

**St. Mary's Religious Education
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FAMILY HANDBOOK



Religious Education Program

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*****The Church of St. Mary Religious Education Program reserves the right to amend this handbook and will notify parents of changes.

INTRODUCTION

As members of the church, we are all given the joy and responsibility of handing on the Catholic faith to our children. As part of our Baptismal obligation, we accepted the responsibility of training our children in the practice of the Catholic faith. To assist in this responsibility, The Church of St. Mary provides religious education/faith formation preparation for pre-school through high school students. The Family Handbook was developed as a tool to help the families of The Church of St. Mary become familiar with the policies and procedures of our parish religious education program.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION MISSION STATEMENT

The mission statement of the Religious Education Program is:

- To nourish the lives of children, teens and adults by building a strong moral and spiritual foundation
- To increase knowledge of our religious fundamentals and inspire the growth of sacramental awareness
- To develop an awareness of the demands of justice and stewardship
- To be in accordance and compliance with the National Directory for Catechesis (NDC)

The Church of St. Mary views religious education as a total parish experience that engages not just the child, but also parents, families, catechists, clergy and other religious leaders that form our parish community of faith. The religious education program reflects an integrated learning experience comprised of catechetical instruction in: traditional Catholic doctrine, prayer, biblical studies, liturgy, sacramental preparation, service, and the understanding and development of Catholic moral values. Furthermore, the religious education program exists to assist parents in their responsibility of forming their children in the Catholic faith into which they have been baptized. This is according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, page 543, 2252: “Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children in the faith, prayer, and all virtues. They have the duty to provide as far as possible for the physical and spiritual needs of their children.”

ADMISSION AND ATTENDANCE GUIDELINES

Students are registered in the religious education program by filling out a registration form. A copy of your child's Baptismal certificate must be provided for First Communion and Confirmation if your child was baptized at another parish.

The registration form requires the parent to provide an emergency contact, field trip permission, and publishing permission. In addition, parents are asked to provide pertinent information regarding any special needs which may affect the teaching/learning experience for their child (e.g. medical conditions, learning disabilities, custody issues, etc.). **This information will be kept confidential and will be used with discretion.**

There will be an annual fee per student with a maximum per family. This fee is expected to be paid. Fees may be adjusted as needed to meet current expenses. All students are provided with appropriate materials for their grade level, such as textbooks, prayer sheets, Bibles, folders, and class schedules. The religious education office will assign children to a class and no changes in a class will be made without consultation with the Ministry Coordinator.

Every effort should be made to have your child attend every scheduled class. Excused absences will be accepted for illnesses and/or family circumstances. **Parents are asked to notify the religious education office in the event their child will be absent.** When a class is missed, parents should obtain the lesson and assist their child in completion of the lesson. Notification of class cancellation due to bad weather will be broadcast on KXRA 1490AM/92.3FM, Z99.3 and KIKV 100.7FM. If District 206 is closed, we are also closed.

Any child with physical, emotional, mental, or learning disabilities will be provided with religious education instruction. The church is responsible to nourish the faith of the baptized person to the degree the individual is capable of growing. Parents may request a consultation with the Ministry Coordinator and/or catechist to determine the best approach to help their child grow in faith.

Regular Mass attendance is also an essential part of our lives as Catholics. The Mass is the 'source and summit' of our Catholic faith. Children learn by example; we encourage all parents to share the Mass celebration with their children each Sunday and on Holy Days of Obligation.

It is recommended that you notify the religious education office if your child will not be returning to the religious education program (i.e. moving to another town).

ROLE OF THE GOVERNING/ADVISORY BOARDS

The Church of St. Mary's Board of Education supervises the total education of the parish, including St. Mary's School and the Religious Education Department. The duties and functions include establishing all governing policies, coordinating and evaluating the effectiveness of the parish education programs, and any other issues related to education. The Religious Education

committees serve as advisory committees and oversee the curriculum, instructional materials and assessment of the religious education program, and provide recommendations/input for continuous improvement to The Church of St. Mary's Board of Education.

