

St. Gertrude Parish



Religious Education Handbook 2025-2026

All are welcome!

Dear parents and legal guardians,

On behalf of the St. Gertrude's Staff and community, I want to welcome you to our Religious Education Program.

The Religious Education Program's team believes it is everyone's responsibility to empower our children and youth with the decision-making skills, based on our Catholic faith, to become socially and emotionally successful and responsible people. With that in mind, you and your family are invited to be active participants in our Church.

Please read the Religious Education handbook. You will find details of both First Communion and Confirmation programs. Our primary method of communication with you will be via email so please, check your spam folder so you do not miss any updates of our program.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to work with your child and family.

Sincerely,

Eloy Escamilla MDiv/MA

Pastoral Associate

St. Gertrude Church

St. Gertrude's Religious Education program is for children in grades 1 through 8. It provides Catholic Religious Education to support parents, the first teachers of their children's way of faith. Parents are called to serve as role models of inspiration for their children through their own prayer life, Education in faith and in support of St. Gertrude Church. Our parish family, through volunteer catechists, as well as our staff and pastor, work as a team with the parents so that together we can provide our children a solid program to help them become disciples of Jesus Christ. We ask you as a parent to:

- A. Show to your children the way to God by your example. It is expected that all children enrolled in our program and their families will participate in Mass every week.
- B. Pray with your child and teach them how to pray.
- C. Encourage your child to discuss his/her thoughts on Religious Education lessons with you.

Religious Education Staff

Each class is staffed by a catechist. Our catechists are volunteers who generously share our Catholic faith and tradition with our students. Most are not teachers by profession. However, all have a willingness to share their faith to help our children grow in the love of Jesus. All our catechists are required to:

- Be in good standing with the Catholic Church.
- Attending catechetical meetings.
- Comply with the Diocesan requirements which include a criminal background check, VIRTUS's Protecting God's Children training, mandated reporter training from the State of Illinois, and Archdiocesan Standards of Behavior for Church Personnel Working with Minors and Vulnerable Adults.
- All catechists are encouraged to seek certification through the Archdiocese of Chicago.

According to the guidelines of the Archdiocese of Chicago there are six tasks of catechesis:

- 1. Promote knowledge of the faith** – Teach the “basics” of the faith as revealed in the signs of creation, Sacred Scripture, Catholic tradition, and human experience.
- 2. Liturgical Education** – Teach about the form and meaning of the liturgy and the sacraments and help individuals prepare their minds and hearts to enter into these mysteries of our faith.
- 3. Moral Formation** – Teach the moral teachings of the Church, which are the fulfillment of the Commandments.
- 4. Teaching to Pray** – Teach that a “climate of prayer” and participation in prayer invites individuals into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

5. **Education for Community Life** – Teach that the human person needs to live in society. Society is not optional, but a requirement of human nature.
6. **Missionary Initiative** – Teach that all Christian service is an expression of love and is performed by Christians for the purpose of building up the Kingdom of God on earth.

Transferring from other Religious Ed Programs

Students who are transferring into our program from another parish should obtain a transfer letter from their former parish indicating that the child has successfully completed one year (minimum) of Religious Education.

Classroom Behavior

We require that all students behave in an appropriate manner to create a productive learning environment. Disrespect towards catechists, fighting, using foul language, defacement of church property, carrying harmful objects, and stealing are considered unacceptable behaviors. Additionally, we have a zero-tolerance policy on bullying. To provide an environment that promotes maximum learning, good discipline in the classroom is a necessity.

Registrations & Non-Discrimination Policy

All new and returning students will need to register each year for Religious Education. It is the parent's responsibility to notify our office of any changes to the information provided during registration.

If the child is making First Communion and Reconciliation or Confirmation during the current school year, a sacramental registration form needs to be filled out. Please, note that students must receive at least two years of preparation to make these sacraments.

Our program admits students of any sex, race, color or nationality, and ethnic origin to all rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students in our parish.

Textbooks

Our textbook series for grades 1 through 8 is entitled, "Alive in Christ" published by Our Sunday Visitor; and "Finding God" published by Loyola Press.

Arrival/Dismissal

When you are dropping off or picking up your children, please pull into a parking space. This is an act of courtesy to others, and it will alleviate the traffic jams that tend to occur at arrival and dismissal times.

The main door opens five minutes before the start of class. If a catechist is not present at the time that the class begins, students are asked to wait in the hallway in an orderly and quiet manner. Children are not to enter an unattended classroom for any reason.

Religious Education Fees for 2025-26

This school year, fees are \$230.00 dollars for one child and an additional \$40.00 dollars for each student from the same family. An additional sacramental fee of \$75.00 dollars is required for children making their First Communion and Reconciliation or their Confirmation in 2026. Fees can be paid on line through GiveCentral, check, or cash.

Parents for whom tuition would cause a severe financial burden should contact the director to set up a payment plan. ***No child will be refused admission to the Religious Education Program because of inability to pay tuition.***

Building Security

To provide a safe environment for the children, we do have a surveillance system outside of the building only. The building will be locked when classes are in session. Parents are not allowed to enter the building without authorization.

