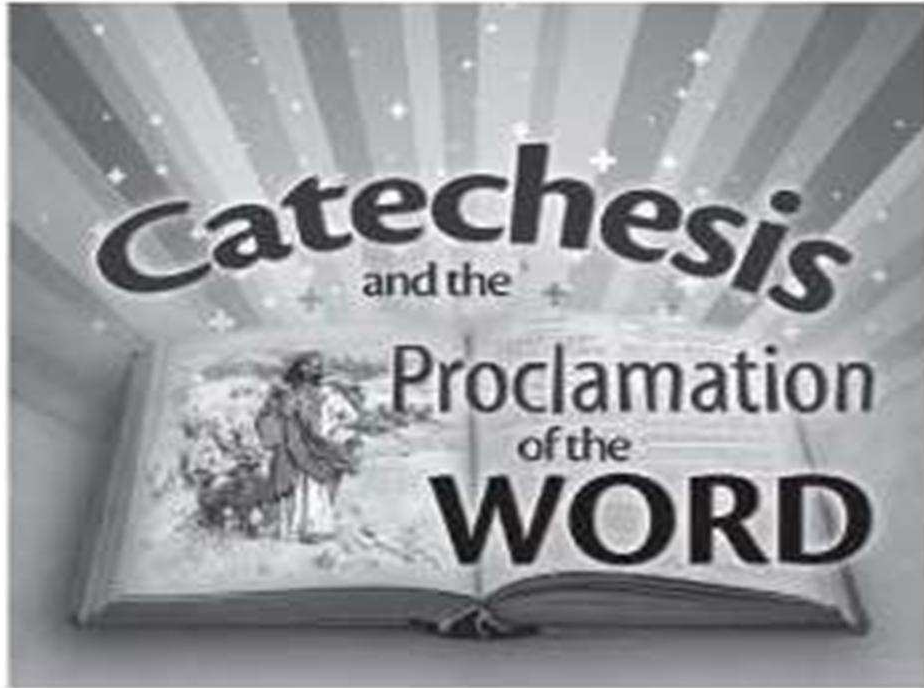


St. Mary's Catholic Church
Parish School of Religion



Parent & Student Handbook
2009-2010

ST. MARY'S RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OFFICE STAFF

Father George Vrabel	Pastor	440-243-3877 ext. 14
Father Jeff Cornelius	Parochial Vicar	440-243-3877 ext. 17
Brian Krezman	Director of Religious Education	440-243-8221 ext. 22
Larry Roetzer	PSR Administrator	440-243-8221 ext. 24
Katie Drager	Teen Faith Coordinator	440-243-8221 ext. 23

Office Hours – when PSR is in session

Monday through Thursday 8:30am – 4:30pm

Friday 8:30am – 12:30pm

The Religious Education Office is also open during PSR sessions
(Sunday morning & Monday evening).

Office Hours – when PSR is not in session

Monday through Friday 9:30am – 2:30pm

Dear Parents and Guardians of St. Mary PSR students,

It is my honor to welcome you back for St. Mary's 2009-2010 PSR year. Thank you for taking the promise you made when your children were baptized to "train them in the practice of the faith" and to "bring them up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us by loving God and our neighbor" seriously. Joining with the parish community in a religious education program is one important part of fulfilling that promise.

Every year the United States Catholic Bishops agree on a theme for the catechetical year. This provides a point of unity for the millions of Catholics throughout the country as we strive to grow to a deeper understanding of our faith. This year's theme is "Catechesis and Proclamation of the Word." I hope these brief comments can help each of us to more fully explore this theme.

The #1 purpose of religious education or, catechesis, is to bring people in touch with an intimate relationship with Christ. This proclamation of the word is called "evangelization." We often think of "evangelization" as going door to door and explicitly preaching to others. St. Francis of Assisi's taught his friars to "Preach the Gospel at all times and if necessary use words." This is a living definition of "evangelization."

Take a look around your home. What is your family's most valued possession? Is it an object, a person, a relationship? How does your family express delight and pride in this treasured possession? For most of us, this might not be the easiest exercise. It may be a person, symbolized by a photograph or other memento. Or is it our television or video game console? Perhaps it is an heirloom such as china or crystal on display in a case, representing the family relationships which go through several generations. For some, it might be a family Bible or a religious article.

Forty-six years ago the Church declared at Vatican II that the "the treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly so that a richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's Word." We can ask ourselves if our families read the bible regularly and use it for prayer or let it collect dust as if nothing has changed in this half century.

That "richer fare" is available to us in two particular ways, at Mass and in private or group prayer, study and reflection on the Bible. Recent surveys have shown that few Catholics read the Bible on their own or as a family. By Sunday afternoon, most of us can't say what the readings on Sunday morning Mass were. But what better place is there to get to know Jesus than in God's Word? St. Jerome once noted, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ."

