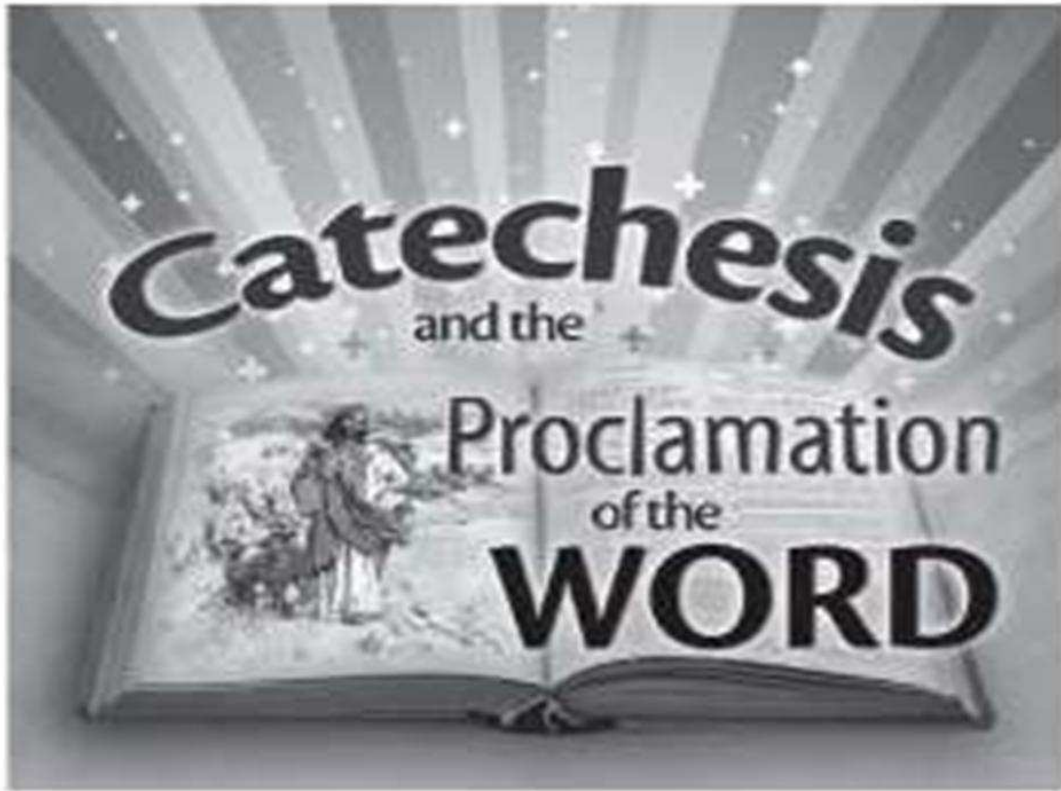


St. Mary's Catholic Church
Parish School of Religion



STAFF 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
Katie Drager	Teen Faith Coordinator	440-243-8221 ext. 23
Larry Roetzer	PSR Administrator	440-243-8221 ext. 24

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 (Summer & Holidays)

Monday through Friday 9:30am – 2:30pm

Evangelizing – Proclaiming the Word

Jesus, in the parable of the sower, (Mk 4:3-8) proclaims the Good News that the Kingdom of God is near, notwithstanding the problems in the soil, the tensions, conflicts and difficulties of the world. The Gospel seed makes fertile the history of mankind and promises a rich harvest. Jesus also cautions, however, that the word of God grows only in a well disposed heart. (General Directory for Catechesis, #15)

Dear Catechists of St. Mary Religious Education Program,

Thank you for being a catechist or aide in our program this year.

As those of you returning from last year know, our ministry faces many challenges. However, you also know that we cannot allow ourselves to be so focused on the things that we wish were different that we lose sight of the good work and opportunities which already exist.

As a catechist you are a part of an ancient and very important line of people stretching back to apostolic times. Although you may have volunteered and you may have agreed to do this, make no mistake about it. It is God who has brought you to this time, in this parish to teach the truths of our faith to your students. That means that you have been called to be a witness to the Gospel for the Church community. Sometimes it can be very helpful to remember that you are in partnership with catechists the world over, from the rainforests of South America to the underground church in China to Vietnamese communities on the Texas Gulf Coast.