Class Cancellations

If for any reason, especially during wintertime, classes need to be cancelled, you will be notified via e-mail.

Special Notices

At times, special notices are issued for making announcements or changing procedures. We ask you to please check your email (remember to check your spam folder) or read the weekly Religious Ed Newsletter posted at <https://stgertrudechicago.org/religious-education-news> to keep you updated.

Class Schedule

First Communion and Religious Education classes for 1st through 6th grades are held at Northside Catholic Academy on Sundays from 9:15-10:15 am. Confirmation Sessions are held at the Ministry Center with the same schedule. Thank you in advance for dropping off and picking up your child on time!

Class Attendance

Religious Education should be a priority, especially for a First Communion or Confirmation candidates. Given the amount of time in the Religious Education teaching schedule, attendance at all classes is essential for all students.

Communication is important. We understand that sometimes children get sick or get overwhelmed with school, parents need to work overtime, etc. Please send an email to eescamilla@stgertrudechicago.org and let us know that your child will be missing class. If a child misses more than five classes or is frequently tardy, they might need to repeat the year.

Think First & Stay Safe sessions

Our Cardinal Blase Cupich states that "We have no greater responsibility than to ensure the safety of the children in our communities." Thus, "As part of the implementation of the Charter for the Protection of Children & Young People, the Archdiocese of Chicago requires its parishes and schools to provide valuable training to children and youth in

schools and faith formation programs annually. These [approved programs](#) are not sex education courses, rather sexual abuse prevention training that encourages children/youth to disclose abuse, neglect or any troubling information to a safe adult, particularly their parent(s). [Click here](#) for a current listing of approved programs. For more information on the Safe Environment Requirements for parishes, visit the Archdiocese of Chicago [Safe Environment Office](#)."

Think First & Stay Safe sessions offer a balanced perspective that preserves the innocence and optimism of childhood, while arming youngsters with personal safety strategies. Two *Think First & Stay Safe* sessions are offered each year, and both are included in the Religious Education calendar. However, if you opt not to bring your child to these two sessions, please, send an email to eescamilla@stgertrudechicago.org to notify that at this time you do not want your child to participate in Think First & Stay Safe 2025-2026 sessions.

Calendar

A calendar with class schedules and important dates will be posted on our website. The calendar will always be available and updated if changes need to be made. Ask for a printed version if needed.

Portable Electronic Devices

Cell phones and other electronic devices are NOT to be used during class time. They are a distraction to the learning process.

Dress Code

We ask that children dress appropriately for Religious Education classes as well as for Mass.

Medication

We will NOT administer prescription or non-prescription medication to any child. Parents are asked to administer any medication before or after any class and to make the catechist aware of any possible side effects. Parents are permitted to enter the building and administer the medication to their children with previous authorization.

First Communion Requirements 2025-26

Any student who wishes to receive the Sacrament of Communion in St. Gertrude Church must:

- Have received the Sacrament of Baptism and Reconciliation.
A copy of the baptismal certificate is needed if the child was not baptized at St. Gertrude Church. Even if the student made First Communion at St. Gertrude, you need to submit the baptismal certificate again.
- Have successfully completed at least two years of preparation for the reception of the sacrament.
- Have regular participation at Mass. Sunday Mass is an important part of building the child's faith, especially during the preparation period for receiving Holy Communion. The presence of children while worshiping God will remind us of Jesus' humbleness and joy! You are more than welcome to participate in any Mass on Sunday or the Saturday Vigil Mass. The Mass schedule at St. Gertrude is:
 - Saturday Vigil Masses - 5:00 pm
 - Sunday Masses - 8:00 and 10:30 am
 - Gym Masses – Sundays at 10:30 am (Sept -Jun)
- Fill out the Sacramental Registration Form. It can be found in our website www.stgertrudechicago.org.

Recommendations for First Communion Day:

- The attire for First Communion is simple and age appropriate.
- The attire should not distract from the focus of receiving the Sacrament.
- To keep the solemnity of the First Communion Mass, photos are not allowed before and/or anytime during Mass.

Sacrament of Confirmation Requirements 2025-26

Any student who wishes to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation in St. Gertrude Church must:

- Have received the Sacrament of Baptism, Reconciliation, and First Communion. (At the time of registration, a copy of the Baptismal certificate is needed if the child was not baptized at St. Gertrude Church. Even if the student made First Communion at St. Gertrude, you need to submit the baptismal certificate again.)
- Have successfully completed at least two years of preparation for the reception of the sacrament.

First Year Preparation:

Confirmation candidates in year one are typically in 7th grade. Those in their first year of preparing for their Confirmation must:

- Attend Religious Education sessions while in 7th grade or any other time after 7th grade.
- Complete service hours.
 - Candidates should talk to their parents about choosing ways to serve.
 - Candidates must complete their service hours in one of each of the three areas presented below. A service log needs to be completed and submitted any time before the beginning of the second year.

