



# Family Handbook



*“Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” Mt 19:14*

## **St. Mary Parish Religious Education Program Grades K-8**

Revised 4/2026

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

Religious Education Office  
19515 S. 115th Ave.  
Mokena, IL. 60448  
708-326-9352 Office  
708-326-9350 (option 1) Absentee Line

[www.stmarymokena.org](http://www.stmarymokena.org)  
[re@stmarymokena.org](mailto:re@stmarymokena.org)

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION STAFF:**

Director of Religious Education  
Tami Brongiel

Assistant Director of Religious Education  
Selena Roberts

Administrative Assistant  
Kathy Brzeszkiewicz

Executive Administrative Assistant  
Sue Polnaszek

**In order to better serve you, please note the following:**

To report absentees, late arrivals and early dismissals:  
contact the Absentee line: 708-326-9350 (select option 1)

For questions about registration and billing:  
contact the Executive Assistant:  
Sue Polnaszek: 708-326-9358 or [spolnaszek@stmarymokena.org](mailto:spolnaszek@stmarymokena.org)

For sacraments, curriculum, catechist questions, and sub requests:  
contact the Assistant DRE:  
Selena Roberts: 708-326-9357 or [sroberts@stmarymokena.org](mailto:sroberts@stmarymokena.org)

For all other questions: please contact the Front Desk Admin. Assistant:  
Kathy Brzeszkiewicz: 708-326-9352 or [kbrez@stmarymokena.org](mailto:kbrez@stmarymokena.org)

**In-Session Office Hours:**

Monday.....9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.  
Tuesday and Wednesday.....3:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.  
Thursday.....3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.  
Friday.....Closed  
Sunday.....9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m

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Dear Parents,

Peace be with you. I am very happy to welcome you to a new term of Religious Education here at St. Mary Parish!

Our goal is to make disciples so that the children and families in our program are on fire with faith and their love for God! Our hope is that, as they grow in their knowledge of the faith, they will become witnesses by their lives and be bold proclaimers of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Our catechists and assistants who instruct and pass on the faith are faith-filled Catholics who are eager and excited to share the Good News of the Kingdom of God with your children. They are very passionate about the Catholic faith and proclaim the love of God with great joy and enthusiasm.

The Religious Education program exists to assist you as parents in evangelizing and catechizing your children. Your role in your children's faith formation is vital. As the primary religious educators of your children, it is by your practice of the faith and by your example that your children will see how essential God and the faith are in your daily lives. Your teaching, support, example, attitude, and the values you impart are fundamental for your children.

To keep the faith alive at home, it is important to attend Sunday Mass weekly as a family, pray together daily, participate in the sacraments often, do the family activities in the textbooks, and look at the family activities on the websites.

We also have a wonderful program called FORMED that provides dynamic Catholic videos online that can be accessed at any time to help deepen and enrich your faith. Go to [Formed.org](http://Formed.org) and Select "Sign up" on the main menu. Enter "60448" when asked for your institution's zip code, and select "St. Mary" in Mokena. Then, you will create a profile which you will use to login in the future. The parish has generously subscribed to this for your benefit and is eager for you to check it out. It's like Catholic Netflix!

I ask that you read this Family Handbook very carefully. It contains essential program and policy information. It is important that parents understand the handbook contents and are willing to comply with its directives. You will need to return the release form to the Religious Education Office by September 30, of the current class term. If you have a question regarding anything in this handbook, please contact me.

Also, if you would be interested in assisting the program further, in a voluntary capacity, please feel free to contact me. We need many volunteers to make this beautiful ministry of passing on our faith to the children run smoothly and effectively.

Please take a look at the Religious Education page on our website, [www.stmarymokena.org](http://www.stmarymokena.org) to find information about the program. Also be certain to "like" the St. Mary Religious Education page on Facebook!

May the Spirit guide and lead us in a grace-filled year.

In Christ,

Mrs. Tami Brongiel, Director of Religious Education

My dearest parents,

I greet you with love and peace in the name of Jesus!