This year's theme chosen by the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) for the catechetical year of 2009-2010 is **“Catechesis and Proclamation of the Word”**. Catechesis is referred to as a “ministry of the word.” In 1975 Pope Paul VI wrote that the Church “exists in order to evangelize, that is “the carrying forth of the Good News to every sector of the human race so that by its strength it may enter into the hearts of men (*and women*) and renew the human race.” The Church sees four aspects to Jesus commands to the Apostles, “proclamation, witness, teaching, sacraments, love of and neighbor.” Together, we call these evangelization. This ministry of the word is a fundamental element of evangelization through all its stages because it involves the proclamation of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God. Catechists must allow themselves to be nourished by the same Word they are proclaiming, so that each of may continue to grow in his or her Christian life. (*National Directory for Catechesis* [NDC] [Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005], no. 17)

So through the year we will focus on this theme **“Catechesis and the Proclamation of the Word.”** We will do so by emphasizing “Helping Hands.....Open Hearts.” This saying will remind us of the relationship between fruitfully serving others and embracing the Word of God “with a generous and good heart” (Lk 8:15). We will also do so by occasional reflections, prayers and other means to help our community of catechists grow together.

The day when this ministry is celebrated throughout the church, Catechetical Sunday, is September 20, 2009. Those who have been designated by the community to serve as catechists will be called forth to be commissioned for their ministry. Please make it a priority to be at the 9AM Mass on Catechetical Sunday and join us as we reflect on the role 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 everyone to rededicate themselves to this mission as a community of faith. Your presence makes the commitment visible and gives parents confidence that they have helpers in passing the faith on to their children, a promise they made at Baptism.

Sincerely in Christ,

Brian Krezman

Director of Religious Education

Catechist Credentials

Catechist Formation

As part of your commitment to our program, all catechists are expected to work toward their diocesan catechist certification or renewal each year. Individuals will work out the details of this with the DRE .

Requests for parish payment for workshops must be submitted and approved in advance of attending or signup.

Catechist profiles should be updated whenever a workshop or lecture is attended. Please contact the secretary in the Religious Education Office (REO).

Policy for the Protection of God's Children

All catechists and other PSR adult staff are required to read and agree to comply with the Diocese of Cleveland "Policy for the Safety of Children in Matters of Sexual Abuse". Their agreement is confirmed by signing the Acknowledgement document (VI2003).

Virtus Training

The Religious Education Office, in compliance with the policy of the Diocese of Cleveland, require all adult volunteers in our program to complete the "Virtus: Protecting God's Children" training workshop. According to the policy, an Adult Volunteer is anyone over the age of 18 years "...who works with children more than (4) hours a month or who works with children more frequently than once a month". This training is not required for the occasional volunteer for individual activities.

Background Checks

Catechists are subject to Ohio Law requiring all persons responsible for the care, custody or control of a child to submit to fingerprinting and an Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation (BCII) criminal records check.

Administrative Procedures for Catechists

- All classroom visitors are **required** to obtain approval of the Religious Education Office (REO) **before** going into the classrooms. The Catechist is responsible for obtaining this approval from the REO.
- Each Catechist should be in their classroom **fifteen minutes** before the start of class. The REO is open at least one (1) hour before class begins.
- All PSR Grades will enter the school by one of the southwest doors (off the parking lot) and go directly to their classroom each week.
- Each Catechist will have an envelope containing student attendance sheets, schedules, lesson plans and any other correspondence. These envelopes will be in your classroom each week prior to class. This envelope should be returned to the REO at the completion of class.
- In the spirit of planning, communication, and cooperation catechists are **expected** to attend **all** meetings unless other arrangements are made.
- Please check with the REO before purchasing any supplies (arts, supplies, craft materials, etc) for your class. The cost of such items may be reimbursed.
- The registration fee is waived for staff members whose children are enrolled in PSR.
- In the interest of safety, school doors will be locked 10 minutes after class begins (10:40am Sundays & 6:55pm Mondays). Students should enter from the front doors only after the back doors are locked.
- In case of an emergency in the building, Catechists are to walk students to the church. Parents will pick up their children there.

Classroom Procedures

In preparation for class:

- Note the emergency exit routes and exit procedure for your classroom.
- Locate your classroom PSR supply crate and always return it to the same location.
- Always allow time to check condition of your classroom before students arrive. Report any discrepancies in the classroom conditions as soon as possible. Note the discrepancy on the Weekly Attendance Report.
- It is recommended that after the first class the Catechist and/or students leave a note introducing themselves to their St. Mary's Day School counterparts who use the same room.

Be prepared. Be patient. Be prayerful.

Attendance:

- Please take attendance accurately each session.
- Students arriving late (after class attendance sheet is sent to the REO) are to be directed to the REO for check in, if not already done.
- Please return the attendance sheet to the REO within 15 minutes of the start of each class.
- In the case of students preparing for sacraments, excessive absences should be discussed with the DRE as early as possible.

