

Saint John Vianney
Faith Formation / Religious Education
Family Handbook
2024-2025



With cooperation among parents, children, and staff, every year of Religious Education will be a time of learning the Word of God, growing in faith, and sharing in God's love.

It is our hope that parents will take an active interest in what is being taught to their children and will help their children learn the important lessons that are being taught.

May God bless our work, and may the power of the Holy Spirit be recognized and realized in our lives and in the life of our Parish Community.

Saint John Vianney Mission Statement

St. John Vianney Parish celebrates the one triune God through the cycle of Proclamation, Community, Service, and Worship. Our faith community is called to discipleship, evangelization, and ministry to the poor and poor in spirit in our parish, in our local community, in our Archdiocese, and everywhere our lives touch.

Faith Formation / Religious Education Staff

Leia Vranes

Director of Faith Formation
St. John Vianney Church
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Omaha, NE 68137
Faith Formation office: 402.895.0896
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Emily Pluta

RE Administrative Assistant
Faith Formation Office
Saint John Vianney Church

Phone: 402-895-0808
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Office Hours

Monday - Thursday: 8:00 am – 4:00 pm
Friday: 8:00 am – 12:00 pm
Saturday: 8:00 am – 4:00 pm

Reconciliation

Saturday - 4:00pm - 4:30pm

Faith Formation Office Hours

Monday: 9:00 am – 4:00 pm
Tuesday: 9:00 am – 1:00 pm
Wednesday: 9:00 am – 7:30 pm
Thursday: Closed
Friday: 9:00 am – 12:00 pm

All who enter the building on Wednesday evenings must check in with a hall monitor.

Mass Schedule:

Monday: 9:15am Communion Service
Tues – Fri: 9:15am
Saturday - 5:00pm
Sunday - 7:30am, 10:30am

Religious Education Wednesday Schedule

Grades 1-8: 4:15 pm to 5:30 pm (Period One)
Grades 1-8: 6:15 pm to 7:30 pm (Period Two)
*Parents are encouraged to attend closing prayer
10 minutes before the end of each class

Parish Office

Phone: 402.895.0808
Website: <http://www.sjvomaha.org/>
Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/SJVomaha>

Building and Classroom Standards

Students are reminded that we share facilities, and they are to be used with care. Please encourage your children to:

- Respect others and the property of others
- Handle all materials with care
- Dispose of all trash appropriately
- Act in an appropriate manner when in the building

*Snacks are occasionally allowed by the discretion of your child's Catechist. **REMINDER, WE HAVE A PEANUT FREE EDUCATION CENTER.**

Expectations

You, the parent, are the most important component in the religious education and formation of your child. St. John Vianney's Faith Formation/Religious Education program exists to supplement the teaching of the Catholic faith that you live at home. **There is no adequate substitute for the active involvement of parents in nurturing their child's emerging faith as disciples of Jesus Christ.** It is the parents who encourage their child's personal response to God's words and gifts.

In our program, parents and catechists (teachers) are partners supporting each other in their efforts to provide religious education for the children.

We are a resource for your child and your family. We see your child approximately 30 hours a year. It is up to you to make the decision that your faith is important – then it will be important to your child. Take time to utilize the resources and lessons sent home. There is so much information available!

Catechists are volunteers from the parish community who generously give of their talents and time. All catechists are required to attend orientation and in-service programs during the year to help them work effectively with the children. All are encouraged to become certified catechists with the Archdiocese of Omaha.

