

Catholic Parent **KNOWHOW**

Practical
Pointers,
Scripture
& More

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Bringing

Allelu! Home

Home



Discover the Beauty of Our Catholic Faith

Dear Parents,

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls the home “the first school of Christian life” (CCC 1657) — meaning that by God’s design, families are the first and primary place children learn about God. As children watch their parents living out the Christian life, they grow in the Faith.

Allelu! is a preschool religion program that understands and values the essential role of families in forming children’s faith. For this reason, the program contains a variety of ways parents can share their faith with their children.

This booklet contains an overview of the development of the pre-kindergarten child, a summary of the six basic tasks of faith formation and how to help your child in each of these areas, a summary of the key themes your child will explore this year in *Allelu!*, and a prayer for parents. Keep it as a reference throughout the year as you work together with your child’s teacher to help your child discover the treasures of our Faith.

Each week, your child will also receive an *Allelu!* Activity Sheet, designed in the form of a placemat, with specific sections you can use for sharing with your child.

In addition to the Activity Sheets, be sure to take advantage of other resources, such as the *Allelu!* music CD, which contains the music your child is learning to go along with the lesson materials. Music can be a very powerful way to learn new information, especially when it includes catchy, age-appropriate lyrics and tunes that children find easy to remember.

And finally, be sure to check the *Allelu!* Web site, Allelu.com, for additional activities for parents and kids, family podcasts, and a wealth of family-friendly information on various topics covered in the *Allelu!* program.

May God richly bless you as you help your child discover the beauty of our Catholic Faith!

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Families are the first and primary place children learn about God.

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Your Pre-K Child

Although preschool children grow more slowly than infants or toddlers, they learn new skills every day, often causing us to marvel at how much they are growing up.

Your pre-K child has more balance, coordination, and physical strength than s/he did just one year ago, and may be more skilled at activities like running, riding a tricycle, or even skipping and hopping.

Your child's mind is also growing by leaps and bounds. Four-year-olds have about a four-minute sustained attention span, meaning that they can pay close attention to one thing for about four minutes without becoming distracted. Children at this age learn best through experiences, through observing others and imitating, and role-playing. This is why both hands-on learning and pretend play are critical to the healthy development of the pre-K child.

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Language skills are developing quickly at this age as well. Parents can encourage their children's language development by reading to their children often and, of course, engaging them in conversation about their thoughts and experiences.

Pre-kindergarteners are just beginning to separate reality from fantasy, so they can struggle with the difference between what is true and what they wish were true. The pre-kindergartener may also engage in "magical thinking" — the belief that thinking bad thoughts can make something bad happen.

Socially, pre-K children may have the ability to join new groups of playing children if they have some prior experience in social settings. However, children at this age can also be quite bossy and somewhat controlling — they tend to assume that others see the world as they do. But overall, pre-kindergarteners are increasingly interested in, and able to interact with, their peers. They are able to make more choices on their own, and their attention and problem-solving skills are growing.



growing vocabulary

big ideas

role-playing

memory



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The Pre-K Child and the Six Tasks of Catechesis

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The *General Directory for Catechesis*, our Church’s “instruction book” for how to hand on the Catholic faith to others, discusses six tasks of catechesis, or religious education. They are:

- **Promoting Knowledge of the Faith**
- **Liturgical Education**
- **Moral Formation**
- **Teaching to Pray**
- **Education for Community Life**
- **Missionary Initiation**

Keeping these tasks in mind helps us to ensure that we are handing on a complete picture of what it means to be Catholic and giving future generations a solid spiritual foundation. Let’s examine these tasks, one by one, with some attention to the developmental level and needs of the pre-K child.