ROLE OF THE MINISTRY COORDINATOR

The Ministry Coordinators are responsible for the development, implementation, administration and evaluation of their specific religious education program.

ROLE OF THE CATECHIST

A catechist is a person of faith who has been called to communicate God's love by proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ and creating an atmosphere for the Holy Spirit to bring about growth in faith among the members of our parish. Catechists are commissioned to teach the truths of the Catholic faith and will follow the official church teachings.

Our church values the ministry of the catechist and views them as an essential element to the catechetical mission of our parish. All catechists are registered as volunteers in the parish. They are provided with initial and ongoing training in order to ensure a high quality of religious education. Also, all catechists are encouraged to continue their faith formation through diocesan and local programs that are offered periodically.

ROLE OF THE PARENT/GUARDIAN

Parents are a child's first and enduring teachers. Parents play a crucial role in helping their children learn and are expected to take the primary role in their child's faith formation. It is essential to the child's growth and development in the Catholic faith that the parent/guardian live the life of faith at home.

Parents/Guardians:

- Act as the primary educators of their child.
- Initiate their child into the sacramental life **through regular Mass attendance**.
- Serve as role models for their child by being moral Christians.
- Help their child in forming a good conscience and a Christian code of morality.
- Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation regularly with their families.
- Participate in meetings, activities and prayers that are planned to help their child prepare for the sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Confirmation.
- Encourage their child to continue learning more about their faith as they mature.
- Help their child understand service projects are the beginning of a life committed to Christian service.

ROLE OF THE STUDENT

Students are expected to:

- Attend class regularly.
- Participate in class activities and discussions.
- Attend and participate in planned church visits and liturgical celebrations that are scheduled by the Ministry Coordinators.
- Respect their catechist and classmates at all times.
- Respect others property-students do not use materials in the desks in the classrooms.
- Accept responsibility for his/her conduct or actions: no abusive language, fighting, vandalism, stealing, or disrespect will be tolerated.
- Complete any requirements for class or program.

COMMUNICATION AND CONCERNS

Parents should communicate to the Ministry Coordinator any questions or concerns regarding their child's religious education. Parents are encouraged to establish a relationship with their child's catechist. Parents are encouraged to assist with activities throughout the year.

Christian standards dictate that complaints should be handled on the level where they can best be resolved. To circumvent the line of communication can have negative influence on the Christian community.

If a parent has concerns about catechists, Ministry Coordinators, or anything else involving their child's religious education program at St. Mary's, the following procedure should be followed:

Ordinarily the first contact should be made with the offending party to resolve the problem. If a satisfactory solution is not achieved, the parent should next seek help from the Ministry Coordinator. If that fails, the parent may ask for a meeting with the Pastor and/or the Parish Administrator.

PROGRAMS

All materials used in The Church of St. Mary Religious Education Program are cross-referenced to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) and supported by scripture. The four pillars of the CCC are belief, worship and sacraments, the moral life, and prayer, which are expressed by the creeds, the Mass, the Ten Commandments, and prayer styles. Specific detail on lessons for each grade level is readily available in the religious education office.

Our religious education program offers instruction for preschool through high school children in the Alexandria area. The program includes the preparation for the reception of the sacraments of First Reconciliation, First Eucharist, and Confirmation. Just as sacraments are an integral part of the Christian life, so too, each grade in the religious education program adds to the development of the Christian life. The overall goal of the program is to provide an environment in which our parish youth can grow in sound Christ-like attitudes and values.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SPONSORED TRIPS AND ACTIVITIES

If a trip or activity is planned for a catechetical program, the Parent Authorization Release Form and Medical Attention must be completed by the parent/guardian of each minor who will participate. Telephone calls will not be accepted in lieu of written permission forms. Great care will be taken to ensure the safety of the students during the entire course of the trip, including the provision for appropriate supervision. Catholic Mutual Group (insurance) guidelines will be followed.