You can expect for yourself and your family:

- a welcoming, loving atmosphere
- community-building activities and experiences
- growth in your family's relationship with God
- information to help make decisions based on Christian values
- preparation for leadership and ministry in the local community, church and world-at-large
- convictions that help you cope with modern trends of media morality, the "me first" generation and the desire for material possessions above all else
- an awareness of opportunities to act for peace and justice for humankind
- ideas and activities that can help bring new understanding of faith into your home

We expect:

- your involvement and interest in all facets of the Faith Formation/Religious Education program
- that you will talk with your child about each meeting and event related to the Religious Education program
- that you will contact your child's catechist at least twice during the year to discuss your child's progress
- that you will contact your child's catechist or the Faith Formation Office each time your child will not be attending class
- that you will contact the catechist or the Faith Formation Office if there is an issue with your child's participation so that we may assist with a solution
- your attendance at the parent information meetings and any other parent meetings related to a particular grade level
- your attendance at family reconciliations, Christmas program, and other special liturgical events
- your family's weekly attendance at Mass. This is an important component of your child's formation

NEW POLICY – Student Schedule Change Requests

It is very important that we keep classes the same throughout the year. Due to our ratios of children to catechist. Any time after the first two weeks of class, if your child needs to switch class times for ANY reason there will be a \$50 admin fee charged to you. The Faith Formation Director **MUST** be notified, in writing at least 1 week in advance of the requested change and the \$50 fee must be paid at the time of the request. Changes are requests, not a guarantee and at the discretion of the Faith Formation Director. Every change will be subject to the \$50 fee. *Example:* If you submit a request in November to change your child's class attendance time from 4:15pm to the 6:15pm you will be required to pay the \$50 admin fee before the request is fulfilled. If you submit a 2nd request that your child, be changed back to their original class period later on in the year, you will be subject to another \$50 fee.

Remember: Schedule Changes are requests **NOT** guarantees and **MUST** be submitted in writing with the \$50 admin fee to Leia Vranes, Director of Faith Formation at least 1 week in advance of the change.

UPDATED - Attendance Policy:

To assure continued quality of religious education for your children, ON TIME attendance is expected.

If a child cannot attend class, a phone call to the Parish Office before 4:00pm @ 402-895-0808 or email Leia Vranes: Lvrnes@johnvianney.org.

Students must be in their classrooms when class begins. No student may leave the parish premises during class time or during a parish activity without a parent being present in the Narthex. Students will not be dismissed early with notes—a parent must come to the Hall Monitor Check-in Desk located just inside of the 2 entrances where they will check-in and be given a Visitor badge. Only then will the parent be allowed to go to their child's room to pick them up.

Attendance is of utmost importance. We see your children for less than 33 hours per school year. Since attendance is so important, the Faith Formation Director will notify you if your child has 3 or more absences. We understand that situations arise and some absences are unavoidable; however, in order for students to receive the instruction for their current grade, they need to be in class. If absences exceed 4 days during the duration of the program, the Director may request that students repeat their current grade level. It is expected that your child attends all scheduled class periods and specially-scheduled events.

Attendance Policy – Sacramental Preparation Years

2nd grade: 1st Reconciliation/1st Holy Communion and 7th & 8th grade: Confirmation

It is of dire importance that a child in Sacrament Preparation classes attend all session so that they do not miss important and much needed formation.

- If a child misses 2 or more Sacramental Preparation classes per school year, they are at risk of being unable to participate in the Sacrament.
- ALL absences will result in makeup work being sent home.
- Confirmation prep is a 2-year process. To be eligible to participate in Sacramental Preparation and receive the Sacrament of Confirmation a child **MUST** have participated in the Religious Education Program for both 7th (Previous year) and 8th grade.

If there are any questions, concerns or issues, please contact the Religious Ed office immediately so we can work on a plan of action!

Arrival and Dismissal

Children should be dropped off at either set of doors. Parents wishing to come into the building and/or accompany their child to class are asked to park in the parking lot first. Children are to be dropped off by the sidewalk or accompanied across the parking lot by an adult. We do not want children running between parked cars across the lot. Children should arrive no sooner than five minutes before class begins and should be picked up promptly at dismissal time. All children are to go directly to their class rooms immediately upon arrival in a quiet and orderly manner.

