



ST. PIUS X
FAIRFIELD, CT

Elementary Faith Formation Handbook

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Parish Clergy and Staff

Father Brendan H. Blawie, *Parish Administrator*

Father Ferry Galbert, *Priest in Residence*

Deacon Donald Ross, *Deacon of the Parish*

Shari Mellinger, *Directory of Elementary Faith Formation*

Cathy Coyle, *Communications Coordinator*

Terri Dawes, *Receptionist*

Cathy Hughes, *Administrative Assistant*

Michael Lantowski, *Music Director*

Kimberlie Leon, *Business Manager*

Paola Peña, *Director of Evangelization*

Parish Website: www.st-pius.org

Elementary Faith Formation Office Contact

Shari Mellinger, *Director of Elementary Faith Formation*

sgarcia@st-pius.org

(203) 259-4800

Elementary Faith Formation Mission Statement

Elementary Faith Formation at St. Pius X partners with families in nurturing children in the Catholic faith—rooted in the Eucharist, nourished by God’s Word, and formed in the sacramental life of the Church.

This ministry fosters a welcoming, Christ-centered environment where every child is known, loved, and invited to grow in relationship with Jesus. Through faithful teaching, prayer, and active participation in parish life, children are formed as young disciples who reflect Christ in their words and actions.

In collaboration with parents, catechists, and the parish community, the program seeks to pass on the Gospel, cultivate a love for the Mass and the Sacraments, and encourage a lifelong commitment to living the faith.

Purpose of Catechesis

Catechesis makes the proclamation of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ continually resound in the heart of every person, so that life may be transformed. A dynamic and complex reality at the service of the Word of God, catechesis is accompaniment, education and formation in the faith and for the faith, an introduction to the celebration of the Mystery, illumination and interpretation of human life and history. By harmoniously integrating these characteristics, catechesis expresses the richness of its essence and offers its specific contribution to the pastoral mission of the Church.

Directory for Catechesis, 55.

Eligibility to Participate

Families must be registered and active parishioners of St. Pius X Parish before the start of the enrollment period to enroll children in the St. Pius X Elementary Faith Formation Program.

Process of Enrollment

Existing Parishioners

Registration opens in mid-June each year for the coming year of Elementary Faith Formation and Sacramental Preparation. The deadline to register for Confirmation Preparation is **August 14, 2026**. The deadline to register for Grades 1-5 is **September 21, 2026**. These deadlines are necessary to ensure adequate classroom space and materials for each child, as well as the proper number of volunteers. We do not offer rolling admission. After the registration deadlines have passed, new registrations from existing parishioners will not be processed, without exception.

Registration is collected digitally on the parish website for the duration of the registration period.

Parents are asked to indicate a **unique** first and second choice of session for each child. The first choice is honored whenever possible. Requests for specific sessions are filled on a first-come-first served basis, and some sessions fill up quickly.

Transfer Students & Students from Neighboring Parishes

Transfer students are welcome to join the program upon registration with the parish based on availability during the registration period. We do not accept rolling admissions from transfer students.

Families who wish to register in the Elementary Faith Formation Program without leaving their current parish are eligible to register for and participate in general formation (Grades 1, 3, 4, and 5) with written permission from the pastor of their parish. At this time, we cannot accept students from neighboring parishes for Sacramental Preparation, as these programs fill quickly.

Children with Special Needs

Parents who have a child with special needs are asked to contact the Director of Elementary Faith Formation to discuss and set an appropriate, agreed upon plan for catechesis for their child.

Classroom Changes

Due to the number of children in our program and our desire to accommodate as many family preferences as possible, the process of assigning sessions and classrooms is intricate and lengthy. We will honor session changes as availability allows. Due to the intricate nature of assigning sessions and classrooms, we cannot accept requests to be placed with friends. For those who carpool, we kindly ask that you register early for the best chance of a similar assignment.

Tuition and Fees

Tuition for the Elementary Faith Formation Program is set at **\$260** per child. This fee covers tuition, books, and materials for the year. An additional fee is assessed for Sacramental Preparation. The fee for First Communion is set at **\$40** for the year. The fee for Confirmation is set at **\$75** for the year. These

fees cover additional materials, certificates, and other fees associated with the celebration of the sacrament. There is a **\$5** processing fee for those who choose to pay by credit card.

Tuition and fees are assessed and collected online at the time of registration, unless a family chooses to pay by check. If this option is selected, registration will be processed upon receipt of payment.

Tuition Assistance

Cost should not be a factor when pursuing Faith Formation and Sacramental Preparation for your child. If your family requires tuition assistance or a multiple child discount, please submit the Tuition Assistance Request Form (available online) to the Director of Elementary Faith Formation at the time of registration. When submitting the online registration form, please select the 'pay by check' option to move forward with your application.