Learning about God and the Church (Promoting Knowledge of the Faith)

Pre-K children have hopefully learned from watching their parents that there is a God who made them and who made the world, but their very concrete style of thinking makes an abstract concept like an invisible God very difficult for them. They mostly understand God from the way in which they see their parents and others praying and acknowledging God in their lives. They also discover Jesus and the saints through icons and other concrete symbols of our Faith, so it’s important to have child-friendly (and child-accessible) pictures, statues, and other visible objects available to them. Stories, which are at the heart of



Hemera

our Judeo-Christian tradition, are another excellent tool for promoting knowledge of the Faith in pre-K children.

Allelu! helps accomplish this task of catechesis with engaging, developmentally-appropriate Scripture stories in the Discovering time, and concrete activities that reinforce the Faith in the Exploring time.

Celebrating with the Church Family (Liturgical Education)

Because of their short attention spans, pre-K children sometimes find Mass difficult. However, parents can capitalize on the sensory experiences of our liturgy to keep children engaged and help them begin to worship with the community.

For example, parents can note the changes in the colors of vestments and decorations when the liturgical season changes, even creating the expectation prior to a Mass that will mark a new season (e.g., “When we go to Mass



Praise Pic

today, things in the church will be a different color because we are getting ready to celebrate Jesus' birthday in a few weeks at Christmas. Can you guess what color things will be today?”).

Encourage children to participate in kinesthetic aspects of the liturgy (e.g., blessing themselves

with holy water when entering the church, genuflecting before entering the pew, standing and kneeling at appropriate times) as another way of appealing to their hands-on learning needs. Sit close to the front so your child can see what is happening, and explain special rites before they occur. A children's picture missal may be helpful in helping your child mark different events in the Mass and know what to expect next. Liturgical stories in the Discovering time and worship-themed activities in Exploring, along with liturgical concepts reinforced on the take-home Activity Sheets of *Allelu!*, all help children learn about the liturgy.

Following God's Plan (Moral Formation)

Beginning very early in life, children learn that some choices bring good results, and some behaviors are punished. The earliest decision-making is made based on these criteria (“Does this action get me something I want, or something I don't want?”). This principle is still very much active in the four-old-child, but another influence is also becoming quite strong — the child's desire to please adults with whom he or she has significant relationships. Four-year-old children want to be thought of as “good” girls or boys, and knowing what behaviors are approved of and frowned upon by adults they love has a strong impact. However, the values the child is learning through the adult's approval or disapproval are still not internalized, so he or she may still think it's okay to engage in bad behavior when the adult isn't looking.

Allelu! assists in the moral development of children through discussions of God's rules for living, role-playing of positive behaviors, and information for parents about children's moral development.



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Talking to God (Teaching to Pray)

Teaching children to pray means more than just teaching them prayers. Traditional prayers are helpful because they allow us to pray together to God with one voice.

Simple traditional prayers should be introduced gradually as your child can understand them, so that he or she can really mean what you are praying. Less formal, spontaneous prayer allows us to converse with God as a friend and gives the child a strong sense of

God's presence in daily life. Using the forms of prayer mentioned in the *Catechism*, we can help children compose their own prayers by following this formula:



Praise Pic

The Pre-K Child and the Six Tasks of Catechesis

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Praise God for who he is

(e.g., “You are very big and strong”).

Tell God thank you for something

(e.g., “Thank you for the food you give us”).

Tell God you are sorry for something

(e.g., “I’m sorry I hit my brother today”).

Ask God for something

(e.g., “Help me to be brave at the dentist tomorrow”).

Ask God to help someone else

(e.g., “Please help my Grandma get well”).

Allelu! helps children learn to pray through prayer times in each session. Prayer times in *Allelu!* lessons draw from various forms of prayer and help children to learn both traditional prayers and how to pray in their own words.

Your Child in Community (Education for Community Life)

Education for community life includes forming your child’s understanding of his or her place in the Christian community as well as helping your child learn about your family’s connection to the neighborhood or town in which you live, especially with regard to service to those in need. The Christian family is the child’s first experience of the community of faith.



