

ST AGNES CATHOLIC CHURCH

FIRST PENANCE FIRST COMMUNION HANDBOOK

2025-2026





ST. AGNES CATHOLIC CHURCH

ST. AGNES PARISH

REV. MONSIGNOR WILLIAM P. SAUNDERS
Pastor

REV. MICHAEL J. FOLMAR
Parochial Vicar

REV. RICHARD M. MALEBRANCHE
Parochial Vicar

REV. STEVEN OETJEN
Priest in Residence

LISA OROSA
Director of Faith Formation
dff@saintagnes.org

ISABELLA GRADO
Director of Evangelization & Adult
Faith Formation
adultfaith@saintagnes.org

LIGIA SANTOS
Administrative Assistant
secretary@saintagnes.org

JENNIFER CARPENTER
Child Protection Coordinator
protect@saintagnes.org

1910 N. Randolph St., Arlington, VA 22207

Main: 703.525.1166

www.saintagnes.org

Religious Education Office: 703.527.1129

MISSION STATEMENT

Called by our Lord Jesus Christ, and strengthened by His Word and Sacraments, as faithful Catholics, we strive to be missionary disciples of Jesus Christ, committed to sharing His love with one another and all in need.

CORE VALUES

Communion: Uniting ourselves with Jesus and other baptized Christians in the Church, which has its source and summit in the Eucharist.

Holiness: Embracing the "light, love and limitless possibility" communicated by the Holy Spirit and consecrating ourselves to doing God's will by uniting ourselves to His Son, Jesus Christ.

Joy: Delighting in the peace that comes from knowing God's love and manifesting His love to others in the hope of sharing in His glory.

Service: Promoting the dignity of the human person by sharing our God-given time, talent and treasure with others and in service to the Church.

Discipleship & Formation: Recognizing that conversion is a lifelong process, we commit to fostering a deeper relationship with God, living a fully sacramental life, sustaining our faith through ongoing catechesis and witnessing to the love of God through Jesus in our words, actions and relationships, and passing this on to our children.

Dear First Holy Communion Parents

This preparation time for First Penance and First Eucharist marks an important step in your child's formation in the Catholic faith. What a wonderful privilege it is for you to talk to your son or daughter about your relationship with Jesus; to teach them how much God loves them and waits for them in the Sacrament of Penance; and how Jesus, the Bread of Life, sustains us for the Christian journey!

Passing on the Church's faith in the love of God and the values taught to us by Jesus Christ, is the most important thing you can do as a parent. As children grow and learn, they make mistakes. It is all part of learning. Teaching your child forgiveness and humbly asking for forgiveness are important lessons in shaping them to become the person that God has created them to be. The Sacrament of Penance is an encounter with the merciful love of Christ that lets children know that there is nothing that they can ever do that will make God love them less. He waits for them with great love in the Confessional to offer His mercy and healing.

As parents, we nourish our children with good food to help them grow strong and healthy. Catholics truly believe Jesus' words in John 6:53-55: "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink." **When we receive the Eucharist, we receive Jesus Himself - Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity - in both the literal and spiritual sense of the word.** Jesus, who takes the form of bread and wine, comes to us to nourish us, strengthen us, and unite with us so that we may be one with Him and the Father and the Holy Spirit, and be empowered to live out our mission. The Holy Eucharist truly is the "source and summit of the Christian life." (CCC 1324)

This is the gift your child receives at First Communion. At every Mass, Jesus becomes entirely and absolutely present among us. Jesus Christ is God's total and absolute Love made flesh. As human beings we can't love like this. Yet, in the Eucharist, we receive Christ's Body and Blood so that we can experience this kind of infinite love. This infinite love is made manifest in the Eucharist. As we partake of the Eucharist, Christ intimately unites Himself to us, so we may participate in the Trinitarian Love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and share this Love with others.

The home is the primary place where faith is cultivated. Parents are their child's primary example of how to live as a Christian and you remain integral to your child's spiritual formation throughout life. By living a fully sacramental life, availing of the Sacrament of Penance regularly and the Holy Eucharist every Sunday, you model the trust, love and faith you desire for your children in their relationship with God. As you attend to your own personal faith formation and holiness, you model the true meaning of discipleship. As expressed in the words of every baptismal liturgy, the handing on of the faith is primarily the responsibility of parents, and you are described as the first and best teachers of your children in the ways of faith. You are not alone in this role. We, at St. Agnes, are ready to guide, support and encourage you as you lead your family to become intentional disciples of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessings,

Lisa Orosa
Director of Faith Formation
dff@saintagnes.org
703.527.1129

1ST COMMUNION AT ST. AGNES

YEAR TWO REQUIREMENTS

TAKE HOME WORKBOOKS

Students must complete two workbooks: Penance & 1st Communion. These workbooks are sent home to allow parents to share in the preparation of their children and grow together in their love for the Eucharist.