Please note that Sacramental Preparation fees are not eligible for Tuition Assistance.

Mass Attendance

In brief, the Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith: "Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking." (CCC 1327)

Every student enrolled in Elementary Faith Formation at St. Pius X is required to attend Mass every Sunday and on all Holy Days of Obligation. Families are expected to attend most of those Masses at the parish. Instructions for signing in will be posted at all entrances of the church and will be live immediately following each Mass. If you attend Mass at another parish because of travel, you must obtain a bulletin from that parish signed by the celebrating priest to be turned in to your child's catechist that same week. There will be no exceptions to this rule.

Because the material taught during in-class formation flows from and leads back to the Eucharist, if your family cannot commit to this important aspect of our Catholic faith, we encourage you to reflect on what you hope your child will gain from the Elementary Faith Formation Program.

Class Sessions & Location

Students entering Grade 1 through Grade 6 are eligible to participate in Elementary Faith Formation at St. Pius X, with students in Grade 1 completing an at-home curriculum through *My Catholic Faith Delivered*. To accommodate our existing parishioners, the following sessions are available for Elementary Faith Formation and Sacramental Preparation (Grades 2-6):

	First Reconciliation/First Communion (Gr. 2)	Grades 3, 4, & 5	Confirmation (Gr. 6)
Monday	4:30 PM – 5:30 PM	4:30 PM – 5:30 PM	4:30 PM – 5:30 PM
Tuesday	4:30 PM – 5:30 PM	4:30 PM – 5:30 PM	N/A
Wednesday	4:30 PM – 5:30 PM	4:30 PM – 5:30 PM	N/A

Students in Grades 2-5 meet weekly beginning mid-October in the Religious Education Center (school building).

Students in Confirmation Preparation (Grade 6+) meet in the Faith Center Community Room and Munro Room during their 14-week session.

Calendar, Closings, and Cancellations

The Elementary Faith Formation calendar is posted online. Families are encouraged to print a copy of the calendar for their use at home. This calendar highlights important dates throughout the year, including closings for scheduled breaks and sacrament celebrations.

Closings

There are four (4) scheduled breaks for Elementary Faith Formation. They are:

- Thanksgiving Break (Grades 2-5 only) in November
- Christmas Break in December
- February Break
- Spring Break (typically in April, according to Fairfield Public Schools)

Several days on the Elementary Faith Formation calendar are marked in **grey** as “Remote Days.” On these days, students in grades 2–5 will complete an at-home assignment instead of attending class in person. Assignments must be returned to the catechist the following week. Failure to complete and return the assignment will result in an unexcused absence for that class.

Cancellations

When Fairfield Public Schools close or dismiss early due to inclement weather, we will not have class that day. Class cancellations will be posted on our Facebook page and the parish website, and a brief lesson will be emailed for review, following the Remote Day protocol stated previously. Closings will

also be posted on the WTNH website, www.wtnh.com/weather/closings/, under 'St. Pius X Church – Fairfield.' Rarely, St. Pius X will choose to cancel Elementary Faith Formation outside of any decisions made by Fairfield Public Schools. In this event, the cancellation will be posted on WTNH, social media, and communicated via email and text message.

If we have not cancelled class but you are concerned about travel conditions, use your best judgment whether to bring your children to class. Absences due to inclement weather will be treated as excused absences. In most cases, classes cancelled due to inclement weather will not be rescheduled.

Communication

Important details regarding Elementary Faith Formation will be sent via email or text message using Flocknote, which is designed for parish use and allows us to communicate with you effectively. A cell phone number and at least one email address that your family checks regularly are necessary for effective communication. Our staff is not responsible for any missed communications due to a faulty email address or phone number.

All regularly scheduled parish communications are also sent via Flocknote. This typically consists of a weekly email and any critical messages that must be communicated to the entire parish. Please note that if you opt out of these notifications, Flocknote automatically removes you from the Elementary Faith Formation group(s) you are in and you will cease to receive all communications from St. Pius X. As such, we kindly ask that you do not opt out of any messaging from St. Pius X for the duration of your child's time in the program.

Program Policies and Procedures

Class Attendance and Absences

Enrollment in Elementary Faith Formation at St. Pius X is a year-long commitment. Classes begin promptly at 4:30 PM each week, and each student is expected to arrive on time and prepared for class. If any extenuating circumstances arise in your family that result in extended periods of absence, please contact the office immediately to arrange to complete the material at home for the length of the conflict. Students are allowed three "unexcused" absences for the year. Absences are considered "excused" when a student completes a take-home assignment and returns the finished work to their catechist. Catechists are not required to accept work that is poorly done or incomplete.