Dismissal:

- Sunday (grades Pre-K – 3) parents/guardians are to meet students in the classrooms. Parents/Guardians will pick up their children at 11:45 AM.
- Monday (grades 4-8 & Teen Faith) students will be released from class and exit the school from the southwest doors to the parking lot. Parents/guardians can come to the classroom to pick up their children at 8:15pm. All students are expected to leave the building in an *orderly manner* to their pick up vehicle. Exit doors & the Parking lot will be supervised by the REO Staff and/or Catechists until all children have been picked up.
- Any child not picked up should be brought to the REO so that a parent/guardian can be contacted.

After each class:

- Check that the room is left in the same condition as before the class.
- Be certain that papers are removed from the floor.
- Return desks to the same order and configuration.
- Make sure windows are closed.
- Turn off lights and fans.
- Return your class envelope to the office. Make sure you have returned the attendance sheet and report any classroom issues to the REO.

Classroom Management

Classroom Behavior

1. Classroom expectations and standards of behavior should be discussed during the first class session. The following policies are in effect for all classes:
 - Respect is shown to all people.
 - Radios, toys, hand-held video games, candles, etc. are not to be brought into classroom.
 - Snacks, candy, or refreshments should not be served in the classrooms without the prior approval of the Religious Education Office.
 - Eating candy and chewing gum in class is **not permitted**.
 - Students are **never** to open a student's desk under any circumstances.
2. Catechists are **never** to strike, shake, slap or touch a child in any way.
3. Catechists should always show respect to the children. Insulting, abusive or sarcastic language is not respectful.
4. No child should be put in the hall for discipline. (See "Classroom Discipline" for further information.)

Classroom Discipline

Catechists should be proactive in addressing discipline. Do not wait for a problem to discuss the expectation that respect and courtesy will be shown by all persons, to all persons. In the event a student's behavior disrupts learning, Catechists are asked to do the following:

1. Routine discipline matters within the classroom will be taken care of by the Catechist, who will request cooperation, and if necessary, issue a warning.
2. If the behavior continues or escalates, the student(s) will be sent to the office with a note describing the situation.
3. The PSR Administrator, DRE or other staff member, will hold the disruptive student for a "time out"; during which time the student will be engaged in self-reflection of their actions. This reflection will include the student documenting their understanding of the situation. This document will be reviewed and signed by the Catechist, the Parents of the student and the DRE. The document will then be placed in the student's file. Should the student continue to be disruptive, the parents will be contacted for a meeting with the DRE.
4. Students who are consistently uncooperative will be called before the Review Board for appropriate action which may include removal from PSR.

Teaching Procedures

Curriculum

1. Unit Plans are required. This guide should indicate the topics to be covered, by week, in order to complete the particular Unit. Also, any assessment (quizzes, tests, etc.) or teaching aides (videos, handouts, etc.) you intend to use should be noted & copies provided (where appropriate) to the REO for class record.
2. Catechists are expected to follow the course of study as outlined in the *Faith First* text for each grade level. This course of study is available for each grade (excluding Pre-K & Kindergarten). Notation of completion should be made each class to aid both the REO and in case a substitute is required to help.
3. Any changes or substitutions to this plan must be reviewed and approved by the DRE.

Learning Materials and Equipment

1. The REO has Audio-Visual material available for your use. A reservation policy is to be observed when borrowing materials that you need.
2. Any materials brought from home or from the public libraries should be reviewed with the REO prior to use.
3. Any work that needs to be typed or copied should be given to the REO with ample time to complete your request.

Catechist Absence

1. The REO will arrange for all Catechist substitutes.
2. The REO must be notified as early as possible of a catechist's absence.
3. The list of available substitutes will be reviewed with the Catechist for best fit with the classroom a/or other potential suggestions.
4. The Director of Religious Education (DRE) must approve any person not on the substitute list. Unauthorized substitutes will not be permitted to conduct a class.
5. Catechist manuals and other teaching materials should be given to the REO a/or directly to the substitute catechist.
6. If no substitute is available, classes may be combined with another Catechist.

Teaching Procedures – cont.

Class Project

This year (2009-10) the entire Religious Education Program will have a common theme for our efforts to spread our faith outside the classroom. This theme will apply to PSR, Teen Faith, Youth Ministry and our Sacramental Preparation programs of First Reconciliation, First Holy Eucharist & Confirmation.

This year's theme is . . .

Helping Hands . . . Open Hearts!

We have decided to dedicate our Service efforts to the support of our Parish and its many ministries. We have contacted as many ministries/activities as we could find, developed a list with the ministry/activity, the leader, contact information and the type of help this ministry/activity wants. These lists will be available to the Catechist who will then select a ministry/activity to help. This "help" can be organizing, buying, collecting, cleaning, participating . . . anything needed to contribute to the success of the ministry/activity. Each class will have at least one Project.

Once the class has selected their "Buddy" ministry we will list each choice, what the class will be doing and follow their path to the event with pictures & updates.