I want to take a moment to thank you from the bottom of my heart for entrusting us with your children by enrolling them in our Religious Education program this year. What a blessing it is to walk alongside your family as we help your children grow in faith and in their love for God.

As your pastor, I want you to know how deeply committed we are to offering the best program we can. Our mission goes far beyond simply teaching the faith. We want to help each child come to know Jesus in a personal and loving way. Our hope is that every child who walks through our doors will come to know that they are deeply loved by God and that they truly belong in His Church.

But as you know, the most important teachers of the faith are you: the parents. You lay the foundation. Our role is to support you, encourage you, and walk with you on this journey. When the parish and the family come together, beautiful things happen in the hearts of our children.

We are blessed with an incredible team of staff, catechists, and volunteers who love the Lord and care deeply about your children. They are doing everything they can to make this a joyful and meaningful experience. I am truly grateful for them, and I know your children are in loving and capable hands.

If you ever have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to me or to anyone on our Religious Education team. As I have said earlier, you are not just parishioners, you are a family to us. And when your children come through our doors, they become part of our parish family as well.

I am truly excited for this new year. Let us continue to support one another, always keeping our children's best interests at heart.

With love in Christ,

Fr. Joe Gasta, RCJ  
Pastor

# ***This is my body, given for you. (Luke 22: 19)***

## **OUR MISSION AND VISION AT ST. MARY'S RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

**Mission:** *Guided by the Holy Spirit, foster an environment to encounter Christ and evangelize our community.*

**Vision:** *Form disciples on fire with our Roman Catholic faith, who know, love and serve our Lord Jesus Christ.*

**PATRONESS:** Our Lady of Mount Carmel

**PHILOSOPHY:** The philosophy of the Religious Education Program of St. Mary Catholic Church is based on three key principles:

1. Religious Education is a life-long process of entering into a personal relationship with God and getting to know him more intimately. We strive to help the children recognize God's unconditional love, compassion, and forgiveness.
2. Religious Education has a threefold mission:
  - a. Through the Word of God, in study and prayer of both the Old and New Testament, the children will hear the Good News of Salvation. They will gain a better understanding of Scripture, learn how to apply it in their lives, and be able to proclaim the Good News to others.
  - b. To promote Worship through prayer and an appreciation and growth in the love of the liturgy, the children will realize that worship is central to our lives as Catholics.
  - c. Through Service to the church, community, and at home, the children will learn that helping others, especially those who are elderly and poor, are at the heart of living a life in Christ.
3. In providing doctrinal, moral, liturgical enrichment, as well as formation in the sacramental life and values of the church, we seek to make disciples of Christ, whereby the children will give witness to Christ by leading lives of holiness.

## **GOALS**

The Religious Education Program will strive to:

1. Develop a sense of personal worth as children of God, made in His image and likeness
2. Develop a sense of community where relationships may be formed and they can genuinely grow in friendship, trust, and prayer
3. Teach what Jesus taught by remaining faithful to the principle elements of the Christian message for Catechesis and the Church:
  - a. The Mystery of the Holy Trinity
  - b. Creation
  - c. Jesus Christ
  - d. Holy Spirit
  - e. The Sacraments
  - f. The Life of Grace
  - g. The Moral Life
  - h. Mary and the Saints
4. Assist students in understanding and remembering:
  - a. the traditional prayers of the Church
  - b. the Beatitudes
  - c. the Ten Commandments
  - d. Stations of the Cross
  - e. the Laws of the Church
5. Provide students with experiences of Christian Community:
  - a. to celebrate together the principal events of the liturgical year
  - b. to promote participation in personal prayers and communal worship
6. Guide students into commitments of Christian Service:
  - a. in doing service projects
  - b. to activate Christian concern for issues of life, truth, and justice

## **GUIDELINES**

Classes in the St. Mary Religious Education Program will be taught in conformity with the teaching of the Church as presented in the General Catechetical Directory, in Sharing the Light of Faith, The National Catechetical Directory of United States, The Catechism of the Catholic Church and in accordance with the policies and guidelines of Religious Education Programs within the Diocese of Joliet