Earlier this summer, we made the registration renewal information available after all masses on two weekends. I must admit that even considering the statistics I was aware of and the fact that school had just ended and some families are away, it came as quite a discouragement to see how few families from our program (and overall) were present at the Masses to pick up the information. A Catholic community which is not attending Mass is a community which is drifting, slowly drifting away from Christ.

Perhaps the first step you can take is to make attendance and participation at Mass every Sunday (or Saturday evening) a top priority for you and your family. That would be a great starting point. Maybe you go to Mass but never read the Bible otherwise. Reading at least the Gospel from Sunday throughout the following week is a great place to start opening one's mind and heart to the Word. It can be amazing to recognize how God's word can give us direction we might have completely missed.

Jesus said that those who hear and act on the word do so "with a generous and good heart, and bear fruit through perseverance." (Luke 8:15) So we can all ask ourselves where our hearts are in relationship to the Word of God. We will have the thread of "Helping Hands.....Open Hearts" running throughout our religious education activities this year. We are privileged at St. Mary's, to have as our patron, the perfect model, Mary the mother of Jesus, to show us how to open our hearts and minds to the Word. Let us pray that she may be our guide as we strive to hear, proclaim and live God's Word in a heartfelt and knowledgeable way.

Catechetical Sunday, September 20, 2009, at 9AM Mass will focus on the bishops' theme. Our catechists will be commissioned for their ministry and we will all be challenged to reflect upon the role that each person plays, by virtue of Baptism, in handing on the faith and being a witness to the Gospel. Catechetical Sunday is an opportunity for all to rededicate themselves to this mission as a community of faith. Please come to the 9:00 Mass that day and support our generous catechists.

We have decided to lengthen Monday PSR from 75 to 90 minutes, which is the standard time in our diocese. So as not to keep Monday students out any later on a school night, PSR classes will now begin at 6:45 PM, fifteen minutes earlier than in the past. I would like to thank everyone who gave feedback on this issue. Please know that everyone's comments were taken seriously and we will do our best to help the transition be as smooth as possible for you.

May each of our hearts be opened to more faithfully proclaim the Word, especially with our Helping Hands.

Sincerely in Christ,

Brian Krezman

Director of Religious Education

ST. MARY'S PSR PROGRAM

The PSR Program

The Faith Formation Program.

St. Mary's PSR sessions are held at St. Mary's School, 265 Baker Street (one block north of St. Mary's Church.)

Sunday morning students are Preschool (4 years old), Kindergarten and Elementary grades 1-3. They meet on Sunday mornings from 10:30-11:45 AM. Sunday morning students enter through the side doors at the back of the school. For security reasons, these doors will be opened by 10:15 am and locked 10 minutes after the sessions begin. The doors will be reopened by 11:30 am for student dismissal.

Monday Evening Students are grades 4-7. They meet on Monday evenings from 6:45 - 8:15 PM. Monday evening students enter through the gym doors at the rear of the building only. All other doors will be locked from the outside. For security reasons, these gym doors will be locked 10 minutes after the evening sessions begin. The doors will reopen by 8:00 pm for student dismissal.

Students trying to enter the building after these times are asked to enter by the Religious Education Office (REO, front of the school, by the Media Center). This way attendance records will be updated properly.

We request that ALL Parents/Guardians be prompt in bringing their children to our Program.

The PSR Staff

St. Mary's PSR program is staffed by a dedicated and talented group of volunteer catechists who wish to share the Good News of Jesus with the children of the parish. These catechists take advantage of a variety of in-service sessions and diocesan training and certification opportunities to assure they are knowledgeable and up-to-date in Church teaching and classroom methods.

The program is overseen by a professional Director of Religious Education and an administrator responsible for the operation of the PSR Program and the office.

The Religious Education Office is located in St. Mary's School. It is staffed during the school year Monday through Thursday 8:30am - 4:30pm and Friday 8:30am - 12:30pm. During the PSR Year they are also available during the PSR session days/times. The phone number is (440) 243-8221.

Communication

We in the Religious Education Program are trying to be good stewards of our environment. Therefore, we are making every attempt to communicate electronically with our parents/guardians. At the beginning of the year we will be asking for email addresses so that we can inform you of events, activities and information that involve your child or affect our program. For the most current information, please consult our website at: www.stmarysbereareo.org.