For students participating in Confirmation Preparation, they are required to attend a 14-week immediate Confirmation Preparation program in addition to weekly Mass attendance for the entire program year. Attendance at all 14 weeks is mandatory. If a student must be absent for any reason, it is the student's responsibility to obtain the assignment from that week to turn in when they return. If a student misses three or more of their 14 classes, they will be required to repeat the session when it is

next available. Note that this may not be the following 14-week session in the same year, as that may be at capacity.

If a student does not meet the above requirements for attendance, that student will not be allowed to receive any sacraments related to that year of instruction and/or will be required to repeat the academic year before advancing to the next class.

Safety, Conduct, and Discipline

Safe Environments

St. Pius X Elementary Faith Formation is committed to ensuring respect for the human dignity of all students, parents, volunteers and staff members. Faith Formation is possible only in an environment that embodies that respect.

Accordingly, St. Pius X Parish participates in the ***VIRTUS - Protecting God's Children*** program, which helps churches and religious organizations refine their roles as safe havens for children and empowers them with new tools to help them protect children. The program incorporates the best-proven standards and practices to prevent child sexual abuse and make the parish safe for all people—especially children.

All adult volunteers (18 years or older) in the Elementary Faith Formation Program must be VIRTUS certified. They also must have passed a background check, in compliance with the guidelines of the Diocese of Bridgeport's Safe Environments Program and Guidelines. Information about the VIRTUS program can be found at www.virtus.org.

Student Arrival and Dismissal

The safety and security of all students, parents, and designated adults is our priority. To this end, we are implementing the following mandatory procedures for student arrival and dismissal. We anticipate and appreciate your cooperation in following them and ask that you do not request personal exemptions from catechists, as they are not authorized to provide them.

For children in Grades 2-4

Parents must park their cars in the parking lot and walk their children to and from their classroom door. At all times, children must be under the supervision of a parent, legal guardian, or the adult designated in writing as set out below. Parking or idling in the Fire Lane in front of the Religious Education Center is prohibited.

All students in grades 2-4 must be released to a parent/guardian or an authorized adult. If anyone other than the parents listed on your child's registration will be picking up your child, please complete the Pick-Up Authorization Form available online.

For children in Grade 5 and Confirmation Prep

Parents must park their car in the parking lot and meet their child in the lobby of the school or Community Room for Grade 5 and Confirmation Prep, respectively. Parking or idling in the Fire Lanes outside either building is prohibited.

For families with multiple children in different grades

Parents must follow the arrival and dismissal procedure applicable to the youngest child in that session. Children in Grades 2-4 may not be picked up or dropped off by their older siblings.

Out of courtesy and consideration for our volunteer catechists, as well as the safety and wellbeing of your children, please make every effort to drop off and pick up at the scheduled times.

Building Access

The Religious Education Center will be locked during scheduled sessions from 4:40 PM through 5:25 PM. During this time, only parish staff, clergy, and volunteer catechists will be allowed in the building.

Early Dismissal

Elementary Faith Formation at St. Pius X meets for one short hour each week. As such, early dismissals are prohibited. If there is a family emergency, parents must visit the school office to request that their child be dismissed. Catechists are not authorized to approve early dismissals without the approval of the Director of Elementary Faith Formation.

Food and Drink

No food is allowed at any time during Elementary Faith Formation. This includes, but is not limited to, candy, chips/puffs, meals, and soft drinks. This is to ensure that students with food allergies are in an allergy-free environment.

No drinks other than water are allowed during Elementary Faith Formation. Students may bring **reusable water bottles** only for class. Please note that water bottles must be filled in advance of your arrival, as there are no water fountains in the building.

Conduct and Discipline

All students, parents, catechists, and volunteers are expected to model Christian attitudes of honesty, respect, responsibility, and love for one another. This includes respect for clergy, catechists, fellow students, parish property, and the learning environment.

Our catechists generously volunteer their time to share the faith with your children. To foster a safe and faith-filled environment, students are expected to participate respectfully and avoid behaviors that disrupt learning.

If a student's behavior becomes a distraction before, during, or after class, parents will be notified by phone, in writing, or in person. We will work together to find a solution, which may include requesting a parent's presence in the classroom to support their child as a one-on-one aide if necessary.

All catechists follow a consistent discipline approach. Students who are disruptive may be removed from the classroom. Persistent or serious behavioral concerns may result in removal from the program for the remainder of the year if a resolution cannot be reached.