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Another formative setting is the parish community. At home, it’s important that families spend time together — for example, at family mealtimes — talking and listening to one another. Family identity is critical and can be strengthened both through family

rules (e.g., “In our family, we use our words instead of fighting”) and family rituals (how we celebrate holidays and birthdays, and everyday hellos and goodbyes, including bedtime routines).

Connecting with other families in the parish, especially those who have children your child’s age, can be an excellent way of helping your child identify himself or herself as a member of the church community. Activities of service in the surrounding community, such as a neighborhood trash cleanup or visiting the local



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nursing home as a family, can help your child experience practical ways in which he or she can give to others and make the community a better place.

One strength of the *Allelu!* program is the way in which lessons are structured to foster community among the children in the group. In the Gathering and Sending times, children come together as community — praying together, sharing, and listening to one another. Exploring time includes opportunities for children to engage in cooperative activities that allow them to further their learning together.

Sharing the Faith (Missionary Initiation)

Pre-K children naturally want to share the new things they are learning, and *Allelu!* gives families helpful tools to make this sharing easier. Be sure to use the Activity Sheets your child brings home as his or her placemat at your family table. During mealtime, take the opportunity to ask your child the “Ask Me” questions on the Activity Sheet, review the other items on the pages, and pray together as a family. Also, be sure to engage your child in conversation about any craft projects he or she brings home, and invite your child to share songs he or she has learned.

Allelu!

Growing and Celebrating with Jesus

Activity Sheets



Some of the most significant moments of Jesus' own ministry centered around meals (e.g., Jesus' meals with his disciples, the feeding of the 5,000, etc.). The Eucharist is a special kind of family meal that is also more than just a meal — when we celebrate the Mass, Jesus offers himself to the Father, and we offer ourselves with him. Considering all this, what better time is there for families to come together and talk about their faith than at mealtimes?

Each Activity Sheet gives you . . .

This Week's Scripture Story Condensed versions of the lesson's Scripture story along with discussion starters to share with your child at bedtime.

Ask Me! Questions that help your child remember and share what he or she learned in class, and invite you to share your thoughts about the lesson with your child.

It Helps to Know Catechism and Scripture points that help you review each topic on an adult level.

How Four- and Five-Year-Olds Understand the Lesson Insights, written by a Catholic child psychologist, to help you understand how children of this age view each lesson.

Keep it Simple Natural, practical opportunities for making this week's lesson come to life in your family's daily routine.

This Year in Allelu!

The Ages 4-5 level of Allelu! focuses on five basic areas:

- **God and his relationship to us**
- **The life and teaching of Jesus Christ, and how it applies to us**
- **The parish — its activities and traditions**
- **Making good choices**
- **Seasonal celebrations of the Church and their meanings for us**



The year will begin with opportunities to make new friends and learn more about ourselves and others in our group.

Unit One presents some basic teachings about God, including that we know God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that God made each of us.

Unit Two discusses God's promise to send his Son, and how that promise was fulfilled, through Mary, in the birth of Jesus Christ. This unit also discusses some of Jesus' miracles and teachings.

Unit Three begins by reflecting upon our families and the Holy Family, and children will be encouraged to understand the parish as a kind of "family" in which we learn and celebrate our Faith.

Unit Four discusses the importance of following our parents' rules, basic principles of getting along with others, and how to say we are sorry when we have hurt others by our actions or words.

Unit Five discusses the seasons, as well as Jesus' Ascension and the events of Pentecost Sunday.

After each lesson, your child will receive a take-home Activity Sheet that will help you to review and reinforce the themes of the lesson at home.

A Parent's Prayer

Dear God,

Thank you for the privilege and responsibility of parenthood. Being a parent helps me to realize better the love and care you have for each of us. Help me to follow your call in my life – to grow in knowledge and practice of my faith. Guide me so that I may teach my child well, by word and by example. Protect him/her when I cannot be there. Give him/her the grace to become all you have created him/her to be.

Amen

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