

Catholic Parent **KNOWHOW**

Practical
Pointers,
Scripture
& More

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Bringing **Allelu!** Home

AGES 3-4

Using the Family Components of Allelu!

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. In families, this learning usually takes place not through structured lessons but through the events of everyday life. 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 three- and four-year-old children, 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 with specific sections of text and activities that 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 age-appropriate lyrics and catchy tunes that children are likely to remember. An additional resource is the *Allelu!* website, Allelu.com, which contains additional activities for parents and kids, family

podcasts, and recommendations of where to go for further 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!



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

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YOUR PRE-K CHILD

Three- and four-year-old children are growing quickly in many different ways — physically, intellectually, socially, and spiritually. You may have marveled at how grown-up your child is looking. Most children this age no longer have the appearance of toddlers. Their taller stature and longer legs make them look more like older children. They also are gaining skills rapidly that allow them to learn and do more than ever before.

Children this age are naturally very curious and ask many “why” questions. They have only been talking for a couple of years, and already they are using 4-to-6 word sentences and a vocabulary of about 300 words. Three- and four-year-olds can engage in simple conversations. The rapid language development of children this age sometimes means that they talk faster than they think, and this can lead to saying things that don’t make much logical sense, especially when they are upset or excited. Three- and four-year-olds can sometimes be like little attorneys, arguing their cases when they are not getting their way. But sometimes their arguments can be a little hard to follow!

Just as three- and four-year-olds are better talkers than before, they are also better listeners. They can follow two-step directions and pay attention to short stories.

The memories of three- and four-year-olds have improved as well. They can understand simple concepts related to time, such as “now” and “later.” Most children this age can describe what happened the day before and can recall up to three visually presented objects. Three- and four-year-olds are able to see relationships between some objects and pictures, and can identify which object doesn’t belong in a group of objects.

Three- and four-year-olds are beginning to expand their social relationships. They like to be with other children and can begin to participate in group activities, but they are still working on mastering basic social skills, such as sharing and taking turns. Three- and four-year-olds love to get approval from adults and want to be thought of as “good boys” and “good girls.” They enjoy helping adults when possible. Still, three- and four-year-olds are very limited in their ability to understand how others feel. They are the center of their worlds, and they are growing in their knowledge of themselves. They can identify their age and gender, and they take pride in the things they can do on their own.





The Three-to-Four-Year-Old Child and the Six Tasks of Catechesis

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 three- and four-year-old children.



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

Three- and four-year-olds who are growing up in a Christian household have hopefully heard some things about God, but they are very concrete thinkers, so it is difficult for them to have a concept of something they cannot see, touch, or otherwise experience with their senses. 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. Because three- and four-year-olds can now pay attention to short stories, brief, developmentally appropriate tales from the Bible and the lives of the saints can be another excellent tool for promoting knowledge of the faith in children this age. Simply written, illustrated children's books of Bible stories can be wonderful tools for parents in teaching basic faith concepts. **Allelu! helps accomplish this task of catechesis through engaging, developmentally appropriate Scripture stories in the Discovering time of each lesson. Faith concepts are reinforced through concrete activities in the Exploring time.**

Celebrating with the Church Family (Liturgical Education)

Because of their short attention spans, the Mass can sometimes be a difficult experience for three- and four-year-old children. However, parents can

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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 (for example, "When we go to Mass 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?") Encouraging children to participate in kinesthetic aspects of the liturgy is another way of appealing to their concrete, hands-on learning needs (for example, blessing themselves with holy water when entering the church, genuflecting before entering the pew, standing and kneeling at appropriate times). Sit close to the front so your child can see what is happening, and explain special rites before they occur so he or she will know what to look for. 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 help children learn about the liturgy. Liturgical concepts are also reinforced through pictorial activities on the take-home Activity pages.**

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-year-old child, but another influence is also becoming quite strong – the three-year-old's desire to please the grown-ups that are important in his or her life. Three- and 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 can make a big impression. However, the values the child is learning through the adult's approval or disapproval are still not internalized, so children this age may still think it's okay to engage in bad behavior when the adult is not looking.

Parents can encourage their child's moral and character development at this age, by setting clear and consistent expectations, presenting consequences that are logically related to behaviors, and by role-playing situations in which they would like their children to change a behavior or add a new behavior



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The Three-to-Four-Year-Old Child and the Six Tasks of Catechesis

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to their repertoire. *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.

Talking to God (Teaching to Pray)

Teaching children to pray means more than just teaching 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.

***Allelu!* helps children learn to pray through prayer times in each class 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. Another formative setting is the parish community. At home, it is 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 (for example, "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).

