

Grade 5:

Nicene Creed
Review those previously learned



Prayers

Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Father

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Glory Be

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Angel of God

Angel of God, my Guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here. Ever this day, be at my side; to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.



Prayer Before Meals

Bless us, O Lord, and these your gifts, which we are about to receive from your goodness, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer After Meals

We give you thanks for all your gifts, almighty God, living and reigning now and forever. Amen.

Prayer of Sorrow (Act of Contrition)

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In His name, dear Father, forgive me. Amen.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, **and** in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, **who** was conceived **by** the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended **into hell**; on the third day he rose again **from the dead**; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of **God** the Father **almighty**; **from there** he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Rosary

How to say the Rosary:

1. Begin with the crucifix and say the Apostles' Creed
2. On the first bead, say one Our Father.
3. On each of the next three beads, say one Hail Mary.
4. Next say one Glory Be.
5. Then announce the first Mystery and say one Our Father.
6. Say ten Hail Mary's and one Glory Be.
7. Announce the second Mystery and continue in the same way until each of the five Mysteries of the selected group or decades are said.

Joyful Mysteries

The Annunciation
The Visitation
The Birth of Jesus
The Presentation of Jesus
The Finding of Jesus in the Temple

Glorious Mysteries

The Resurrection
The Ascension
The Coming of the Holy Spirit
The Assumption of Mary
The Coronation of Mary

Sorrowful Mysteries

The Agony in the Garden
The Scourging at the Pillar
The Crowning with Thorns
The Carrying of the Cross
The Crucifixion

Luminous Mysteries (or Mysteries of Light)

The Baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan
The Wedding Feast at Cana
The Proclamation of the Kingdom of God
The Transfiguration of Jesus
The Institution of the Eucharist

The Ten Commandments

1. I am the Lord your God: you shall not have strange gods before me.
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.
4. Honor your father and your mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.



Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all **things visible and invisible**.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only **Begotten** Son of God, **born** of the Father **before all ages**. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, **consubstantial with the Father**; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, **and** by the Holy Spirit **was incarnate** of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he **suffered death** and was buried, **and rose again on the third day** in **accordance** with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, **who** with the Father and the Son **is adored** and glorified, **who** has spoken through the Prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. **I confess** one baptism for the forgiveness of sins **and I look forward to** the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Who's Who and How to Contact

Please feel free to address your concerns and/or questions to any of the following:

2014-2015 Faith Formation Commission

Name	Phone Number	Email Address
Jordan Boock, chairperson	712-304-0782	jdboock@gmail.com
Nannet Horton	515-292-2222	nanagatep@hotmail.com
Tera Sitzmann	515-232-4130	samsitz@gmail.com
Rick Anderson		ricky_a@sbcglobal.net
Ginny Anderson		ricky_a@sbcglobal.net
Danielle Gallet, student seat	319-721-2439	dgallet@iastate.edu

Director of Faith Formation

Tyler Wheeler	292-3810, ext. 16 (w)	tyler@STAparish.net
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Faith Formation Intern

Kaitlin Mulvaney	651-786-9302	kmm1@iastate.edu
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Director of Youth Ministry

Anna Steele	515-232-3514 (w)	annajsteele@gmail.com
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Coordinator of Middle School Youth Ministry

Ricardo Garcia	515-232-3514 (w)	rgarcia@stceciliaparish.org
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Pastor

Fr. Jon Seda	292-3810 ext.13 (w)	frjon@STAparish.net
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If Child(ren) Will Be Absent

Parents are asked to notify the Director of Religious Education (DFF) if their child(ren) will not be attending class: **CALL 292-3810, ext. 16.** If the voicemail attendant answers the phone, immediately punch in 29 and the call will be transferred to the DFF's extension—it will ring 4 times in the DFF's office before it goes into voicemail—please leave a voicemail message! Parents may also notify the DFF of their child(ren)'s absence by e-mail.

Note: To ensure the safety of all children, attendance is taken within the first 10 minutes of class time. For children who are not in attendance and notification from parents has not been received, a phone call will be made to the parents. Children who arrive late for class must check in with the secretary in the DFF's Office before going to their classroom.

In Case of Inclement Weather...

...that would require us to cancel classes, parents will receive this information by checking the following sources: Television channel 8 (KCCI) and/or channel 5 (ABC5), Radio stations KASI and WOI AM/FM, and the Parish website: www.staparish.net. If enough time is allowed, parents will also receive notice of cancellations by e-mail.