DUE DATES: January 6, 2026 (Penance WB) and April 14, 2026 (Communion WB).

MASS JOURNALS & BINGO

Attending Sunday Mass is the most important preparation to receiving First Communion.

Students are asked to thoughtfully complete the weekly Mass Journal sheets. In addition, optional Bingo cards will be given to students each month. Submit the completed Mass Journal & Bingo cards for a special prize at the end of the month.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT & FAMILY FAITH FORMATION

This special time of preparing children to receive Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist becomes more meaningful and memorable with the parents' active involvement in their child's preparation. With the Flipped classroom approach in RE classes, students are able to prepare for their Religious Education classes beforehand, with the help and support of the parents. This allows the catechist to devote more time to delve deeply into the Faith, and for more creative learning in the classroom. ST. Agnes School children are blessed to attend Religion classes 4 days a week.

Parents are expected to be actively involved with the formation of their children by helping them with lessons and workbooks, praying together as a family, faithfully attending Mass and availing of the Sacrament of Penance. In addition, RE parents are expected to participate in the monthly Family Faith Formation (FFF) sessions.

A family interview with one of our St. Agnes priest will be scheduled throughout the year to determine other ways that the parish can support our First Communion families.

STUDENT & PARENT RETREATS

Parents are required to attend a Parents Retreat for 1st Penance on Feb. 28, 2026 to help their students prepare for this sacrament of mercy. Students will go to their First Penance retreat on March 21, 2026. The First Communion retreat and rehearsal for both students and parents will be held on May 2nd, 2026.

FIRST PENANCE & FIRST COMMUNION

Students will receive their First Penance on March 29, immediately after the First Penance Retreat. Students are asked to wear their Sunday's best.

Families have two options to schedule their child's First Communion: May 10th or on May 17th at the 11AM Sunday Mass. Appropriate First Communion attire is required.

OTHER KEY DATES

Registration Deadline: September 26, 2025

Start Mass Journal & Bingo: October 5, 2025

Mass Journals due: 10/28, 12/2, 1/6, 2/3, 3/3, 4/14, 5/5

NOTE: Non-St. Agnes parishioners will need to submit a permission letter from their pastor to receive the Sacraments at St. Agnes



FIRST PENANCE/COMMUNION IMPORTANT CALENDAR DATES

2025

September 17 RE & FFF BEGIN	September 26 APPLICATION, PARENT AGREEMENT, FEE DUE	October 5 MASS JOURNAL BEGINS	
October 7 FAMILY FAITH FORMATION DAY	November 1 ALL SOULS HOLY DAY OF OBLIGATION	November 4 FAMILY FAITH FORMATION DAY MASS JOURNAL DUE	December 2 MASS JOURNAL DUE

2026

January 1 MARY, MOTHER OF GOD HOLY DAY	January 6 FFF DAY MASS JOURNAL PENANCE WB DUE	February 3 FFF DAY MASS JOURNAL DUE	February 28 1ST PENANCE RETREAT FOR PARENTS
March 3 FFF DAY MASS JOURNAL DUE	March 21 1ST PENANCE FOR STUDENTS	April 14 FFF DAY MASS JOURNAL COMMUNION WB DUE	May 2 1ST COMMUNION RETREAT
	May 10 1ST COMMUNION LITURGY #1 11 AM MASS	May 17 1ST COMMUNION LITURGY #2 11AM MASS	

FIRST PENANCE/COMMUNION PLANNER

☒ DON'T FORGET!

- ☐ 1st Communion Registration & Fee
- ☐ Weekly Sunday Mass Journals
- ☐ Monthly Family Faith Formation
- ☐ First Penance Workbook
- ☐ Schedule family interview with priest
- ☐ Memorize Act of Contrition
- ☐ First Penance Retreat - PARENTS
- ☐ First Penance & Retreat - STUDENTS
- ☐ First Communion Workbook
- ☐ First Communion Retreat
- ☐ Practice Reverence & Receiving Host
- ☐ Visit Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament
- ☐ Go to Confession 1-2 weeks before First Communion.
- ☐ Receive Jesus in the Eucharist every Sunday and holy days with great love.