As an example, our 2nd Graders & Confirmation Candidates are going to be "Sacramental Buddies". Each 2nd grader will choose a Candidate to write to, make things for, share things with, to help prepare to receive their sacrament. More information on this activity will be coming! This Project will end with the Candidates helping with Jesus Day (4/24/2009) & the First Communicants helping with the Social after Confirmation (5/5/2009).

Guidelines:

- Class Projects should be in keeping with this year's theme "Proclamation of the Word" and demonstrate opening the doors of our faith. The project should be age appropriate and manageable, given the class size.
- Each class will be given a large size poster board in order to pictorially indicate what the project is about . . . and to track the class's progress.
- Projects requiring "out of class" gathering should be coordinated with the REO in order to assure diocesan policy is followed.
- Classroom time should be set aside, each session, to discuss and review progress. The DRE and/or the PSR Administrator will schedule times with the Catechist to attend these review times.
- Completed Posters can be left in the REO to reduce the threat of tampering.
- At the end of the school year, all projects will be displayed for the entire parish.
- Any questions regarding the project should be taken to the REO for clarification.

Teaching Procedures – cont.

Visitor Policy

- No one except the priests, DRE, or REO staff is permitted to enter any classroom after classes have started.
- Visitors are not permitted in the classrooms unless special arrangements have been made with the office prior to the visit.
- Parents who wish to visit their child's class should notify the Catechist and the REO first.
- 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.
- The practice of bringing guests to class will be monitored

Guest Speakers

- The DRE must approve guest speakers in the classroom at least one week prior to the class.
- When the guest speaker arrives, they must notify the REO.

Communication with Parents

- Any form letter to parents **must** have the approval of the DRE **before** it is sent home. In the case of electronic mailings, such mail should be reviewed with the REO before it is sent out and a copy be sent to the REO (information@stmarysbereareo.org). Any letters should also be on file in the REO.
- Parents who wish to meet with catechists are to notify the REO. Such meetings are not to take place during class time.
- By the end of the first semester, parents of students with poor evaluation forms should be contacted to work out a solution to the student's difficulty.
- If sufficient progress is not made in the second semester, the Review Board will convene to render a decision on the matter.

The Review Board consists of:

The Parish Pastor
Director of Religious Education
PSR Administrator
Catechist of the student

Teaching Procedures – cont.

Student Evaluation Forms

- Parents of students in grades 1 - 8 will receive an evaluation form twice a year. This Evaluation is intended to provide an insight to parents/guardians of their child's progress toward achieving the faith formation goals set at the beginning of the year.
- Evaluation forms are to be completed and mailed electronically to parents/guardians during the Christmas break (first Semester) and at the end of the year (May time frame). The REO should be copied on each Evaluation.
- The Catechist of any student with a poor evaluation form at the end of the first semester should contact the student's parents (see Communication With Parents).

Weapons Policy

Saint Mary's Church School of Religion 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.

Sexual Harassment Policy

Saint Mary's Church is firmly committed to providing a safe, positive learning and working environment for everyone in the PSR program. For this reason, and in keeping with the goals and objectives of Catholic education, Saint Mary's PSR program 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.

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 school grounds, or at school-sponsored activities
- Obscene or sexually explicit graffiti anywhere in the school or on the school/parish grounds
- Continuing and unwanted written or oral communication directed to another of a sexual nature
- 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 DRE and the PSR Administrator. Parents 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 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/DRE/Administrator conference.
- Written warning/reprimand and parent notification.
- Detention or removal from selected school or program activities.
- Behavior/probation contracts, possibly requiring professional intervention.
- Suspension.
- Expulsion.

Sexual Violence Policy

Sexual violence is handled separately because of its potentially criminal nature. If an incident of sexual violence occurs, the Pastor, Deacon or other school authority or program personnel are required under state law to report the incident. (Ohio Revised Code 2151.421) The Department of Human Services and the police will be contacted immediately if there is any "reason to believe" (Ohio Revision Code 2151.421) that sexual abuse has or violence has occurred involving a child less than eighteen years of age. The Diocesan Legal Office will be contacted immediately in these situations.

Generally, sexual harassment should be construed as sexual violence when:
The recipient is physically touched without his/her consent in a sexual manner
Is expressly threatened or perceives a threat of physical harm for purposes of the offender's sexual gratification. Is the victim of sex offenses under Ohio law, including Gross Sexual Imposition (O.R.C. 2907.05), Sexual Battery (O.R.C.2907.03), Rape (O.R.C. 2907.02), Importuning (O.R.C.2907.07), Voyeurism (O.R.C. 2907.08), Public Indecency (O.R.C. 2907.09) or Felonious Sexual Penetration (O.R.C. 2907.12) as examples.

In each of the above examples, the Department of Human Services and the police will be contacted immediately.

St. Mary's Religious Education Office

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