ALL PARENTS OR GUARDIANS MUST ENTER THE CHURCH TO PICK-UP THEIR CHILDREN AT THE END OF THEIR CLASS PERIOD. CHILDREN WILL STAY WITH THEIR CATECHIST IN THE NARTHEX/CHURCH UNTIL THEIR PARENT OR GUARDIAN ENTERS THE BUILDING TO PICK UP THEIR CHILDREN. THIS IS FOR THE SAFETY OF ALL THE CHILDREN. CHILDREN WHO ARE NOT PICKED UP BY DISMISSAL TIME MUST REMAIN INSIDE THE BUILDING. THEY WILL BE ASKED TO WAIT BY THE FRONT OFFICE IF THEIR RIDE IS LATE. DISMISSAL IS SUPERVISED BY THE HALL MONITORS, CATECHISTS, AND AIDES.

You are welcome to visit your child's room, but we ask you set up a time with the Faith Formation Office. Please remember all parents and other visitors must report to the Hall Monitor Check-in Desk upon entering the building. This is a safety precaution for our children. Please refer to and sign the "Drop off and Dismissal Map and Instructions Sheet" attached to this handbook.

Student Textbooks & Family Pages

The catechists will send home the lesson pages from the book. **Parents are encouraged to look at the lessons with their child during the week.** Catechists invite parents to do additional work in the pages with their child since their gathering time here at church is limited. Books are consumable and are the property and responsibility of the child. Replacement of any textbook will cost \$50.00.

Sacramental Preparation

Children usually receive the sacraments of **Reconciliation** and **Eucharist** for the first time in second grade and **Confirmation** in the eighth grade. Parents are required to attend the sacramental parent meetings for each sacrament their child receives.

Confirmation preparation is a life-long process. Children should attend some type of religious education from Kindergarten through Grade 8 at a Catholic Church or school. Retreats, service, parent and sponsor involvement are a required part of this program.

The Catch-Up Class - *ONLY be offered at Mary Our Queen* - prepares older children (Grades 3-8) who are baptized Catholic or non-baptized, have had no previous religious education, and have not celebrated one or more of the sacraments, or children interested in initiation into the Catholic Church. Please contact the Faith Formation Office if you are interested in this program, or if you know of someone who would be eligible for this program.

If your child has **special needs**, we would like to meet with you to discuss possible options for religious education. Please contact our Director of Faith Formation, Leia Vranes, at 402.895.0896, or lvranes@johnvianney.org.

Personal Disciple Information

To make the year more enjoyable and to allow us to compassionately handle any behavior caused by external factors in your child's life, please notify his/her catechist and the Faith Formation Office of any special situations that exist within your family. These might include pending divorce, granted divorce, aged grandparents living with you, health problems of other family members, single parents, visitation rights of non-custodial parents, death in the family, separations. Any notifications will be kept in the strictest confidence.

Health Concerns and Medications

If your child has a health problem that may affect his/her routine, please notify the Faith Formation Office. Examples may include food allergies, asthma, ADD or ADHD. No medication of any kind (including both prescription and over-the-counter) may be administered to, or taken by, the child during Religious Education classes. If any exception has to be made, the parent must provide a written request and directives.

Covid-19 information

Below is the 2024-25 Saint John Vianney "Back to School Protocols", developed after consultation with metro area public health departments. It's important to note that these protocols may be modified over time based on changing circumstances and may change for a specific, program, classroom, or settings based on cases, contact tracing, community conditions and risk of spread.

COVID Protocols for all children, parents, and volunteers:

All children are expected to meet in person each Wednesday evening or Sunday morning, unless the following apply to your child:

- Everyone must self-screen for symptoms prior to entering buildings.
- If symptoms exist, the individual must stay home and call the Parish Office @402-895-0808 immediately to report your child's absence.
- If anyone, (children, parents, volunteers, or staff) test positive for COVID-19, he/she must stay home for a period of 5 calendar days. Please report any positive COVID-19 case, so we can notify parents of children that might have come in contact with anyone who tested positive.
- We will continue with frequent hand washing and using hand sanitizer.
- Sanitation protocols will continue to be followed within reason of our limited staff.
- Masks are optional at this time but subject to change at any time under the discretion of the Faith Formation Director & Pastor.

