

ALIVE IN  
CHRIST

*Catholic Parent*®  
KNOW HOW



## How to Help Kids Pray

**4** Ways to  
Support  
Your Child's  
Religious Education  
Program

**Catholic**  
*Essentials*  
Family and Mass

***Year by Year***  
**Guide to**  
***Alive in Christ***

# Catholic Parent Know-How: *Alive in Christ*

## Dear Parents,

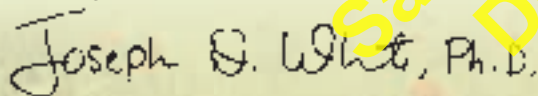
The beginning of the school year means the beginning of an exciting year of religious education for your family!

This year, your parish is using the new curriculum program, *Alive In Christ*, published by Our Sunday Visitor. *Alive in Christ* presents a systematic and comprehensive overview for the basic teachings of our faith while helping children form a relationship with Christ and his Church. Lesson material is presented in a developmentally appropriate manner at each grade level, and every lesson includes resources for parents and families to discover, celebrate, and live our faith in the home.

This guide will help you know what to expect from your child's religion program, as well as offer resources to help reinforce and support your child's learning. General information about how lessons in *Alive in Christ* are organized and what is covered at each age level are at the center of this booklet. You will also find tips and tools to help grow in faith at home through family prayer and activities.

May God bless you in this coming school year as you and your children continue to explore the riches of our Catholic faith!

Blessings!



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*Nihil Obstat*: Msgr. Michael Heintz, Ph.D.  
Censor Librorum

*Imprimatur*:

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Bishop of Fort Wayne–South Bend

July 15, 2013

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Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.

Published 2013.

15 14 13 12 11 1 2 3 4 5 6

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Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division  
Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 200 Noll Plaza,  
Huntington, IN 46750, 1-800-348-2440;  
bookpermissions@osv.com

ISBN: 978-1-61278-759-6  
(Inventory No. X1567)

Design by: Amanda Falk  
Cover photo by: Shutterstock  
Page 2 photo: Shutterstock

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



# The Family that Prays Together

Perhaps the most important lesson we can teach our children is that God loves them. However, to truly teach our children about God's love for them, we must teach them to have conversations with God. We must teach them to pray.

At its best, prayer occurs within the flow of family life. Blessings before meals and prayers in the morning and evening are natural opportunities to integrate prayer into daily life. Other opportunities for prayer arise, for example, when a loved one is hurt or ill, or when facing a specific challenge.

Creating a prayer space in the home can be helpful for children because it serves as a constant reminder of God's presence and our need to connect with him. A simple home altar might consist of an end table or a decorator table with a religious statue, a Bible, and a candle. You might also want to place various sacramentals, such as the Rosary, in your prayer space.



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## How to Help Kids Pray

The forms of prayer we use with children depend in part on their age and interests. Very young children will benefit a great deal from the use of pictures and statues. They can be encouraged to say "Hi" or "I love you" to Jesus depicted in a statue or painting. They can be taught to make the Sign of the Cross and to sing hymns. As children grow, they may be taught about spontaneous and traditional Catholic prayers.

**TRADITIONAL PRAYERS** (such as the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be) are valuable because they enable us to pray together, in one voice, as God's people. They highlight our unity of faith and purpose. Traditional prayers also give us a repertoire from which to choose when we are not sure what to pray. Traditional prayers should be introduced gradually as children are able to understand them.

**SPONTANEOUS PRAYER** helps us to develop the unique relationship God desires with each of us. It is important to teach children to both thank God for what he has done (the blessings he has given us, etc.) and to praise God for who he is (all-powerful, almighty, loving, and just). Other forms of prayer include petition (making our requests known to God) and intercession (praying on behalf of others). Prayers of contrition and reconciliation are also useful for children to learn, especially when they are taught in the context of God's unconditional love ("God always forgives us when we are truly sorry").