PROCEDURES AND POLICIES

Student Etiquette/Behavior

1. All adult personnel are to be addressed in a polite, respectful manner, preferably as “Miss, Ms., Mrs., or Mr.”.
2. Radios, toys, snacks, candies, general reading materials and skateboards, etc. are not to be brought into class without the expressed approval of the PSR Administrator & the Catechist. Without such approval, eating, drinking, or chewing gum will not be tolerated in class.
3. Students should not wear inappropriate T-shirts, clothing or accessories to PSR sessions. Inappropriate includes, but is not limited to, clothing referencing alcoholic beverages, illegal drugs, weapons or themes inconsistent with Christian belief and practice.
4. Students’ personal needs should be taken care of before class time. There is not a recess break for this purpose. Individual consideration will be shown with parental notification.
5. Students will have assigned seats each week. If desks or their contents are damaged, parents/guardians will be notified and assessed an appropriate replacement value.
6. Homework assignments are to be completed on schedule.

Students who do not obey these policies will be subject to disciplinary action.

Curriculum

Weekly participation in Saturday (evening) or Sunday Eucharist (Mass) is the most essential part of each child’s ongoing faith development. Not only is participation in the Eucharist expected of every baptized Catholic, but it is the center of our faith life. The staff of St. Mary’s Parish cannot place enough stress on the importance of making regular Mass attendance a priority.

St. Mary’s PSR Grades 1-7 use the *Faith First Legacy Edition* textbook series from RCL. This is a faith-formation program for children and their families based on what Catholics believe, how Catholics worship, how Catholics live and how Catholics pray. This textbook is in accordance with the diocesan religion curriculum and approved by the U.S. Bishops committee for Catechesis.

Grades Preschool and Kindergarten use a lectionary-based hands-on program called *Seeds (P)* and *Promise (K)* published by the Pflaum Publishing Group.

To help spread our faith to our entire community and to reinforce our role as Evangelists in our world, each class (grades 1-7) will have a year-long project. These projects will be grade-appropriate. They will be approved by the REO Team and their progress will involve and be presented to parents, friends and family at the end of the school year.

PROCEDURES AND POLICIES – cont.

Classroom Discipline

Respect and courtesy are expected of every PSR student. Catechists will clearly state classroom rules and procedures during the first session of PSR year.

Routine discipline matters within the classroom will be handled by the Catechist. If the behavior continues or escalates, the Catechist may request support and/or assistance from the office. The PSR Administrator may come to the classroom to escort the disruptive student to the office. During this time, the student will be assigned tasks by the PSR Administrator or the DRE. These assignments will be documented and sent to the parent/guardian for review, signature and return to the DRE.

Parents/guardians will be called should a second visit to the office be necessary. If the disciplinary problem is not resolved, despite the best efforts of the catechists, the Review Board will convene to decide the best resolution to the problem. Their decision will be documented and discussed with the students parent/guardian before any action is taken.

The Review Board consists of:

The Parish Pastor
Director of Religious Education
PSR Administrator
Student's catechist

Students should always remember that when they gather they represent St. Mary's and always act accordingly.

Student Evaluation Forms

Parents/guardians of students in grades 1-7 will receive an evaluation form twice a year.

Evaluation forms will be completed and emailed to the parent/guardian of the students at the end of the First Semester (during the Christmas break), and at the end of the Second Semester (May time frame).

The Catechist will contact the parent/guardian of any student with a poor first semester evaluation at or before the end of the first semester to discuss ways to help the student.

If sufficient progress is not made in the second semester the Review Board will convene to discuss the matter.

PROCEDURES AND POLICIES – cont

Snow Days

When PSR sessions are cancelled, due to heavy snow fall or other inclement conditions, students will be notified by their Catechist. The status of class will also be reported on our website (www.stmarysbereareo.org). This information will also be reported on the following radio/TV stations: iAlert (Channel 3 & WTAM 1100AM) & NewsChannel 5's School Closing Network. Please do not call the rectory. If conditions are hazardous, parents/guardians should use their good judgment concerning coming to class.

Visitors Policy

No one is permitted to enter any classroom, after classes have started, without permission from the Religious Education Office.

Visitors are not permitted in the classrooms unless special arrangements have been made with the office prior to the visit.

Should a student bring a visitor to class, he or she **must** have permission from the catechist. The student **must** check in at the office with his or her visitor.

Recognizing that parents are the primary religious educators of their children, parents/guardians are encouraged to visit PSR classes. However parents are expected to notify the REO and make arrangements with the individual catechist before visiting classes. Please remember that the catechist has a lesson plan and is teaching the entire class, therefore any visitor to the classroom should not disrupt normal activities.

Protecting God's Children

Saint Mary's Parish is firmly committed to providing a safe, positive learning and working environment for everyone in the Faith Formation Program. For this reason, and in keeping with the goals and objectives of catechesis, Saint Mary's PSR expressly prohibits sexual harassment and sexual violence in the school environment. This policy re-emphasizes the personal dignity of the individual and fosters positive sexual attitudes and respect for others.