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **Class Schedule**

Tuesday	4:30 p.m. – 5:45 p.m.	Grades	K - 6
Wednesday	4:30 p.m. – 5:45 p.m.	Grades	1 - 8
Thursday	4:30 p.m. – 5:45 p.m.	Grades	1 - 8
Tuesday, Wednesday	6:30 p.m. – 7:45 p.m.	Grades	7 - 8
Sunday	9:30 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.	Grades	K - 6

R.E.A.C.H. (for children with disabilities, see page 16):

Sunday 9:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. (2 x per month)

Wednesday 4:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. (2 x per month)

## **CONTINUITY**

Parents are reminded that their child should be enrolled in the Religious Education Program the entire eight years. Acceptance into the Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Confirmation Programs is based upon regular attendance of the student in the Religious Education Program. Sacramental preparation requires two-years consecutively. A skipped grade may need to be made up.

## **ENROLLMENT**

Enrollment in the Religious Education Program is open to any child of a family registered in St. Mary Parish and who is five years old through grade eight. Enrollment is ongoing. You may know neighbors or friends, who for various reasons are not enrolled in the Religious Education Program. We ask you to encourage them to contact the Director at 708.326.9356.

The grade level of a student entering the program will be left to the sole discretion of the Director of Religious Education (DRE), in dialogue with the parent(s) or guardian.

## **EXPECTATIONS**

It is expected that each family will become actively involved in St. Mary Religious Education Program and Parish, as evidenced by regularly participating in the Mass in order to model an active Christian faith and to reinforce the values and attitudes of living that faith. The parent and their child also agree to act in accordance with these values and attitudes.

## **HOMEWORK AND THE PARENT'S ROLE**

Parents are expected to worship with their children at Mass. Parents should be modeling their faith, talking about their faith and values and telling and re-telling stories about Jesus. Parents are asked to review what has been taught in class and help the children with any homework a Catechist may have assigned. Parents are also encouraged to take time to pray with their children and help them learn the traditional prayers.

## **COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES**

It is the responsibility of the parent to notify the Religious Education Office if you should move or change any of the following information:

- Phone numbers (cell, home, work)
- Address
- Email address
- Health status
- Marital and custodian status

## **UPDATES**

News blasts, updates, and flyers will be distributed via email or hard copies may be sent with the youngest child of the family.

## **PARENT CONCERNS**

Our office number is 708.326.9352. We welcome any calls from parents who wish to express their concerns and we will be happy to answer your questions.

## **PROGRESS REPORTS**

Progress reports will be given to the children in grades 1-8 in January and at the end of the catechetical year. These reports will help parents to keep track of their child's progress within the program and will also contain a record of the child's absences. It is our expectation and end-goal that content, prayers and beliefs for each grade level are mastered with assistance from our parents.

## **EMERGENCY CONTACT**

St. Mary Religious Education will notify all households and parents by email of an emergency or unplanned event that causes early dismissal or Religious Education cancellation. We will also send you announcements or reminders throughout the year to the email address on file.

## **ATTENDANCE POLICIES**

Attendance is expected for the full hour and fifteen minutes of class each week. Every class is important to the student's catechetical formation. The Catechist facilitates the formation of community, proclaims the Word, encourages service, and leads the students in prayer each week. Each class builds upon the preceding class.

## **ABSENCES**

A student who misses 3 classes in grades 1 through 7 will receive a notification from the Religious Education Office. If the student misses a 4th time, the Director of Religious Education will call to discuss the student's future participation in the Religious Education Program. Depending on the results of this conference, the student may be asked to repeat the same grade the following year.

In the event of an emergency or illness, parents are asked to call 708.326.9350, and select "Option 1" to reach the Absentee Line to inform us of your child/ren's absence.

All class work must be made up. It is the parent's responsibility to contact the Catechist to arrange for make-up work.

## **LATE ARRIVALS**

**All tardy students must enter the building at door #3 and come to the RE office to obtain a tardy slip.** Late arrivals are discouraged as they are disruptive to the class. Parents are requested to make every effort to have their children arrive on time for class sessions.