The following behaviors are not permitted and will result in immediate disciplinary action, which may include removal from class, suspension, dismissal from the program, or restitution when appropriate:

- Use of inappropriate or harmful language, including vulgar, bullying, or discriminatory speech
- Fighting, physical aggression, or any inappropriate physical contact
- Stealing, damaging, or destroying property belonging to others or the parish

Disrespectful or disruptive behavior toward catechists, staff, other students, or parish property may result in immediate removal from the program.

If your child has specific learning or behavioral needs, please indicate this during registration so that we can best support them.

If concerns arise, parents should contact the Director of Elementary Faith Formation so that, in a spirit rooted in Christ, we can work together toward a constructive resolution.

Medical Issues

Emergency Contact

St. Pius X Elementary Faith Formation registration materials request that parents supply the name, phone number and relationship to the child of an emergency contact person. This information should allow us to contact someone who generally will be available during your child's class time.

Diocesan Consent and Release

All families are asked to complete and submit a Consent and Release form to the Diocese of Bridgeport. Returning families are asked to update their information and new families are asked to complete the form in its entirety. This form serves as the medical release for your child's participation in the program and includes a permission statement authorizing emergency medical personnel to treat a child in the event of a medical emergency. We cannot enroll students without submission of this form.

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Curriculum and Home Schooling

Overview

The Elementary Faith Formation Program at St. Pius X is Christ-centered and based on the Diocese of Bridgeport's Guidelines for Catechesis. Each grade level will review the following topics in an age-appropriate manner:

- Sacred Scripture
- The Creed
- The Sacraments
- Morality
- Prayer and Spirituality

It is expected and encouraged that children attend Faith Formation continuously from Grade 1 through the reception of Confirmation. If any grade level was completed at another parish, please provide record of completion to the Director of Elementary Faith Formation.

Home Schooling

All students in Grade 1 complete their first year of Faith Formation at home, using the materials provided by *My Catholic Faith Delivered*.

Home schooling is not available to students seeking preparation for the sacraments.

If you are a home schooling family who wishes to utilize the St. Pius X materials for Faith Formation at home, please contact the Director of Elementary Faith Formation.

If a child is unable to participate in Elementary Faith Formation in person for grades 3–5, they may be eligible to complete the curriculum at home using materials from *My Catholic Faith Delivered*. Please contact the Director of Elementary Faith Formation for additional information. Decisions regarding requests to home school are made by the Parish Administrator.

Sacramental Preparation

The Elementary Faith Formation Program at St. Pius X also encompasses preparation for First Reconciliation, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation for eligible parishioners. At this time, we can only accept registered parishioners into our Sacramental Preparation programs due to limited capacity. The Elementary Faith Formation Program requires a minimum of one year of proximate formation prior to participating in the immediate formation for Sacramental Preparation.

First Reconciliation & First Holy Communion

Children entering Grade 2 prepare for and receive First Reconciliation and Holy Communion in the same program year. Children must have completed an **approved** first grade curriculum to participate.

Record of completion of the first grade curriculum (if not at St. Pius X) should be sent to the Director of Elementary Faith Formation upon submission of the registration application.

Confirmation

Children entering Grade 6 (and, in rare instances, Grades 7 or 8) prepare for and receive Confirmation in the same program year. Children must have completed an **approved** fifth (or, in rare instances, sixth or seventh) grade curriculum to participate.

Immediate preparation for Confirmation takes place within a 14-week period (Fall or Spring). Preparation for Confirmation also requires submission of a Saint Essay and regular examinations as determined by the Confirmation catechists. These are used to determine readiness and understanding of the sacrament.

Approved Programs

Approved programs are those offered through a Roman Catholic parish. Families who homeschool their children should be prepared to provide information about their Catholic Faith Formation curriculum upon request by the Director of Elementary Faith Formation.

Christian Initiation of Children

Children who are not baptized, baptized in a non-Catholic church, and those who have no formal Religious Education and wish to learn more about the Catholic Church are invited to learn more about the Catholic Church with their parents. Parents are asked to contact the Director of Religious Education who will work with parents to develop a catechetical plan to welcome these children into the Catholic Church according to the norms and customs of the Catholic Church.

Acknowledgement and Consent

Registration in the St. Pius X Religious Education Program constitutes acknowledgment and consent to the policies outlined in this Handbook. By completing the online registration, the parent/guardian affirms that they have received, read, and understand the contents of the Handbook and agree to abide by its guidelines.

Parents/guardians are expected to review these expectations with their children prior to the start of classes.

The Handbook is available on the parish website for reference. Any questions regarding its contents or requirements may be directed to the Director of Religious Education.