

The Lakes Catholic Community

Faith Formation Handbook

St. Joseph in Milford and St. Mary in Spirit Lake, Parishes of the
Diocese of Sioux City

2026-2027

Staff Directory

- **Pastor:** Rev. David Hemann
 - *Email:* pastor@thelakescatholic.church | *Phone/Text:* 712-320-8526
- **Director of Religious Education (DRE):** Erin Lorch
 - *Email:* faith@thelakescatholic.church | *Phone/Text:* 712-339-4555
- **Director of Youth Ministry:** Teresa Goehring
 - *Email:* youth@thelakescatholic.church | *Phone/Text:* 712-330-1189
- **Director of Liturgy and Music:** Ali Oyler
 - *Email:* liturgy@thelakescatholic.church | *Phone/Text:* 712-320-8527

Registration & Fees

- **Standard Fee:** \$50 per student for St. Mary and St. Joseph Parishioners.
- **Catechist Discount:** Fees are waived for the children of full-time Catechists. Please contact Erin Lorch to receive your discount code.
- **Payment Policy:** All payments must be paid in full at the time of online registration.
- **Financial Assistance:** If you have concerns or require financial assistance, please reach out to Erin.

Expectations of Families

As a community of faith, we are honored to walk alongside your family on this beautiful journey of faith formation. Deepening a child's relationship with God requires a

meaningful partnership between the church and the home. To ensure a fruitful year for your child, we ask our families to commit to the following foundational expectations:

Parish Registration

Active participation in a local faith community provides a vital foundation for your child's spiritual growth. Families enrolling children in our religious education program are expected to be registered, active members of either St. Mary Parish or St. Joseph Parish. If you are new to the area or have not yet officially registered, please contact the parish office so we can formally welcome you into our parish family.

Parents as the Primary Catechists

The Church beautifully affirms that parents are the first and most influential teachers of the faith to their children. Our weekly program is designed to support and supplement what you are already doing at home, not replace it. You are your child's primary model of Christian living, and your daily example is the most powerful tool for their spiritual formation.

Nurturing Faith at Home

When your child was baptized, a sacred commitment was made to raise them in the practice of the faith. We gently remind you of this promise and encourage you to intentionally cultivate a Catholic home environment by:

- **Praying Together:** Establish simple, regular prayer routines, such as grace before meals, morning offerings, or bedtime prayers.
- **Teaching Core Prayers:** Help your child learn and memorize the foundational prayers of our faith (such as the Sign of the Cross, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Glory Be) so they can fully participate in the life of the Church.
- **Discussing the Faith:** Take time to talk about God, share stories of the saints, and discuss what they are learning in their religious education classes.

Mass Attendance: The Ultimate Classroom

The single most important thing you can do for your child's faith formation is to attend Holy Mass together every weekend. The Liturgy and the Holy Eucharist are the source and summit of our Catholic faith. Bringing your children to Mass weekly not only fulfills our obligation to keep the Lord's Day holy, but it also anchors your child in the sacramental life of the Church and reinforces everything they learn in the classroom.

Class Schedules & Curriculum

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS)

CGS offers a religious education framework designed for children between the ages of 3 and 12. Drawing on Montessori principles, this approach fosters a child's spiritual growth through an emphasis on biblical texts and liturgical traditions, ensuring the experience is tailored to their specific stage of development.

Level I| Ages 3–6

*Level II| Ages 6-9

*Only for children who have completed at least one full year of Level 1. Only available at St. Joseph. This is an alternative option to the general 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade classes.

- **Schedule:** Meets on various dates and times during the year as determined by the Catechist. The academic year runs from September through April, with a break during the Christmas season. After you have registered, the DRE or catechist will reach out to you with the schedule.

1st–8th Grade Religious Education

Classes utilize the *Word of Life* Curriculum. *Word of Life* is a K–8 religious education curriculum from Ignatius Press and the Augustine Institute that bridges faith and reason to cultivate a Christian worldview. Modeled after the 2020 *Directory for Catechesis*, the program emphasizes evangelization and the foundational Gospel message. It combines scripture, rigorous theology, and engaging activities to help students explore salvation history and discipleship. Ultimately, the series uses the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to give modern youth a practical, relevant understanding of Catholic doctrine and their identity in Christ.

- **Schedule:** Held weekly on Wednesdays. The academic year runs from September through April, with a break during the Christmas season.*
 - **Grades 1–4:** 5:15 PM – 6:15 PM
 - **Grades 5–8:** 7:00 PM – 8:00 PM

***Note for 2nd Grade:** Additional activities will be held throughout the year for students preparing to make their First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion.

9th–12th Grade

The 9th grade curriculum, *Chosen: Your Journey to Confirmation*, produced by Ascension Press, is a comprehensive, multimedia-based catechesis program designed to

prepare young people for the Sacrament of Confirmation while fostering a lifelong commitment to the Catholic faith.

10th Grade continues to use the *Chosen* curriculum, along with *Wild Goose* Videos produced by Fr. Dave Pivonka, inviting our Confirmandi into a more intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit. They also explore the text *Rediscovering Catholicism* by Matthew Kelly. Kelly gives a practical vision of Catholicism as a dynamic way of life rather than a set of rigid rules

11th and 12th Grade are combined and have a large emphasis on discipleship through Scripture Studies and service opportunities.

- **Schedule:** Meets weekly on Wednesdays from 7:00 PM – 8:00 PM. The academic year runs from September through April, with a break during the Christmas season.
- ***Note for 10th Grade:** Additional activities will be held throughout the year for students preparing to make their Confirmation.
- **Location:** 9th-12th graders from St. Joseph and St. Mary meet at the Okoboji Bible Conference Site at the “Ella House” (7 S US-71, Arnolds Park).