## **DELAYED PICK UP**

We expect children to be picked up promptly after class. If a parent is delayed in picking up their child, for the safety of the child, he/she will wait in the Religious Education Office. The parent will need to come inside the office, via door #3, for the child.

## **ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL PROCEDURES**

Parents and guardians are urged to use extreme caution when dropping off or picking up their children. Religious Education Staff, Catechists, and Assistants will be assigned to help with dismissal at 195th Street and Door 4 Circle Drive only. **Please make sure your children know from which exit you will pick them up based on the first letter of the driving family's last name.**

Pick-Up Stations (Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday classes):

- **Families whose last name begins with the letters "A-K" pick up their children at the 195th Street lane.** Children will leave the building via Door #9. This driveway provides safety for children and very easy access and exit for drivers.
- **Families whose last name begins with "L-Z" arrange to pick up their children in the Circle Drive, outside door #4.**

Pick-Up Stations (Sunday classes only):

- **All families will pick up their children at Door #4** in the Circle Drive. Please be aware that people will be coming to and from Mass during Sunday RE dismissal.

**PLEASE NOTE:** The Religious Education Staff will monitor dismissal at the above-mentioned two locations only. There will be no supervision or responsibility for dismissal at the upper lot, or at any other location. Students will not be allowed to walk to the upper lot or elsewhere on St. Mary's grounds to meet their parent(s). In the event that parents park elsewhere on St. Mary's grounds for pick-up, they will be responsible for walking to the correct door to pick up their child/ren. **Calling children to cross the road to come to your car is dangerous and will not be allowed.**

## **SECURITY**

- Parents must wait outdoors for their child at the time of dismissal.
- All building doors will be locked at the beginning of each class in order to safeguard the well-being of our children during class time.
- Any person having business in the school building during these hours must come to the Religious Education Office, via Door #3, to state his/her business and sign in.

**Safety Alert:** Cell phones are a DISTRACTION. Please turn off when you are in the pick-up lane. Illinois law prohibits use of cell phones in a school zone. This is a 'ticketable' offense.

### **CELL PHONE LAW:**

Public Act 96-0131 went into effect January 1, 2010. THIS LAW PROHIBITS ANY DRIVER, REGARDLESS OF AGE, FROM USING A CELL PHONE WHILE OPERATING A MOTOR VEHICLE IN A SCHOOL ZONE. According to Secretary of State, Jesse White, distracted driving has become a serious problem in both our nation and our state. So please follow the law! There should be no cell phone usage anywhere on St. Mary's grounds, which includes, but is not limited to our pick-up and drop-off areas in the Circle Drive, the lower level parking lot, or the 195th Street pick-up area. Keep our children safe!

## **VOLUNTEERS AT ST. MARY'S RELIGIOUS ED OFFICE**

All volunteers are a wonderful asset to our program. Please register on our webpage or call the Religious Education Office if you are able to give time to help in our program during the year. We count on your presence and your commitment.

All adult volunteers are required to attend a program called Protecting God's Children. Volunteers will also complete background checks and hold a Virtus account in good standing. Additional requirements may be necessary depending on the volunteer's position.

### **Catechists**

Catechists are the heart and soul of the Religious Education Program. They echo the life and stories about Jesus. Their time spent in preparation and presentation is greatly valued.

### **Substitute Catechists**

Substitute catechists are vital to the program. They are needed to fill in when a Catechist cannot come at their scheduled time.

### **Catechist Assistants**

Catechist Assistants can be both adult and teen, and are the strong right arms to the catechists. Catechist Assistants are asked to perform many tasks such as taking attendance, listening to traditional prayers, helping children with class work, accompanying children to the office, making copies, helping with dismissal, etc.

### **Office Assistants**

Office Assistants are willing volunteers who offer their time to help out in the Religious Education Office. They assist with tasks such as: taking phone messages, collecting attendance sheets, making copies for catechists, preparing mailings and sacramental booklets, newsletters, etc. Other tasks include monitoring the doors, bathrooms, and hallways for security, greeting the children, and helping with dismissal.