DISCIPLINE

All students must obey the rules set forth by their catechist. We expect all students to act in a kind and courteous manner at all times. In turn, catechists are expected to respect each student. No physical discipline or humiliation on the part of the catechist is ever permitted and will not be tolerated. Unsatisfactory or inappropriate student behavior will also not be tolerated. Disciplinary infractions include, but are not limited to: abusive language, fighting, vandalism, stealing, habitual tardiness or absenteeism, throwing of any objects, possession of dangerous objects, possession of tobacco, possession or use of a controlled substance, leaving the building without permission, or disrespect to a catechist or other student. Catechists are not required to be baby sitters nor are they professional educators. They are volunteers who give of their time to pass on the faith to the children of our parish.

The following steps will be used to handle discipline problems. A child may be removed from class if the situation does not improve.

- Step One: Student will be verbally warned and asked to correct behavior.
- Step Two: If the student does not correct his/her behavior, the student will be asked to leave the class and the problem will be addressed between the student and catechist. If the student agrees to correct his/her behavior, the student will be allowed back into class.
- Step Three: If Step Two does not correct behavior, parents will be notified and asked to meet with a religious education staff person, along with the student, at which time all must agree upon proper behavior before the student can return to class.

SAFETY ISSUES AND PROCEDURES

The safety and well being of all children in the religious education program is very important to all staff members and catechists, and every effort will be made to ensure a safe environment exists at all times. It is the responsibility of the Ministry Coordinators to make certain that all students and catechists know exactly what to do in an emergency situation. The Emergency/ Disaster Preparedness Plan will be the comprehensive guide used to manage safety issues and concerns. A complete copy of the plan is available in the religious education office.

Preschool through second grade students must be escorted by their parents to their classrooms or designated meeting area and picked up at the classrooms. Students will not be allowed into the classrooms until the catechist arrives. No student will be permitted to leave class early unless the parent has made arrangements with the catechist prior to the start of class. Students and parents will be asked to exercise caution when arriving and leaving the school/church premises to alleviate any safety issues.

Accidents

If an accident occurs to a student while attending any religious education program function, the catechist or religious education staff member will take the following steps:

- If bleeding is involved, the procedures outlined under Blood Borne Pathogens, which are documented in the Catechist Handbook, must be followed.
- The catechist/staff member must report the accident immediately to the Ministry Coordinator.
- The Ministry Coordinator is responsible to notify the parents.
- The Ministry Coordinator will complete the St. Cloud Diocesan Schools-Accident-Injury Report form when required.
- The catechist/staff member or Ministry Coordinator will call 911 or the local police/emergency rescue squad when needed in a serious situation.

Medication

No medication of any kind (including both prescription and over-the-counter) will be administered to, or taken by, a student during any religious education program function. If an exception has to be made, the parent must contact the Ministry Coordinator to provide the necessary information.

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT POLICY

Guarding the dignity of all members of the parish community is a priority for all catechetical leaders. Any form of demeaning behavior has no place in any religious education program.

Effective September 1, 2007, the Diocese of Saint Cloud has implemented a new and revised comprehensive sexual misconduct policy. Complete details of the policy can be found on the diocesan website: http://www.stedio.org/new_misconduct.html or a copy can be obtained from the religious education office. This policy is applicable to all clergy of the Diocese, and to all clergy, religious, and laity who are in ministerial or volunteer positions within the Diocese of Saint Cloud. As well, the policy states that the Diocese of Saint Cloud regards sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and sexual harassment against all persons as sinful and a grave violation of the justice and respect that must govern human relationships. The policy is intended to address violations of civil, criminal and Canon law.

Any student or parent complaint alleging abuse by a catechist or staff member will be thoroughly investigated. Credible allegations of child abuse or molestation will result in immediate suspension of the catechist or staff member. Each reported incident will be immediately investigated, with care taken not to interfere with any civil/criminal investigation, and with a high level of Christian care, concern, and confidentiality for all persons involved. The procedures outlined in the diocesan policy will be followed to investigate any alleged incidents of sexual misconduct.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Valuables

The religious education staff and catechists cannot be responsible for valuables that a student brings to class. It is recommended that all valuables be left at home.

Lost & Found

All clothing, money, jewelry, or other articles of value that are found will be kept in the religious education office or the school lost & found.