Attendance & Communication

Absences & Tardiness

Only a parent or guardian can report a student's absence. If your child is going to be absent, tardy, or needs to be picked up early, please contact the DRE via email or phone/text.

- **Make-Up Work:** Students are required to make up any missed lessons within 2 weeks of the absence.

Safe Environment Communication Policy Diocese of Sioux City, VIRTUS

To maintain compliance with diocesan safe environment policies, communication with minors is strictly regulated:

- **CGS & 1st–4th Grade:** All digital communication must go directly through the parents.
- **5th–12th Grade:** Parents/Guardians must be copied on any digital communication sent to a student. Students should not contact staff or volunteers

without explicit parental consent, and a parent/guardian must be included in the message.

Weather & Emergency Closings

Inclement Weather Cancellations

If local public schools cancel classes or schedule an early dismissal on a Wednesday due to weather, Religious Education is also canceled:

- **St. Joseph RE** is canceled if **Okoboji Schools** close or dismiss early.
- **St. Mary RE** is canceled if **Spirit Lake Schools** close or dismiss early.
- Classes will also be canceled if general travel conditions are deemed dangerous in Milford, Spirit Lake, and the surrounding areas.

Emergency Notifications & Contacts

- In the event of emergency cancellations, parents will be notified immediately via OSV and Twilio. We will also post on our parish Facebook pages. Please follow “St. Joseph Catholic Church, Milford, IA” and/or “St. Mary’s Catholic Church.”
 - **Student Emergencies:** In the event of a medical or situational emergency involving your child, staff will immediately call the parent/guardian listed under the student's emergency contacts. An incident report may be filed.
 - *Please contact the DRE immediately if your phone number, address, or emergency contact information changes during the year.*
-

Health & Safety Policies

Health Guidelines

Catechists and volunteers prioritize the health of all children. Please keep your child home from class if they have a fever, a severe cough, body aches, or are otherwise feeling unwell. If your child was absent from school due to illness, please keep them home from Faith Formation.

Arrival & Dismissal Procedures for CGS and 1st-8th Grade

- **Arrival:** Students should arrive on time for class. Parents of children in CGS and grades 1–4 **must** escort their children inside the building.

- **Dismissal:** For safety, catechists will escort students from the classroom and release them directly to a parent or guardian. Parents **must** come inside to pick up their children in CGS and grades 1-4. Students in CGS and grades 1-4 are strictly prohibited from walking home alone or walking unescorted to vehicles. Students in grades 5-8 are strictly prohibited from walking home alone.
- Please contact the DRE if you have to make special arrangements for pick up and drop off.

VIRTUS Compliance

The Lakes Catholic Community is a proud member of VIRTUS, an organization dedicated to preventing wrongdoing and promoting safe environments within the Church.

- All catechists, weekly volunteers, and regular volunteers must be fully VIRTUS-trained, compliant, and complete their mandatory monthly online bulletins.
- To learn more or complete training, visit <https://www.virtusonline.org/virtus>

Student Conduct & Behavior Policies

Church Reverence

Reverence for the Blessed Sacrament is expected at all times inside the churches of St. Joseph and St. Mary. Students are expected to:

- Bless themselves with Holy Water upon entering and leaving.
- Bow in front of the Altar.
- Genuflect when entering and exiting the pews.
- Keep eyes forward and refrain from talking to peers.
- **Grades 2+:** Actively participate in Mass prayers and follow along in the missal.

Property & Environmental Rules

- **Parish Property:** Running or climbing on furniture inside the building is prohibited.
- **Electronic Devices for CGS, 1st-8th Grade:** Cell phones and other electronic devices are not permitted during class. They must be placed in a designated classroom bin or kept in the students' bag for the duration of the session.

- **Food & Drinks for CGS, 1st-8th Grad:** Water bottles are permitted in the classroom (**water only**). Outside snacks are not allowed unless explicitly provided by the program for a special occasion.

Dress Code

Students are asked to dress modestly and appropriately for a church environment. The following are prohibited:

- Bare midriffs, bare shoulders, or bare feet.
- Very short shorts or exposed undergarments.
- Clothing displaying references to drugs, alcohol, tobacco, sex, death, or the devil.

Discipline Policy

Our catechists are generous volunteers sharing their time and faith. The Faith Formation office maintains a low tolerance for disruptive, disrespectful, or unruly behavior. Our motto is “Safe, Kind, Helpful, and Holy.”

Standard Discipline Steps

- **1st Disruption:** The student will be corrected by the catechist. The catechist reserves the right to notify the parents/guardians and DRE.
- **2nd Disruption:** The student will be sent to the DRE or site facilitator, and parents/guardians will be contacted immediately.

Zero-Tolerance Infractions

Certain actions will result in immediate removal from the classroom. The student will be required to complete the remainder of their curriculum at home with their parent/guardian for a timeframe to be determined. These include:

- Throwing objects or hitting another student or adult.
- Use of foul language.
- The use, possession, or selling of tobacco, alcohol, drugs, or narcotics.
- Possession of matches, lighters, guns, knives, or any sharp objects.
- Fleeing the premises
- **Bullying & Intimidation:** Verbal, physical, text, social media, or written abuse, demeaning remarks/jokes, and threats directed at students or adults will not be tolerated.

Religious Education Handbook 2026-2027

Note: In the event of a zero-tolerance violation, parents will be notified immediately, and a mandatory meeting with the DRE and Pastor will be required before the student may return.