### **Hall Monitors**

Hall Monitors monitor activity and safety of students; direct students to proper classrooms at arrival and proper exit doors at dismissal. Hall Monitors ensure students are escorted from classes to the office when needed.

### **Pick Up/Drop Off Line Supervisor**

These supervisors will assist at arrival and dismissal times ensuring the safety of students as well as monitor for late arrivals and late pick ups to ensure students are escorted to class or office as appropriate.

### **St. Mary's RE Board**

The Religious Education Board is an advisory to the Religious Education Department. They help sponsor events that benefit the members of St. Mary's RE and the community at large. The Board meets on the second Thursday every other month at 6pm in the RE Office, August through March. Open roles on the board are announced at the end of the school year.

The Board consists of 7 discerned members of which 3 hold elected officer positions.

## **CURRICULUM OVERVIEW**

### **Kindergarten will be using Finding God published by Loyola Press.**

It nurtures young children's natural tendency to seek a relationship with God, reinforcing a strong sense of community and love. It will familiarize children with the Catholic sacraments, liturgical rituals, symbols, and seasons. It will help form their moral lives, standards, and values. It will teach them how to pray and give them the tools they need to talk about God.

### **Grade 1 will be using Christ is our Life 2024 published by Loyola Press.**

The all-new Christ Our Life series is an authentic, kerygmatic catechesis program that joyfully nurtures missionary discipleship in the lives of children and their families through the love and centrality of Jesus Christ. Authored by the Sisters of Notre Dame of Chardon, Ohio.

### **Grade 2 will be using Blessed published by Dynamic Catholic.**

It is a program that helps children encounter the living God in a dynamic way that also uses animated short films along with the student text. Each of the episodes will engage our children's sense of wonder and take them on an unforgettable adventure into the story of Jesus and the life-giving truths of His Church. It will bring the faith to life and inspire them to live the faith. Online videos are available to reinforce chapters at home.

### **Grades 3, 4, 5 and 6 will be using Be My Disciples 2nd ed. published by RCL Benziger.**

The General Directory for Catechesis calls for the teaching of doctrine through a spiral approach so that learning is reinforced from year to year, but the knowledge of the Catholic faith is expanded through the theme providing opportunities for the learners to deepen their faith. Be My Disciples teach in every unit, at every level, every year, from year to year, and concepts are developed based on the four pillars of the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

1. What Catholics Believe: The children will gain knowledge of their Catholic faith
2. How Catholics Worship: The children will grow in their appreciation of the Mass and the Sacraments
3. How Catholics Live: The moral teaching of the Church is developed at each level through presentations on the Beatitudes, the Ten Commandments, and precepts of the Church
4. How Catholics Pray: There is a wide variety of prayer experiences at each level

**Grades 7 & 8: Confirmation Year I and II** will be using a few different resources. They focus on Confirmation preparation by using the videos from Ascension Press' "Chosen" program. These videos were filmed on location throughout the U.S. and internationally and feature top youth experts in the Church. Students will also be using the Catholic Youth Bible for learning to use a bible and how to read scriptures.

**8th graders will also complete** the 6 lessons from "Altaration" also by Ascension Press which focuses on the mass through a powerful and transforming experience as they watch videos of some of today's most insightful and intelligent Catholic voices, and answer probing questions in their journal.

### **REACH**

The REACH Program offers classes for young people with disabilities from our parish and the surrounding community. The class meets approximately 2 times per month, and is offered on Wednesdays and Sundays. Please contact Tami Brongiel at 708.326.9356 for more information.

### **Home Study**

Special arrangements must be made with the Director of Religious Education. It should be noted that even though a family may home school their children, the child must be in attendance in a Parish Religious Education Program for two years prior to the reception of the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Confirmation. Home Study is not permitted to accommodate schedules or extra-curricular activities.

### **STUDENT MATERIALS and REPLACEMENTS**

Children in the program will be given folders in which they can carry their papers, etc. Please check their folders weekly and remove papers. Students in grades K-8 are given textbooks and materials that they are expected to bring to every class. Students who lose their book (or materials) may purchase a replacement from the Religious Education Office.