These are the three areas in which the candidate must cover:

Family life:

These are things that the candidate might do to help his/her family:

- Taking extra household chores.
- Helping a sibling, friend, neighbor, or a schoolmate with his/her homework.
- Monitoring the recycling system at home.
- Organizing a family fun night.
- Cleaning the house.

Community life:

These are things that the candidate might help to create a better community.

- Finding a social justice issue and creating a project/presentation on that for his/her class.
- Collecting aluminum cans and donating the money to charity.
- Making get well cards for children in hospitals.
- Volunteering for service in a soup kitchen, food pantry, etc.

Parish life:

- These are things that the candidate might do to help St. Gertrude's parish community. The candidate must fill out the Ministry Service Registration Form.
 - The form must be submitted no later than Sunday, September 7th, 2025. Ministry placement is based on a first-come, first-served basis. Ministry placement will be communicated to the candidate's parents.
- Have regular participation at Mass. Sunday Mass is an important part of building faith, especially during the preparation period for receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The presence of your family will bring joy to the whole community. You are always welcome to participate in any Mass on Sunday or Saturday Vigil Mass. The Mass schedule at St. Gertrude is:
 - Saturday Vigil Masses - 5:00 pm
 - Sunday Masses - 8:00 and 10:30 am
 - Gym Masses – Sundays at 10:30 am (Sept -Jun)

Second Year Preparation:

Any student who wishes to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation in St. Gertrude's Church must:

- Have received the Sacrament of Baptism, Reconciliation, and First Communion. At the time of registration, a copy of the Baptismal certificate is needed if the child was not baptized at St. Gertrude Church.
- Have successfully completed at least two years of preparation for the reception of the sacrament.

Confirmation candidates are typically in 8th grade. Those in their second year of preparing for their Confirmation must:

- Complete Religious Education sessions while in 8th grade or any other time after 8th grade.
- Complete service hours:
 - Candidates should talk to their parents about choosing ways to serve in our church.
 - Candidates must complete their service hours in one of each of the three areas presented below. A service log for each project needs to be completed.
 - The Service Logs for those in their second year of preparing for their confirmation are due on May 1st, 2026.
- These are the three areas in which the candidate must cover:

Family life:

These are things that the candidate might do to help his/her family:

- Taking extra household chores.
- Helping a sibling, friend, neighbor, or a schoolmate with his/her homework.
- Monitoring the recycling system at home.
- Organizing a family fun night.
- Cleaning the house.

Community life:

These are things that the candidate might help to create a better community.

- Finding a social justice issue and creating a project/presentation on that for his/her class.
- Collecting aluminum cans and donating the money to charity.
- Making get well cards for children in hospitals.
- Volunteering for service in a soup kitchen, food pantry, etc.

Parish life:

These are things that the candidate might do to help St. Gertrude's parish community.

- The candidate must fill out the Ministry Service Registration Form on time.
- The form must be submitted no later than Sunday, September 7th, 2025. Ministry placement is based on a first-come, first-served basis. Ministry placement will be communicated to the candidate's parents.

- Have regular participation at Mass. Sunday Mass is an important part of building your faith, especially during the preparation period for receiving the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The presence of your family will bring joy to the whole community. You are always welcome to participate in any Mass on Sunday or Saturday Vigil Mass. The Mass schedule at St. Gertrude is:

- Saturday Vigil Masses - 5:00 pm
- Sunday Masses - 8:00 and 10:30 am
- Gym Masses – Sundays at 10:30 am (Sept -Jun)

- Have attended the required Confirmation retreats. The first retreat for those to be confirmed in 2026 will be held at the Ministry Center on Saturday, February 7th, 2026, from 9:00 am to noon. The second will be on April 30th, 2026, at 6 pm. More information about these retreats will be shared in due time. *Please note that if the student is not able to attend the first retreat, the student must complete*

his/her retreat in another parish. A letter of completion must be submitted before the Confirmation date.

- Have participated in the Essay Contest.
 - **Assignment Topic:** *TBA*
 - The essay should be 450–500 words. Spelling and grammar count.
 - Essays should be sent to eescamilla@stgertrudechicago.org or mailed to:
St. Gertrude Church / Religious Education, 1420 W. Granville Ave,
Chicago, IL 60660
- **Deadline:** Entries must be submitted online or postmarked by Monday, December 22, 2025. The three best essays will receive a gift card and will appear on our website.
- Be accompanied by one sponsor on the day of Confirmation. The sponsor should meet the following qualifications: A Catholic who has received the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Holy Eucharist, and Confirmation; at least 18 years of age; and must not be the Candidate's father or mother.
- Complete the following Confirmation forms:
 - Confirmation package – due on Saturday, February 7, 2026. The package has the following forms:
 - Letter to the Bishop requesting the Sacrament of Confirmation
 - Sacramental Request Form for Confirmation Candidates
 - Service Log.
 - All the forms can be found on our website.

Recommendations for Confirmation Day:

- The attire for Confirmation should not distract from the focus of receiving the Sacrament.
- The dress code will be sent to you in due time.
- To keep the solemnity of the Confirmation Mass, photos are not allowed before and/or anytime during Mass.