Sexual Harassment

For the purposes of this policy, sexual harassment includes the following specific instances:

- Verbal sexual abuse
- Disseminating obscene or sexually explicit material, whether in the form of music, written lyrics, pornographic pictures, or other literature.
- Having such materials in one's possession in the school, on parish (including school) grounds or at parish (including school) -sponsored activities
- Obscene or sexually explicit graffiti anywhere in the parish or on the parish grounds.
- Continuing and unwanted written or oral communication of a sexual nature directed to another.
- Spreading sexual rumors/innuendoes
- Obscene or sexually explicit gestures
- Any other inappropriate behavior of a sexually explicit or obscene nature that demeans or offends the recipient.

The above list is not meant to be all-inclusive, but is intended to provide guidance as to what may constitute sexual harassment.

Isolated, trivial incidents are not sufficient to constitute harassment and will be handled according to the student behavior code.

Allegations of sexual harassment, as defined above, are to be reported to the catechist, the PSR Administrator or DRE or to the appropriate program director.

Parents/guardians of both the offender and the victim will be informed of the allegations. The matter is to be kept confidential by all parties involved, and every effort will be made to protect the alleged victim from retaliation. The parents/guardians of both the offender and the alleged victim are obligated to cooperate in remedying the situation

If the allegations are substantiated, disciplinary actions will be taken. These will depend on the nature, frequency and severity of the action, the ages of the offender and victim, the history of similar actions by this individual, and the circumstances in which the harassment occurred. Possible disciplinary actions may include, but are not limited to, any or all of the following:

- Verbal warning/reprimand and apology to the victim
- A parent/student/principal/DRE conference
- Written warning/reprimand and parent notification
- Detention or removal from selected PSR activities.
- Behavior/probation contracts, possibly requiring professional intervention.
- Suspension
- Expulsion.

Protecting God's Children – cont.

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is handled separately because of its potentially criminal nature. This is covered under Diocesan policy in compliance with Ohio law.

All staff members and volunteers have agreed to be in compliance with *The Diocese of Cleveland: Policy for the Safety of Children in Matters of Sexual Abuse*. This policy is available online at http://www.dioceseofcleveland.org/virtus/virtus_index.htm. A printed copy is available from the Religious Education Office upon request.

This policy includes, but is not limited to each person with access to children completing the *Virtus: Protecting God's Children* educational program as well as undergoing a background check with the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation.

How to Report Suspected Abuse

We encourage people to report any suspected inappropriate behavior to the Diocesan Response Office, which is staffed by trained counselors and was established to respond to all allegations.

response_services@dioceseofcleveland.org or (216)334-2999

Prayer for Healing for Victims of Abuse

Praise to you, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
source of all consolation and hope.
By your Son's dying and rising
He remains our light in every darkness,
our strength in every weakness.

Be the refuge and guardian
of all who suffer from abuse and violence.
Comfort them and send healing
for their wounds of body, soul and spirit.
Rescue them from bitterness and shame
and refresh them with your love.
Heal the brokenness in all victims of abuse
and revive the spirits of all who lament this sin.

Help us to follow Jesus
in drawing good from evil, life from death.
Make us one with you in your love for justice
as we deepen our respect
for the dignity of every human life.

Giver of peace,
make us one in celebrating your praise,
both now and for ever. Amen.

+ John F. Kinney
Bishop of Saint Cloud, MN
Imprimatur given May 15, 2002

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Protecting God's Children – cont.

WEAPONS POLICY

Saint Mary's PSR follows the proposed policy of the Diocese of Cleveland. This policy expressly prohibits the use, possession, sales, or discharge of any weapons or explosive devices in the school/parish, on school/parish grounds. This policy shall apply to all students, participants in parish programs, catechists, administrators, and other personnel in the school or parish.

This policy includes, but is not limited to:

- Any firearm
- Knife
- Deadly weapon
- Explosive or incendiary device

As defined by state law, a deadly weapon is "any instrument, device, or thing capable of inflicting death, and designed or specifically adapted for use as a weapon, or possessed, carried or used as a weapon." (Ohio Revised code 2923.11A) Firearms shall include any loaded or unloaded gun of any caliber or type. This prohibition also includes any pistol, rifle, or other device that uses air or gas propelled projectiles.

Violations of this policy will warrant:

- Notification of the police

Or may warrant:

- Immediate suspension
- Exclusion from a parish program

Signing by parents and student of a probation contract that includes all the conditions of the student's retention in the program.

St. Mary's Religious Education Office

265 Baker Street

Berea, Ohio 44017

Telephone: (440) 243-8221

Fax: (440) 243-8411

information@stmarysbereareo.org

Brian Krezman, Director of Religious Education

Larry Roetzer, PSR Administrator

Katie Drager, Teen Faith Coordinator