#### **REPLACEMENT PRICE LIST**

Student text Grades K-8	\$ 25.00
Bible	\$ 35.00

## **SACRAMENTS**

A Sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace. By the action of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, they make present efficaciously the grace that they signify. Sacraments are sacred moments in a person's life as he/she encounters Jesus Christ.

Preparation for the Sacraments are joint efforts on the part of the child, the parents, and the catechist. Class time, parent meetings, parent participation, retreats, and celebration experiences are all necessary ingredients for a meaningful initiation into these sacramental experiences.

Per the Joliet Diocese, Sacraments require a two year preparation period. Sacraments at St. Mary's are celebrated in:

- Grade 2: First Reconciliation and First Eucharist
- Grade 8: Confirmation

**First Reconciliation** preparation begins in grade one and is further developed in grade two. There will be a group reconciliation in Winter/Spring for second grade children when the parents, in conjunction with the Pastor and Director, deem the child ready.

**First Eucharist** preparation begins in grade one and is further developed in grade two. The celebration of this sacrament usually takes place in May for second grade children when the parents, in conjunction with the Pastor and Director, deem the child ready.

**ISP:** Preparation for the initial reception of the sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion by children in grades three through eight will be arranged by the Director, using age-appropriate instructional materials and procedures, in our "Intermediate Sacramental Preparation" class, or ISP. Attendance in this two-year program is required alongside the student's regular religious education class.

**Confirmation** preparation begins in grade seven (Year I) and continues through grade eight (Year II). The candidate must have completed two consecutive years of Religious Education before they can be confirmed. If they have not taken Year I they will be required to do so.

There must be a desire and commitment to the requirements of the preparation programs and the Catholic faith on the part of the children and families preparing to receive sacraments.

## **EUCCHARISTIC LITURGY**

On the night before He died, Jesus directed us to remember Him by celebrating the Eucharist. It is the most important thing He told us to do. It is a GREAT blessing to be Catholic, that the God of the universe should humble Himself and take on the form of bread and wine, so as to be intimately united to us. The Eucharist is the GREATEST gift we will ever receive! What a tremendous grace that we are called to share in this profound mystery of the Eucharistic meal, “the wedding feast of the lamb” (Rev. 19:9).

There is NOTHING more important in our whole life that we will ever do than go to Mass. God is so madly in love with us and longs to be with each one of us. We should have a great desire to attend Mass on Sunday, and as often as we can, to be so closely united to Our Lord. Mass is essential to coming to know God and growing in our relationship with Him. Parents, as the primary educators of their children, show by example their commitment to weekly participation in the Sunday Eucharist. May we help our children grow in love of God and the Eucharist by attending Mass on Sunday as a family.

## **PRAYERS AND BELIEFS TO BE MEMORIZED**

- Grade K:
- Sign of the Cross
  - Glory Be
  - Prayer to Guardian Angel
- Grade 1:
- Same as Grade K
- Our Father
  - Hail Mary
  - Grace before meals
- Grade 2:
- Same as Grade K, 1
- Act of Contrition
  - Morning Offering
- Grade 3:
- Same as Grade K, 1, 2
- Apostles' Creed
  - Seven Sacraments
- Grade 4:
- Same as Grade K, 1, 2, 3
- Ten Commandments
  - Memorare to the Blessed Virgin
- Grade 5:
- Same as Grade K, 1, 2, 3, 4
- Beatitudes
  - Prayer to St. Michael
- Grade 6:
- Same as Grade K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
- Nicene Creed
- Grade 7:
- Same as Grade K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
- Seven Spiritual Works of Mercy
  - Seven Corporal Works of Mercy
- Grade 8:
- Same as Grade K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
- Seven gifts of the Holy Spirit
  - Prayer to the Holy Spirit

## **CODE OF BEHAVIOR FOR STUDENTS**

The Religious Education program defines serious misconduct as, but not limited to, fighting, stealing, cheating, and possession/use of drugs, weapons, and/or alcohol, disrespect to staff, gang involvement, vandalism, aggressive behavior, swearing, vulgarity, and possession of dangerous items.