Emergency Information

Emergency information will be on file in the Faith Formation Office. This information must be kept current at all times. In case of illness or injury, parents will be contacted by phone. If the parent cannot be reached, emergency phone numbers will be called. In the event of an emergency which requires medical attention, the parent will be notified and the child will be transported by ambulance, if necessary, to the hospital at the parent's expense.

Communication

Every family is given a calendar at the beginning of the Religious Education year. Please make note of this calendar. Any changes appear in the weekly Sunday bulletin or in notices sent home by email or with the youngest or only child. It is very important that you check with your child after each meeting to see if any such notices were sent home.

E-mails to parents, flyers sent home, and parish bulletin announcements are our major sources of ongoing communication. We will use email as much as possible. If you do not have an email address, we will send a letter in the mail or send the information home with your youngest or only child. Please read all e-mails and flyers, and check the parish bulletin each week for information for upcoming events. The Sunday bulletin can also be found at <http://www.sjvomaha.org/bulletins/>.

Dress Standards

Ideally, a child's choice of attire and grooming should be left to the good judgment of the child and his/her parents or guardians, and should contribute to a positive learning environment. The following clothing or types of dress are not permitted:

1. Dress which either causes or has the potential to cause either a substantial disruption or material interference with the education process.
2. Dress which creates or has the potential to create a health or safety problem/risk.
3. Dress which contains vulgar or offensive language or is sexually explicit/indecent/lewd.
4. Dress and other personal item which promotes or advocates the use of illegal drugs; liquor or tobacco products/including displaying the logo/trademark or any brand(s) of alcohol or tobacco.
5. Oversized baggy pants may be worn only with a belt that secures the waistline above the hips.
6. Hats and caps are not to be worn in the parish building.
7. Halter tops, mid-drift tops and tank tops found to be revealing and disruptive to the educational process are not to be worn in the building.
8. Violations of the dress standards will result in disciplinary action.

Discipline and Procedures

Our catechists, aides and hall monitors are volunteers. They offer their time, talents, and energies to the religious education of our parish youth. They deserve utmost respect, consideration and support at all times. In order to understand and teach the child, the Director of Faith Formation and catechist should be made aware of any special needs the child may have. Christian conduct on the part of the students is expected at all times. We ask parents to talk with their children about contributing to a good learning environment. We hope that the catechist in most instances can forestall a problem from escalating into a major incident by simply requesting the disciple to stop the behavior and return to acceptable behavior.

~ **1st offense:** A warning is given by the child's catechist.

~ **2nd offense:** If behavior does not stop or is a continuation of habitually bad behavior, the child will be sent to the Faith Formation office under supervision of the Director of Faith Formation. The catechist gives documentation of the incident to the Director of Faith Formation. The catechist or the Director of Faith Formation notifies the parents either verbally or in writing.

~ **3rd offense:** The child will be sent to the Faith formation office. The Director of Faith Formation will contact the parents to pick the student up and have a discussion of the problem. A written report will be made of the incident.

~ **4th offense:** Catechist contacts the Director of Faith Formation. Parents will be asked to come in to meet with catechist, director and pastor to determine if child will remain in the program. It may be necessary for a parent/guardian to sit with the child during the regular gatherings or to home school the child. We reserve the right to remove the child from our program if cooperation is not evident by child or parent. Incidents and discussions will be documented in writing.

Parents should be aware and communicate to their child that the following behavior is absolutely unacceptable and can result in the child being removed from class:

- Bullying – we have zero tolerance for this
- Cursing
- Non-requested physical contact with another student or catechist such as hitting/fighting in any manner
- Any type of verbal abuse to any person, peer, catechist, or volunteer
- Disrespect for, or abuse of, any part of the parish facilities
- Drinking alcohol, smoking or using drugs illegally
- Having weapons of any kind
- The use of all cell phones (If a child's phone becomes a distraction, it will be taken to the Faith Formation Office and a parent must come up to retrieve it)

Catholic schools, religious education and youth ministry programs have no Constitutional restraints on the use of search and seizure. The Gospel certainly demands that everyone be respected and that unnecessary intrusions into person and possessions be avoided.