FIRST COMMUNION ATTIRE

GIRLS should wear white dresses with shoulders and back covered (sleeveless dresses need to be covered, e.g. with a sweater; cap sleeves are okay) as well as white shoes, white socks or tights, and white veil. Dresses should be knee-length or longer.

BOYS should wear a white shirt, a tie, dress pants, dress shoes, and a jacket (conservative colors).

Gloves are not allowed, and the children may not carry anything in their hands at Mass (i.e. no purses, books, rosaries, etc.).

INSPIRATIONAL

"I think that many people do not fully understand the value of Mass, because if they recognized the enormous blessing we have in a Lord who gives himself as our food and drink in the Sacred Host, they would go to Mass every day to participate in the fruits of the sacrifice and let go of so many superfluous things."

- St. Carlo Acutis

PARENTS MATTER!

Parents are the best and primary models of faith, reverence and discipleship for children.

"Parents have only one good and hopefully effective way to raise children to understand and carry on their family's religion (or perhaps return to it someday after a period of disaffection). That is for parents simply to practice their own personal religious faith, naturally, for its own sake and as role models for their children. If all goes well, children will over time learn, absorb, and embrace their own version of that faith, almost unconsciously." (Religious Parenting by Smith, Ritz, and Rotolo, 179)

St. Agnes Catholic Church

First Penance & First Holy Communion

PARENT PREPARATION AGREEMENT

I will make every effort to participate fully in my child's preparation to receive these sacraments, specifically:

I will help my child with religious education assignments and overall sacramental preparation at home. I will schedule and attend a family interview with one of our St. Agnes priests.

I will ensure that my child competently completes their assigned lessons on Word of Life in preparation for class each week and attends class in person. My child will not be absent from RE class for more than 4 classes. As an RE parent, I will also attend the monthly Family Faith Formation sessions offered. As an SAS school parent, I will ensure my child is supported in Religion class.

I will help prepare my students by working with them to complete their First Penance and First Communion workbooks and help them prepare for their assessments to gauge their understanding and readiness to receive the Sacraments.

I will take my child to Mass on Sundays and holy days, in person. I will help them complete their Mass Journal each Sunday.

I will attend to my own personal faith formation and avail of the opportunities given by St. Agnes, especially the 1st Penance Retreat for Parents and the 1st Communion Retreat (Student & Parent).

I will make sure that my child attends the First Penance Retreat on March 21, 2026. I will also ensure my child attends the First Communion Retreat & Practice on May 2, 2025.

Finally, I will be a living and holy example to my children, teaching them the Faith and living a fully sacramental life through personal and family prayer and growing in virtues.

Name: _____

Student Name: _____

Signature: _____



Teach the Faith



Sunday Mass



Confession



Retreat

FIRST PENANCE/COMMUNION RESOURCES

Arlington Diocese RE Guidelines & Standards of Learning

<https://www.arlingtondiocese.org/catechetical-resources/religious-education-guidelines/>

Word of Life

<https://www.augustineinstitute.org/program-and-resources/word-of-life>

Formed.org

Create an account by choosing St. Agnes Church and using zip code 22207 to access content for both children and adult formation.

Blessed Series by Dynamic Catholic

First Reconciliation: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZisXcLIZva4ZGET7CPqvgB75PFXZfVo7>

First Communion: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZisXcLIZva6wnuJgKnPxNo-GJOHu5wKF>

Eucharistic Miracles

<http://www.miracolieucaistici.org/en/Liste/list.html>

Recommended Children's Books

Heavenly Hosts: Eucharistic Miracles for Kids by K. Sweggart

I Look at Jesus and Jesus Looks at Me by Nannet Horton

Great Adventures Kids Catholic Bible Chronicles by Amy Welborn

The Children's Book of Virtues by William J. Bennett

Adult Formation Resources

<https://hallow.com/>

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Ascension Edition

Jesus & the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist by Brant Pitre & Scott Hahn

Theology of Home by Carrie Gress & Noelle Mering

Go to saintagnes.org for information on adult Bible studies, special events and other Faith Formation opportunities.

THE EFFECTS OF HOLY COMMUNION