*"Jesus said, 'Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these'" (Mt 19:14). May God richly bless your efforts to share his love with your children.*



# CATHOLIC *Essentials*

***“We need knowledge, we need truth, because without these we cannot stand firm, we cannot move forward. Faith without truth does not save, it does not provide a sure footing.”***

(Pope Francis, “The Light of Faith,” encyclical, no. 24)

## THE FAMILY

“Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2223). Through their words, guidance, and example, parents form the child’s first experience of the faith and continue to be the child’s most important faith teachers. Be sure to talk with your children about God and the Church, and spend time as a family in prayer. Pay attention to the example you provide for faithful Christian living. Be as involved as possible in what your children are learning in class, and reinforce the lessons at home.

## THE MASS

The Mass is the central celebration of God’s family, the Church. It is the primary place where we gather as family and worship God in communion with one another. Remember that the formative experience of parish religion classes complements, but does not replace the family participation in the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. Be sure to make family attendance at Mass a weekly priority. You can help your children learn from the Mass by encouraging them to follow along.

# A YEAR BY YEAR

As parents, you look for natural opportunities to teach your children how children develop and what they are most ready to learn about their faith as opportunities for prayer and reflection and integration.



## First Grade JESUS CHRIST

*“For through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:26)*

- Because this is the beginning of formal religious education for many children, and because the aim of catechesis is “communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ” (General Directory of Catechesis, 80), it is logical to focus first-grade catechesis around the person of Jesus.
- First graders are just beginning to move beyond the developmental self-focus of the preschool years, so an introduction to a relationship with Jesus and the Church community is appropriate.
- First graders are beginning to move into a cognitive stage of rule-based thinking, so this is a great opportunity to provide them with the basic teachings of the faith.

## Second Grade

## THE SACRAMENTS OF PENANCE AND EUCHARIST

*“This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.” (Luke 22:19)*

- Children this age are in the cognitive stage of “concrete operations.” They understand cause and effect and know the world works according to rules. Therefore, this is a great time to introduce God’s rules and guidelines for living.
- Because they have reached the age of reason, second graders are better able to understand that the Eucharist is not ordinary bread and wine, because Jesus said it was his Body and Blood.
- Second graders are concrete thinkers and need many hands-on activities and practical explanations. Our approach to teaching the Sacraments should be step-by-step and very concrete. This is a good time to learn the steps of the rites, parts of the Mass, and basics of what the Church teaches about the Sacraments.





# GUIDE TO *ALIVE IN CHRIST*

important life lessons. The topics in the Alive in Christ series are presented with careful consideration to the faith. Each lesson incorporates the teachings from the Sacred Scriptures and our Sacred Tradition, as well as how to apply them into daily life. The following is a year by year guide to the primary focus of each age level:



## Third Grade THE CHURCH



*“I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit.” (John 15:5)*

- Children this age have entered what social/developmental theorist Harry Stack Sullivan called the “chumship stage,” when same-age peers become very important, and children often have “best friends.” For this reason, it is an ideal time to focus on the parish community.
- Third graders are more aware of the larger world, so this is a good time to talk about the larger worldwide Church and how it is organized.

## Fourth Grade THE MORAL LIFE



*“This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.” (John 15:12)*

- Fourth graders are beginning to internalize standards of behavior. Their consciences are growing quickly, and they are gaining a sense of “right” and “wrong” that goes beyond just what might bring them punishments or rewards. This is a

great time to work with them on what it means to be disciples of Jesus.

- Fourth graders are good at using their reasoning skills, but they still don’t have a firm grasp on hypothetical reasoning. This means they have difficulty imagining things or situations they have not yet experienced. Acting out making good choices in a moral dilemma will be especially effective, since all of us are more likely to do the things we practice.



## Fifth Grade THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS



*“The water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:14)*

- Fifth graders are growing in their ability to understand symbols and signs. This makes fifth grade an ideal time to take an in-depth look at the Sacraments and rites of the Church.
- Fifth graders are also in a stage of identity development in which they begin to seriously consider who they

will be when they are older. This makes this age an important time for learning about vocation and the Sacraments at the service of Holy Communion.



## Sixth Grade THE WORD OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT



*“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path.” (Psalm 119:105)*

- Children in sixth grade are growing in their abstract-thinking ability and have made great strides in reading and writing ability. This makes sixth grade an excellent time to study Sacred Scripture and begin to connect the events of salvation history.
- Children in sixth grade are also becoming young adolescents, so this is an important time to strengthen Catholic identity by studying our faith ancestors and basic doctrines.