If a young person is suspected of having weapons or drugs in his or her possession, the Director of Faith Formation will conduct a search. An adult staff member or volunteer will witness the search. A decision to search will involve some suspicion of wrongdoing on a young person's part. That individual will be asked to cooperate. If the person refuses, the parents will be contacted to come to the program site and assist in the search. If the parents do not cooperate, it will be determined by the director and Pastor if the young person will remain in the program.

Parents are expected to communicate the rules of the program to their child.

UPDATED Policy: Parent/Family Education and Mass Opportunities

At different times during the year, we offer Holy Day Masses, RE Family Masses, adult education and family learning opportunities. If any of these special events are on a Wednesday, these are considered a class/gathering for Religious Education students. We ask that if families cannot attend, they inform the Faith Formation office before the event.

****We hold a specific grade level family night once each month. Each grade will be assigned a different month during the school year. All families are **required** to attend together on their designated night for a fun family activity. *The Tentative date for each grade level Family Night will be on the Religious Ed School calendar. At least ONE Parent or Grandparent is required to attend with your child.***

****We will also be having conferences once a year (Mid-year – Date to-be-determined) so you can get to know your child's teacher and know how your child is doing. This will be **required** for every family to attend. If you are not able to attend it is up to you and the catechist to reschedule.**

Emergency Class Cancellation

All snow and weather-related announcements will be put on our website at www.svjomaha.org. There may be situations where gatherings for Wednesday evening must be canceled. Our policy for weather cancellations follows Omaha Catholic Schools policy. If Omaha Catholic Schools are closed due to weather, then Religious Education gatherings are canceled for the evening. Other instances may arise, and each instance will be handled individually. We will try to post cancellations on our Facebook Page, our website, and notify parents by e-mail if possible. There will also be cancellation signs posted on the doors or outside.

Fire Safety and Disaster Preparation

All catechists and students will be made aware of fire/tornado/severe weather procedures. Catechists are aware of the lockdown procedures in case of emergencies.

Safe Environment/Circle of Grace

All volunteers who work with children on a regular basis are required to attend Safe Environment training through the Archdiocese and undergo a background check. According to law, St. John Vianney staff and volunteers are required to notify Child Protective Services and law enforcement officials if they have *reasonable* cause to believe a child has been subject to abuse or neglect. The parish cooperates fully in the investigation of such cases. The Archdiocese of Omaha provides a program called "Circle of Grace." It is an age-appropriate program that reinforces that children are valued by God and others. It gives them information on boundaries and practical directives of what to do if someone makes them feel uncomfortable when in their Circle of Grace. It is a good foundation for healthy relationships that will help them throughout their lives. For more information, please see the Circle of Grace Parent Packet and Parents First Packet available in the Faith Formation Office.

Service Projects – Separate from 8th grade requirements

Service to others has always been a priority at Saint John Vianney Parish. Every year the St. John Vianney Religious Education/Formation program participates in the baby bottle campaign and baby shower for Essential Pregnancy Service. For more information, visit their website: <http://essentialps.org/services.html>. Another project would be bringing food for our St. Vincent de Paul Pantry any time during the year. Our parish participates in a Christmas Project to help those less fortunate. Please read the bulletin each week for more information about these projects and possible service opportunities throughout the year. We appreciate your help and support in teaching our disciples the importance of helping people in need.

If you have a 5th through 12th grader, please ask them to consider the following: Would you like to be more involved with Saint John Vianney Parish? Would you like to learn more about the Mass? Would you like to meet other kids and have fun, too? Become an Altar Server! Altar Server trainings are announced in the Sunday Bulletin.

"Our faith calls us to work for justice; to serve those in need; to pursue peace; and to defend the life, dignity, and rights of all our sisters and brothers. This is the call of Jesus, the urging of his Spirit, the challenge of the prophets, and the living tradition of our Church." (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)

If, at any time throughout the year, you have questions or concerns about your child's religious education/ formation, please let Leia Vranes, the Director of Faith Formation know. You may call 402.895.0896 or email lvranes@johnvianney.org. In order for us to provide the best experience for your child, we need to be aware of any possible problems.