



Holy Redeemer Parish

August 2024

Dear Holy Redeemer Parishioners,

Hello! My name is Holly DeVivo, and I am your new Director of Faith Formation! I hope you all have had a restful, fun summer and are ready to get back into the school year. I wanted to reach out, introduce myself, and let you know about some exciting restructuring we have done to our Faith Formation Program for the 2024-2025 year.

This restructuring was designed by an incredible group of Holy Redeemer staff and Faith Formation Commission members in order to help our young people get the most out of Sacramental Preparation, as well as increase our offerings for High Schoolers, Young Adults, and (slightly less young) Adults. Our team has been working diligently over the summer and we are very excited about these new offerings. But first, a little about myself!

I must admit, when Father Phong first approached me to prayerfully consider the position of Director of Faith Formation for Holy Redeemer Parish, I was dumbstruck – which, once you get to know me, you'll understand rarely happens! I am a therapist specializing in forensic psychology, being the Director of Faith Formation was not on my 2024 BINGO card!

In all honesty, if it had been any priest other than Fr. Phong, I likely would have been less inclined to seriously consider his suggestion. However, I have known Father for nearly 15 years, and there are few people on this earth whose discernment I trust more. If he brings something to my attention, I must take it seriously. After speaking with my husband, many conversations with Jesus, and a steak dinner with Frs. Phong and Joseph, I believe that the Holy Spirit is calling me to this role, and I have a great amount of peace about it.

I come from a large Mexican family who, at one time, all belonged to the Church. My mother was raised Catholic and received all the Sacraments, however, her catechetical understanding of her faith was superficial at best. She knew she was Catholic, but she didn't know why she was Catholic. So, when an evangelical pastor approached her and asked her why she worshiped the Virgin Mary, she had no answer. This pastor (who is an amazing human being) was easily able to dismantle my mother's relationship with the Church because it was built on a foundation of sand. This new church allowed her to connect with a loving God who wanted a relationship with her, something she hadn't been taught in CCD. It was easy for her to leave the Church because, for her, the Church held no value. Her newfound love and relationship with the Lord were contagious and she was able to, quite easily, convert my eight brothers. Today I am heartbroken to say I am the only Catholic left in my family. I credit my continued commitment to the Church, in part, to the theological education I received from Aquinas College. I know what I believe and why I believe it, and I have a relationship with Jesus built on the foundation of His Real Presence.

My mission in this role is to help build relationships; relationships with one another, and relationships with Jesus. As a therapist, I value honesty, transparency, and communication – three things that I will bring to my role here at our parish. I promise to always be honest with you, no matter your questions or concerns, and to be transparent as I can in my work and in the goings-on of the Faith Formation Office. It is in the spirit of transparency and communication that I am writing this letter to you, to let you all know about the restructuring we have made to our Faith Formation Programs.

Day and Time

All of our Faith Formation programming will be offered only on Sundays, between the Masses, from 9:45 am to 10:45 am. This allows all family members to participate together, at a time when they are likely to be coming to participate in the Mass.

New Structure

One of the largest, most obvious adjustments we have made relates to the schedule of classes. Our classes will now be offered in 4-week sessions, with a one-week break between each session. The reasoning behind this is two-fold: we recognize that it can be difficult to dedicate an entire academic year to Catechism and Sacramental Preparation, both for our students and catechists. The 4-week sessions allow for catechists to volunteer for a session that they feel best utilizes their unique gifts and allow for others to volunteer who may not have been available for an entire year. It also increases our students' exposure to rich and diverse programming.

Attendance

Preparation to receive the Sacraments of First Reconciliation, First Communion, and Confirmation will have Required and Elective Sessions. Required Sessions are sessions in which attendance is mandatory in order to receive the Sacrament. Students will not be able to receive the Sacrament without attending these Required Sessions. Attendance is not required (though strongly encouraged!) for Elective Sessions.

In order to properly administer the Sacraments, students must be well-formed. Attendance is therefore very important for preparing to receive First Reconciliation, First Communion, and Confirmation. In order to properly administer the Sacraments, we are instituting an attendance policy. Students will be allowed **a total of 4** absences of Required classes throughout the academic year. These absences must be made-up by completing take-home tasks. Students who miss more than 4 classes, and/or fail to complete make-up assignments, will not be permitted to receive the Sacrament until the make-up requirements are met. We understand that families may



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have unique circumstances, so if the attendance requirements present an undue burden, please reach out to me directly.

High School and Young Adults

For our High Schoolers and Young Adults, we will also be offering 4-week sessions throughout the year, covering different topics each session. Our High School sessions will focus on Faith in Action, and we have some exciting opportunities planned for service to our community including Habitat for Humanity, Hand2Hand, and our own Holy Redeemer Food Pantry. We will be also offering simulations throughout the year meant to facilitate empathy towards our brothers and sisters who struggle with food insecurity, poverty, and homelessness. Our Young Adults are encouraged to participate in these sessions and simulations as well, and we have opportunities for them to participate in leadership roles throughout the year. Since many of our Young Adults are away at college during the academic year, we are planning special events for them during school breaks, so they can reconnect with our faith community.

Our middle school and high school youth ministry will also be restructured to emphasize our Living Faith. On weekends throughout the academic year, our young people will be able to participate in Community Action Adventures. These adventures will take place in a variety of settings including Degage Ministries, God's Kitchen, Cherry Street Health Services, and more! We will also present opportunities for our young people to participate in mission trips, service projects, as well as build connections with our Twinning Parish in Mexico. Our faith is alive, and these adventures will allow our young people to see the face of God in our brothers and sisters from all walks of life.

Adult Faith Formation

Our Adult Faith Formation offerings will likewise follow the 4-week session format. Each session will offer several class options including topics such as a Christian Perspective on Depression, The Palestinian / Israeli Conflict, Basic Spanish and American Sign Language. We are hopeful that these offerings will help you engage with other parish members and increase your awareness and understanding of important topics.

Sunday School and Nursery

Sunday School will be available for all children ages 4 through Kindergarten. We will also be offering Nursery (ages 3 and under) for adults participating in Faith Formation and Catechists only.

RCIA

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults will now be offered on Sundays, at the same time as Faith Formation. This will allow for greater opportunities for those interested in the faith, and those interested in being sponsors or teaching RCIA classes, to connect with our parish community.

Calendar and Registration

We have attached a calendar and tentative schedule for your review, and to hopefully clarify any questions you may have regarding the new structure. The dates for First Reconciliation and First Communion retreats are also on the calendar. We will present the dates for the Sacrament of Confirmation and retreat as soon as dates become available from The Office of the Bishop. *Please note participating in the First Reconciliation, First Communion, and Confirmation Retreat is required to receive the Sacrament.* Information regarding service hours for Confirmation students will be available the first week of classes.

To register for Faith Formation, please visit the parish's website: www.holyredeemerparish.org, click on Faith Formation, and then click "Register." A QR code and registration information will soon be available in the Flocknote and bulletin so you can register from there as well.

Faith Formation materials will be available for Catechists in the Faith Formation Office beginning the week of August 26th. Please stop by during business hours.

From the entire Faith Formation team here at Holy Redeemer Parish, as well as our Faith Formation Commission, we cannot wait to get this year started. This is going to be a fantastic year full of fun, faith, and learning. I look forward to getting to know all of you and sharing in these wonderful activities together!

Holly DeVivo

Holly DeVivo
Director of Faith Formation
(616) 669-9220 ext. 1101
holly@holyredeemerparish.org