Weekly Faith Formation Class Schedule

Grade	Class Time	Class Time
	<u>Option 1</u>	<u>Option 2</u>
Pre-School and Kindergarten	Sunday 8:30-9:45 am	Sunday 10:00-11:15 am
Grades 1-5	Wednesday 5:45-7:00 pm	Sunday 10:00-11:15 am
Grades 6-8	Wednesday 7:15-8:30 pm	
Grades 6-8 Youth Ministry (optional)	<p>In addition to regular Wednesday night Faith Formation class, you can partake in Youth Ministry activities. We have <u>EDGE Small Group</u> (Theology of the Body for middle schoolers) on the 2nd Monday of the month typically from 6:15-7:30 pm.</p> <p>We also have <u>EDGE Youth Group</u> (an evening of fun activities and catechists in a large group setting) on the 2nd Wednesday of the month (typically) from 7:00-8:15 pm. On the Wednesday when there is both regular faith formation classes and an EDGE event, you have the choice between which one to attend that particular evening if you sign up for the Youth Ministry option.</p>	
Grades 9-12	For more information, including the schedule, go to saintcecilialifeteen.net	

Refer to the 2014-2015 St. Thomas Aquinas Faith Formation (FF) Calendar for PreK-8th grade for dates when classes WILL NOT be held.

Sacramental Preparation Classes

Parents and children attend the sacramental preparation classes together for First Reconciliation and First Communion (child care is available). Please see pages 13-14 for guidelines on when children should prepare for these first sacraments as well as the components for Confirmation preparation.

Sacrament	Class Dates	Scheduled Celebration
First Reconciliation	<p>-Tues., Sept. 16, 6:30-8:00pm--<i>Must attend for child to be in prep</i></p> <p>-Wed., Oct. 15, 12-7pm (allow 1 1/2 hours)--Learning Stations</p> <p>-Thur., Nov. 20, 6:30-8pm--Meet with Priest, Tour Reconciliation Room, Prep</p>	<p>Sat., Nov. 22, 9-11am</p> 
First Holy Eucharist	<p>-Tues., March 10, 6:30-8:00pm--<i>must attend for child to be in prep</i></p> <p>-Wed. May 6, 12-7pm (allow 1 1/2 hours)--Learning Stations</p> <p>-Sat., May 16th, 9-11am (rehearsal)</p>	<p>Sun., May 17, 10:30am Mass</p> 
Confirmation	<p>Confirmation Preparation is now a two year process starting in 9th grade. For more information please see the Confirmation Manual. If you did not receive this information and have a 9th or 10th grader interested in Confirmation Preparation, please contact Tyler Wheeler, tyler@staparish.net/515-292-3810, or Anna Steele, annajsteele@gmail.com/515-232-3514.</p>	

Fee Schedule

	STA Parishioner	Non-Parishioner	Home-Schooled Faith Formation
Pre-K/K	\$25	\$45	\$25
Grades 1-8	\$55	\$80	\$30
Grades 6-8 Youth Ministry (in addition to regular fees)	\$45	\$45	N/A
Grades 9-12	\$100	\$100	\$30 (\$60 for Confirmation Prep)
Family Maximum	\$200	\$275	\$165

Please contact Fr. Jon Seda or DFF Tyler Wheeler for information on fee arrangements.

Curriculum

Safe Environment Lessons

The Archdiocese of Dubuque requires age-appropriate *Safe Environment Training for Children* to occur at various grade levels. This training includes information about quality relationships, proper forms of touch, actions to take in uncomfortable situations, and reporting possible abuse. However, it is not the same as sex education. Although the training is offered to all child(ren) in FF, a parent can refuse to allow their child(ren) to participate by stating so in writing. When this occurs, the parent is still given the safe environment training materials to use with their child(ren). At STA, a Safe Environment Training lesson plan is taught to children in grades 1, 3, 6, and 9.

Liturgy of the Word

Children's Liturgy of the Word is also taught to students weekly in grades 1-. The Sunday readings are read to students and age-appropriate reflection follows. This component helps students learn the importance of reading and reflecting on the Sunday readings as Catholics.

Grade Specific Curriculum

Pre-Kindergarten

The Early Childhood Curriculum for ages 3 and 4 is *Allelu!: Growing and Celebrating with Jesus* by Our Sunday Visitor. It is Christ-centered to nurture young children's natural tendency to seek a relationship with God, while reinforcing a strong sense of community and love. Its format is flexible and features 28 lessons with multisensory learning activities to engage young children's senses as they gain the building blocks for a lifetime of Catholic Faith. Activity sheets, designed as placemats for the dinner table, reinforce positive family rituals such as eating meals together and talking to each other.