- The children will enter and exit school in an appropriate manner
- The Catechist must be present in the classroom before the students may enter
- Students will take assigned places in the classroom and need permission to leave their seats
- Coats and hats are not to be worn during class. There will be a designated place for coats and hats
- Modest attire is required. Wearing any of the following: suggestive logo or wording on t-shirts, low-rise jeans that expose underwear and low cut tops may result in your child being sent home
- Catechists, assistants, and students should display mutual respect
- Students will raise their hands and wait for permission before speaking
- Textbooks and appropriate materials are required for each class
- Students in the Religious Education Program are reminded that the rooms and desks they use for class are shared with other children within the parish. All are expected to respect the property of the school and other students. Parents are responsible for any damage to or theft of St. Mary's property or the property of a St. Mary School student
- **Cell phone use is prohibited before, during and after class** in St. Mary School when Religious Education classes are in session. That means any cell phone that rings, or is used as a phone or a camera, or to text message is to be claimed by the Catechist or the Assistant and sent to the Director's office. The parent will be required to retrieve the cell phone. It will not be returned to the student. It is recommended that cell phones not be brought into the building. All of our classrooms are equipped with telephones in case of an emergency

Good conduct, cooperation, attention, and courtesy are expected during class time. Any student who continually fails to cooperate with the Catechist and other students within a class shall be subject to the following procedures:

- First step: The Catechist will speak privately with the student to discuss the situation.
- Second step: An uncooperative student will be sent to the office to meet with the Director.

- Third step: If the problem continues, a telephone call is made to the parents.
- Fourth step: If there is no improvement, in fairness and justice to the Catechist and students in the class, the Director reserves the right to require the parents to attend classes with their child until the behavior improves or to provide an alternate form of Religious Education outside of the regular class.

## **CODE OF BEHAVIOR AND SPIRITUAL EXPECTATIONS FOR PARENTS**

The relationship between Religious Education representatives (Catechists, Administrators, Staff and Assistants) and parents of St. Mary Religious Education Program is one of the strongest and most important elements in the effective faith sharing and education of our young people. This policy statement provides structure to several phases of the relationship. Feel free to contact the Religious Education Board Members with any comments or concerns.

The purpose of this code of behavioral expectations for parents is:

- To establish patterns of conflict-resolution in a spirit of cooperative communication. We can disagree with one another, even in complicated matters, but still respect each other. We can be respectful in our speech, courteous in our actions, and Christian in our attitudes.
- To establish levels of appeal through appropriate channels that promote conflict resolution.

Due process seeks to give all parties the chance to make their case and to really be heard. Due process enables many issues to be resolved at the lowest possible level of decision-making.

The content of the following interactions is confidential on the part of all parties and all of these interactions are part of the confidential relationship regarding all student behaviors:

**Student Behavior:** Should a parent wish to question or discuss an issue with a Religious Education representative, any employee or volunteer, the following procedure must be followed:

- First step: Please contact the representative by phone to discuss the issue. The telephone conversation between the parent and representative is expected to be courteous, collegial, and cooperative. A plan should be worked out with follow-up calls or face to face meetings as needed.
- Second step: If the behavior is repeated or is beyond the realm of a telephone conversation, the DRE-parent conference may be scheduled by either the DRE or the parent. This personal, private and two-way dialogue will be calm and will be collaborative.

- Third Step: If the above procedure has not successfully resolved the matter, or in those instances when one party's behavior is intrusive, inflammatory or overbearing the following grievance procedure has been developed:
  - The Director will be involved in conferences, upon request, between the parent and program representative on no more than two occasions. He/she will attempt to resolve the difference.
  - Next, the second step will be to involve the Pastor, Director, and the parent in a confidential conference.
  - Lastly, if an additional parent-director-pastor meeting is required due to elements involving the parent's behavior, a decision may be made by the Pastor and by the Director to deny the continuation of the family's presence in the program.