# 4 Ways to Stay Connected to Your Child's Religious Education Program

It is important to try and stay connected to your child's religious education program. Every parish is different, but certain elements are common in parish religion programs. Here are four things you can expect, and how you can support this important work:

**1. Focus on Jesus Christ:** Jesus is at the center of our faith. "The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but in communion, in intimacy with Jesus Christ (*Catechesi Tradendae*, On Catechesis in Our Time, no. 5). Through faith formation in the parish, children learn that Jesus is both the King of Glory and a close, personal friend. They grow closer to Jesus as they learn about his words and actions, connect with him in prayer, and become initiated into the Church community, the Body of Christ.



**STAY CONNECTED:** Talk to your child about what he or she is learning about Jesus and about how to follow the example of Jesus in everyday life, especially at home and school. Make it a family habit to ask what Jesus would do in various situations.



## Communication and collaboration with parish staff:

Because the role of parents in faith formation is so important, it is essential to have effective communication between parents and parish religious education staff. You will receive updates about what is happening in your child's religious education program, whether through announcements at Mass, electronic updates, flyers and bulletins, personal communications, or a combination of these approaches. This will help keep you connected to your child's faith growth.



**STAY CONNECTED:** Like all of us, parish DREs and catechetical leaders are very busy. Many programs do not have adequate staff, and even well-staffed programs can be hectic, especially at certain times of the year. Try to be patient with the catechetical leader, understanding he or she is working with many different families, and remember that catechists are usually volunteers and are giving of their time for this ministry. It is helpful to tell your catechist the best way to communicate with you (email, cellphone, etc.). Also, consider volunteering your time, either as a catechist or as an assistant, or perhaps as a helper for special projects or a substitute when a catechist has to be absent.



**3. Accurate presentation of Church teaching:** *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* is the standard used to evaluate the content of religious education for its faithfulness to Catholic teaching. The *Alive in Christ* textbook series has been found by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to be in conformity with the *Catechism*. The word *catechesis* comes from a Greek word meaning “to echo,” a reference to the idea that catechists echo the teachings of Jesus and his apostles. In addition, the primary focus in children’s catechesis is on the basics of our faith, rather than highly specialized topics. The content of catechesis reflects the six tasks of catechesis mentioned in the *General Directory for Catechesis* (promoting knowledge of the faith, liturgical education, moral formation, teaching to pray, education for community life, and missionary initiation).



**STAY CONNECTED:** Make sure that you, as a parent, are informed about the faith you have chosen to hand on to your child. Consider attending adult faith formation sessions so you can learn more about your faith on an adult level. Also, pay attention to the Scripture and *Catechism* references on the Family+Faith page that is included with each lesson in *Alive in Christ*. This will provide you with resources to get more information on the topics your child is learning and equip you to reinforce those lessons at home.



**4. Developmental Appropriateness:** In effective religious education programs, the basics of the faith are presented in a systematic way that is consistent with the development of the child. *Alive in Christ* presents faith topics in an order that takes into account a child’s intellectual, social, and moral development (for more information, see the article titled, “A Year by Year Guide to *Alive in Christ*”). While certain themes are repeated each year, the age-level focus is somewhat different for each grade level. Each year of religious education is important and builds upon the last.



**STAY CONNECTED:** Try to ensure that your child attends every session of religious education so he or she won’t miss something important. Be as prompt as possible so the class has time to thoroughly cover each week’s lesson. Also, be sure to look at the section titled “Children this Age” on the Family+Faith page in each lesson. This section is written to help parents learn more about how their child might understand the topic covered.







*Loving God,*

My child is a blessing!

Thank you for entrusting me with this precious gift.

Help me to care for my child — mind, body, and spirit.

Guide me as I work to be a good example  
in my words and actions.

Help me to be patient and present in the busy moments and  
fill me with your Spirit, that I may teach my child  
to follow your path.

Through all of life's changes and stages,  
help us to grow together in love for you and for one another.

*Amen.*



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Inventory No. X1567

US \$1.95

ISBN-13: 978-1-61278-759-6

50195



9 781612 787596