Kindergarten through Grade Eight

Class materials include the *Call to Faith Program* by Our Sunday Visitor. This program provides a solid foundation of Scripture and Tradition, a rich diversity of prayer, and a developmental sequence of activities. It is deeply rooted in Church Tradition. In its dependence on and faithfulness to both the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *General Directory for Catechesis*, it remains true to the *Magisterium*, or teaching office of the Church, and draws from the following sources of Catholic wisdom and experience:

- **Scripture**—the treasure of God's word is highlighted and integrated into the program instruction, reflection, sharing, and prayer.
- **Doctrine**—each lesson draws on Church doctrine in ways that help students, catechists, and families appreciate the Church's teachings as they apply to life today.
- **Lives of Saints and People of Faith**—the program takes seriously the importance of models and witnesses of faith as a factor in the faith development of both children and adults.
- **Church Feasts and Seasonals**—complete seasonal lessons and celebrations introduce children to the feasts and seasons of the Church year. Music, prayer, and ritual actions draw children in to participation in the liturgical life of the Church.
- **Cultural Customs and Celebrations**—the program involves the customs, devotions, and culture of many local communities.
- **Catholic Social Teachings**—the program provides a curriculum for Catholic Social Teaching: "Faith in Action," a comprehensive, age-appropriate lesson at the end of each unit that correlates to the text and key Catholic Social Teaching themes.

Call to Faith has seven catechetical themes that are taught simultaneously at each grade level, 1-6: revelation, trinity, Jesus Christ, the Church, morality, sacraments, and the kingdom of God. In each of grades 7-8, students go more in depth with three of the above catechetical themes.

Grade Nine - Twelve

9th-12th graders are involved in our Youth Ministry/Faith Formation program Life Teen. This is a joint program with St. Cecilia's, the other Catholic Church in Ames. Students have a wide variety of ways to be involved and learn about our faith. This includes, but is not limited to, large group gatherings called Life Nights (every Sunday, 7-9pm), small group offerings covering a variety of topics, trips and retreats, and student leadership opportunities. Please visit saintcecilielifeteen.net for more information.

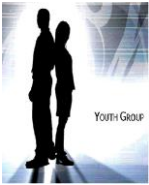
Middle School & High School Youth Ministry

As is stated in the *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry*, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1997, the three goals of youth ministry are to:

1. Empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today.
2. Draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission, and work of the Catholic faith community.
3. Foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person.

The Church is provided with eight fundamental ways to minister effectively with youth. These eight ways or components provide a framework for the Catholic community to *respond* to the needs of young people and to *involve* young people in sharing their unique gifts with the large community. A comprehensive ministry with youth provides balance among all eight components.

- Advocacy—To interpret the needs of youth and to advocate their concerns to the Church and community.
- Catechesis—To guide the young person's growth in faith and spirituality through formal and informal catechesis.
- Community Life—To provide opportunities for young people to share the questions, joys and struggles of their lives with other youth, their families, and adults, in the context of Christian community.
- Evangelization—To reach out to young people who are uninvolved in the life of the community and invite them into a relationship with Jesus and the Christian community.
- Justice & Service—To witness the Church's active concern for those who suffer from poverty, handicaps, and injustice, and to sponsor programs for youth that involve service, reflection, and education for justice.
- Leadership Development—To develop support and utilize the leadership abilities and personal gifts of youth and adults, encouraging their active participation in the responsibilities of ministry to other youth and adults.
- Pastoral Care—To provide youth with sources of support and counsel as they face personal, spiritual and vocational decisions, and to foster healing and reconciliation in their lives and relationships.
- Prayer & Worship—To promote liturgies and prayer experiences for young people and to encourage the participation of youth in liturgical ministries.



Developing a Life-Long Faith

In addition to the classroom setting for school-age children and youth, learning opportunities can present themselves for parishioners of all ages and stages. Periodically, these parishioners (including the elderly, adults and young adults, college students, and families with their children and youth) gather together into a large learning community for what is called Whole Parish Catechesis. The purpose of Whole Parish Catechesis is to engage parishioners in learning and reflecting on significant Church teachings, while also applying the learning to their lives as Catholics. This approach also promotes increasing religion practices in the home or the domestic church. This year, STA parishioners will be invited to gather together into a large learning community once during the Fall Semester and also, once during the Spring Semester.

STA also offers many programs specifically aimed at adults. Although not all of them are offered in any particular year, these programs include:

- **Catholicism 101** – an introduction into the fundamental teachings and beliefs of the Catholic Church. 6 sessions long.