**Spiritual:** Our Religious Education Catechists, Administration and Staff recognize that Jesus has called them to the ministry of teaching. In following Jesus, we strive to provide an excellent and caring education for all students. There is a need for parents, the primary religious educators of their children, to constantly search for God in their lives. They are encouraged to:

- walk in the footsteps of Jesus by being an active member of the Parish Community
- attend weekend Mass with their children
- be responsible stewards in sharing of time, gift and talent

Thank you for your continued cooperation.

## **GENERAL POLICIES**

### **First Aid**

State law regulates minor injuries to be treated with water, disinfectant and band-aids. We follow the rules of universal precaution. The Religious Education Office has available to all catechists a supply of: disinfectant, Band-Aids, rubber gloves and Ziploc bags to dispose of any materials used to clean a wound. If there is a serious injury, we will call 911 and notify parents immediately. Our building is equipped with AEDs (Automatic External Defibrillators). If your child has an epinephrine auto injector (EpiPen), please let the Catechist know as well the RE office.

### **Medications**

Except in extraordinary circumstances, which must be approved by the Director of Religious Education, personnel will not maintain, administer or supervise the taking of medication. An exception is made for use of EpiPens, but only with the doctor's authorization. Arrangements must be made each year with the Director.

### **Lost and Found**

If your child loses an article, please check with the Religious Education Office 708.326.9352.

### **Abused and Neglected Children**

Religious Education personnel are Mandated Reporters through the Department of Children and Family Services.

### **Custody Issues**

If parents are divorced or separated, St. Mary's Religious Education Program presumes that both parents have access to the children and their records unless one parent provides documentation that he or she has sole custody. When the dismissal bell rings, a student will be released to either parent unless the Religious Education Office has a copy of the court order giving one parent exclusive custody.

### **Drug/Alcohol Abuse Policy**

We will tolerate no possession or use of drugs or alcohol on Parish property. Serious consequences (including possible suspension or expulsion) will be taken should there be any infraction of this policy. All Religious Education Staff Members, Catechists, and Volunteers shall immediately notify the office in the event that they observe any person in possession of/or under the influence of drugs/alcohol on school grounds.

### **Food Policy**

Food is not permitted in the classrooms. We have discontinued all classroom parties. There are no exceptions to this policy. The reasons for this policy are:

1. To ensure the many children with food allergies are safe in our program
2. To maintain an insect-free and rodent-free school building
3. To eliminate the wasting of serious class time
4. To eliminate unnecessary financial burdens on the Catechist

Gum chewing is also not permitted in the building at any time

Only water (spill-proof bottles) are permitted

### **Prohibited Items**

Spikes, skateboards and scooters are prohibited and may not be brought into the building. Any skateboard or scooter that is brought to the classroom will be retrieved and sent down to the Director's office.

### **Weapons Policy**

St. Mary Parish takes seriously the safety and well being of students in our care. We do not tolerate possession of any type of weapon (whether real or make-believe) on parish property. Serious consequences (including possible suspension or expulsion) will be taken should there be any infraction of this policy. All Religious Education Staff Members, Catechists, and Volunteers shall immediately notify the office in the event that they observe any person in possession of a firearm or weapon on school grounds.

**The following page is the  
“Family Handbook  
Acknowledgement” form;  
please sign and return  
to the R.E. Office  
no later than  
September 30th**

## **ST. MARY R.E. FAMILY HANDBOOK ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

This is to acknowledge that I have received a copy of the RE Family Handbook and understand that it contains important information on St. Mary's Religious Education Program general policies and specific obligations and guidelines for families.

I acknowledge that I have read the RE Family Handbook and have been given the opportunity to ask questions about anything contained in the handbook. Also, that St. Mary Religious Education has the sole and absolute discretion to amend, supplement, or rescind any provisions of this handbook as it deems appropriate.

I have read and understood the contents of the Handbook.

I agree to abide by the conditions specified in this handbook and by any other rules, practices, or procedures that the St. Mary Religious Education Program adopts.

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Parent/Guardian Printed Name

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Parent/Guardian Signature

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(Date)

**PLEASE RETURN TO THE RELIGIOUS ED OFFICE by September 30th**