Participation in age-level catechesis and other children's activities in the parish can provide a special opportunity for your child to feel a sense of belonging. **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 activities include opportunities for children to engage in cooperative activities that allow them to further their learning together.

Sharing the Faith (Missionary Initiation)

Allelu! includes developmentally appropriate stories and faith concepts that will not only be fun to learn – they will be easy to share! Pre-K children naturally want to share the new things they are learning, and *Allelu!* gives families helpful tools to facilitate this sharing. Be sure to use the Activity Page your child brings home from class as his or her place mat at your family table. During

mealtimes, take the opportunity to ask your child the "Ask Me" questions on the Activity Page, 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 from class, and invite your child to share songs he or she has learned on lesson themes.



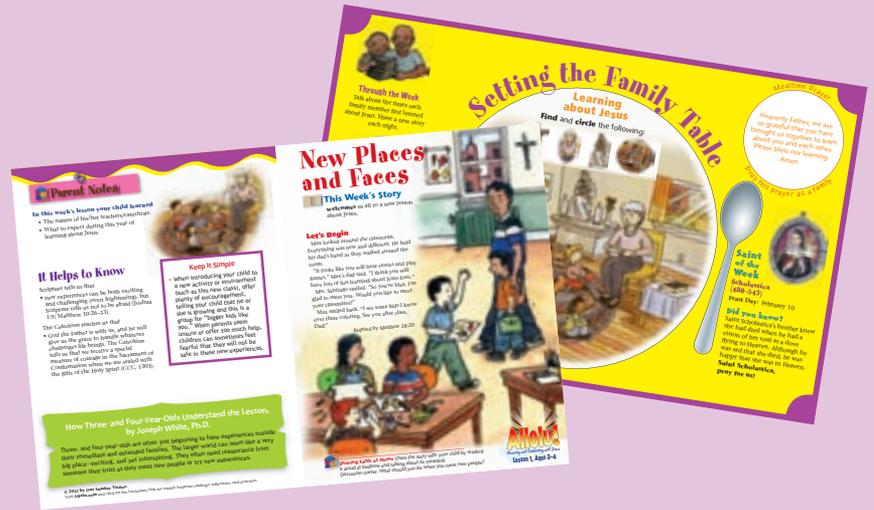
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Allelu!

Growing and Celebrating with Jesus®

Activity Sheets



The *Allelu!* Activity Sheets your child will receive each week are designed in the form of a place mat to reinforce the importance of shared mealtimes to faith and family. Some of the most significant moments of Jesus' own ministry centered around meals (for example., Jesus' meals with his disciples, the feeding of the 5000, etc.). The Eucharist, a special kind of family meal, is at the center of our worship today. And, regular family meals have been shown to be highly correlated with current and future healthy child functioning. 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 — A condensed version of the lesson's Scripture Story, along with an overview of its key points, and discussion starters to share with your child at home.

Ask Me! — Questions you can use to prompt your children to remember and share what he or she learned in class and to create an opportunity to discuss with your child your own thoughts on the key points of the lesson.

It Helps to Know — Includes Catechism and Scripture points to enable you to review each topic on an adult level.

How Three- and Four-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 each week's lesson come to life in your family's daily routine — the most effective and important place for children to learn about their faith.

This Year in Allelu!

The Ages 3-4 level of *Allelu!* focuses on five basic areas:

- God and our relationship to him
- The Church, its activities, and its traditions
- The birth of Jesus and the life of the Holy Family
- Jesus' ministry and teaching
- Birth, growth and new life in our lives, Creation, and the life of Christ



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The year will begin, in **Unit One**, with opportunities to make new friends and learn more about ourselves and others in our group. We will also learn how God made all things, including us, and how God loves each one of us. We will talk about the relationship of love we have with God and with our families.

In **Unit Two**, we will begin by learning about baptism. We will also talk about the Church around the world and our own parish communities. We will discover our mother Mary and talk about all of the wonderful things God has given us.

Unit Three discusses John the Baptist's proclamation that Jesus is coming and the events leading up to and including the birth of Christ. We'll discover more about the life of Christ in **Unit Four**, as Jesus meets the children, calls his disciples, heals others, calms a storm, and teaches us how to love our neighbor.

In **Unit Five**, we will talk about saying we are sorry when we have hurt others. We will also talk about other new beginnings, such as Jesus' death and resurrection and the life cycle of things in creation, such as plants and animals. Finally, we'll talk about how each child is growing and changing.

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

Prayer for Parents

Dear God,

Thank you for the gift of my child. I am filled with awe that you have entrusted me with the life of this little soul. Help me to be the parent you made me to be. Guide me so that I may teach my child well, by word and by example. Protect him/her when I cannot be there. Help me to see and follow the plan you have for our family.

Amen.

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