- **Whole Parish Catechesis** – a two hour session offered twice a year on a specific element of Catholic teaching. These sessions are open to all ages and is a wonderful catechetical opportunity for the whole family to take part in. The content is taught at age appropriate levels in break out groups.
- **Discerning our Giftedness** - a means of spiritual growth and an approach to discovering one's unique spiritual gifts; includes three initial components:
 - 1) a Call & Gifted Workshop, 2) a discernment interview, and 3) three small group discussions and ongoing discernment.



- **Wisdom & Wine** – offered for STA's adult parishioners from ages 25 to 125 once each semester, fall, spring and summer; includes speakers and engaging discussions on current Catholic topics of interest, in a relaxed atmosphere, with food and drink.

- **JustFaith** - a thirty-week program where one has a spiritual journey into compassion; provides a lively and challenging format to read, view, discuss, pray, experience and be formed by the justice tradition that changes lives, inspires faithful witness, and transforms the world through love and service.

*Just*FAITH

Sacramental Preparation

First Reconciliation

Instruction for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not grade specific, but offered as early as second grade. Both parent(s) and child are required to attend the sessions in order for the parent(s) to make an informed decision concerning their child's readiness to receive the Sacrament.

As required by Archdiocesan policies, children will be offered the opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation before their reception of First Eucharist. Should the child, with the guidance of his or her parent(s), decide not to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation at that time, he or she will not be deprived of the right to receive First Communion.

First Communion

First Communion preparation is offered in addition to regular faith formation classes. Parent(s) and child are invited to attend these sessions together to best prepare for the reception of the Sacrament. Celebration of First Communion usually occurs at a regularly scheduled parish Mass in the spring.

At Saint Thomas Aquinas, children usually receive First Communion in second grade. However, this depends on the child's readiness, which must include a sufficient familiarity with the nature of the Eucharist to participate actively and with awareness.

Confirmation

Confirmation Preparation is now a two year process starting in 9th grade. For more information please see the Confirmation Manual. If you did not receive this information and have a 9th or 10th grader interested in Confirmation Preparation, please contact Tyler Wheeler, tyler@staparish.net/515-292-3810, or Anna Steele, annjsteele@gmail.com/515-232-3514.

Home Schooling Program

As stated in the Archdiocese of Dubuque's Board of Education Policy Manual, parents/guardians and children are expected to participate in the parish/regional catechetical programs that have been approved by the Office of Catechetical Services. Financial hardship is never a barrier for participation in faith formation. Parents should contact the pastor or the Director of Religious Education (DFF) for information on financial assistance.

If parents from St. Thomas Aquinas Parish choose to home school their child(ren) in faith formation, the DFF must be notified of their intent by October 1st of each year.

Following are the components outlined by the Archdiocesan Board of Education for parents who choose home schooling:

1. Parents teach their own children, using materials approved by the Archdiocesan Office of Catechetical Services. If needed, the DFF can assist parents in obtaining these materials.
2. Approved catechetical programs must include a parish component involving participants gathering periodically for information, faith sharing, community building and service opportunities. In St. Thomas Aquinas's Faith Formation program, these include, but are not limited to:
 - One or two yearly Whole Parish Catechesis events, to be attended by families.
 - Masses and the Sacrament of Reconciliation planned especially for FF families, where youth in grades 6-12 do the liturgical roles.
 - STA's Youth Ministry activities, planned for middle school and high school-aged youth.Parents teaching their children at home are invited to participate in any or all of the above. The schedule listing these and other parish events may be obtained from the DFF or downloaded from the STA website: staparish.net
3. Parents/guardians and children are required to participate in the parish sacramental preparation programs and sacramental celebrations (First Communion, Reconciliation and Confirmation).

Help For Victims Of Sexual Abuse

The Archdiocese of Dubuque has established a program of pastoral assistance to people who believe they or those in their care have been sexually abused as minors by clergy or other Church personnel. This assistance will include help in informing civil and Church authorities. Victim Assistance Coordinators are trained to facilitate access to appropriate professional mental health services, social services agencies, support groups and/or individuals who can provide spiritual care. Any individual desiring help from this program is invited to call toll free **800-803-6758** or **866-319-4636** to report an allegation or receive assistance. This program is part of the new "Policy for the Protections of Minors."

All those (ages 18 or older) working with children on a weekly basis, as part of the STA Faith Formation program, have fulfilled the requirements of the "Policy for the Protection of Minors" by attending a VIRTUS training session and having a certificate for doing so on file at STA, undergoing a background check, and by reading the sexual misconduct/abuse policies of the Archdiocese.