

# Deepening Grace: an offering for children and parents

**Who:** 1st - 3rd graders and their parents

**When:** January 26, February 2 & 9 (10:10 to 11 a.m.)

February 23 (noon to 3:30 p.m.)

**Holy Communion in the main church on Sunday March 2 (9 a.m.)**

As Christians we are eager to share the sacrament of Holy Communion with those who seek to receive this nourishing gift of divine presence. While a special course of instruction on Holy Communion is not required to receive this sacrament in the Episcopal Church, many—children and adults alike—may find it enriching, instructive, even transformative to spend several weeks in a course designed to deepen one's participation in and appreciation of Eucharist and its centrality to the Christian life.

During elementary school, children enter what is known as the age of reason, a profound phase of development, and one in which the religious formation of the child is particularly impressionable. It is an intensely sensitive time that we believe the church should take great care to nurture. In this developmental phase, children are uniquely engaged in becoming more aware not only of their own moral compass but of a discerning inner voice.

Deepening Grace is a five-week series for children and parents based on meditations from the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, a Montessori-based approach to religious formation. This series is designed with the spiritual life of the elementary-age child in mind, with simultaneous presentations given to their parents. Deepening Grace is a community-building relational experience for all involved—among children, among parents, and within families.

This formation opportunity is offered in three one-hour sessions, beginning January 26 and culminates with an afternoon retreat on Sunday, February 23. The following Sunday, March 2, children and parents participating in this program will receive Communion together in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist with the larger church at the 9 a.m. service. (There is no session on Sunday February 16 due to the holiday weekend.)

Children in grades 1 through 3 are invited to participate. The children's class led by the Rev. Abby Kocher will gather on Sunday mornings at 10:10 a.m. during the formation hour. Concurrently in Many Parents One Vine, parents will engage the

same themes as their children in conversations led by the Rev. Cate Anthony and other St. Stephen's clergy. Parents who register their children should plan to attend these parent sessions themselves.

The capstone retreat on the afternoon of Sunday, February 23 will begin at noon with lunch and end at 3:30 p.m. This retreat time is for the children; parents (siblings welcome) should arrive at 3 p.m. in Palmer Hall to join closing worship. It is a very special experience to share as a group and important not to be missed. Family ministry staff will lead the retreat.

If you anticipate that you and/or your child would miss more than two sessions, it would be better to wait until later. In other words, you can miss one of the Sunday mornings but must attend the retreat in order to fully participate. St. Stephen's Church offers other opportunities for parishioners of all ages to learn more about Holy Communion: in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd for children, inquirers classes for adults, and the youth Confirmation program. Also, if you or your child have not been baptized, please be in touch. We would love to explore this further with you.

If you have questions, please contact Abby Kocher ([akocher@ststephensrva.org](mailto:akocher@ststephensrva.org)).

Blessings,

The Rev. Abby Kocher  
The Rev. Cate Anthony