

St. Joseph Parish

Religious Education Program (R.E.P.)

Handbook for Volunteers



“The faith is perhaps the most beautiful heritage that we can give because it makes you grow. To help boys and girls, young men, women and adults to know and love the Lord even more is one of the most beautiful educational adventures, for it comprises the Church.”

~Pope Francis, *Address to International Catechetical Congress*,
September 27, 2013

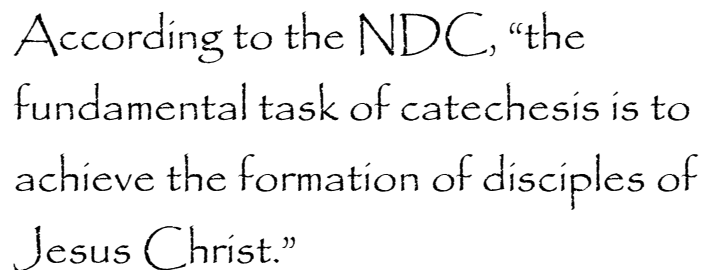
St. Joseph Parish Faith Formation Philosophy

Faith formation is a lifelong process that begins at baptism, is supported by the community through traditional and alternative forms of faith formation and continues through adulthood by various means and methods.

Catechist: a term used for someone who teaches religion; derived from a Greek word for “resound” or “echo”

The National Directory for Catechesis (NDC) identifies six responsibilities of our ministry as catechist:

1. Sharing knowledge of the faith
2. Educating about liturgy (worship) and sacraments
3. Providing moral formation in Jesus Christ
4. Teaching how to pray with Christ
5. Preparing to live in community and to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church
6. Promoting a missionary spirit (witness and service)



According to the NDC, “the fundamental task of catechesis is to achieve the formation of disciples of Jesus Christ.”

The Role of the Director of Religious Education (DRE) and Coordinator of Youth Ministry (CYM)

The duties of the DRE include the visioning and implementation of the program, organization of the schedule, calling forth and supporting volunteer catechists. The DRE, Michelle Hochrein, has been charged with the visioning, organization and implementation of the 3 year old – 6th grade program by the Pastor, Fr. Brendan Walsh. Don Dalgleish, CYM, has been charged with this same task for 7th & 8th grades and Mustard Seed. At each session, Don will be directly involved with the 7th & 8th grade classes and Michelle will be directly involved with the 3 year old through 6th grade classes to see that everything is running smoothly.

Keeping Michelle or Don informed of activities or difficulties that may occur in your session is very important. Occasionally, parents will contact the office with questions about a particular session. One of us already in the know regarding schedules and issues will facilitate a productive conversation with the parents. ***All written or emailed communication between a catechist and the parents must go through Michelle or Don.***

If you have questions, concerns or suggestions, please contact Michelle and/or Don. During the session both Michelle and Don are available to assist with discipline issues or answer any questions you may have. Communication with Don or Michelle is easy; you may speak with them before or after your session, call the REP office (426-2674), or send an email to michelle_hochrein@stjos.com or don_dalgleish@stjos.com.

A Catechist's Covenant

Each catechist must commit to:

- ❖ being a person of prayer; for yourself, the children and their families.
- ❖ an active sacramental life in our Catholic faith.
- ❖ preparing for each session using our curriculum, materials and online resources dedicated to each grade level.
- ❖ arriving at each session in enough time to greet each child in a welcoming manner.
- ❖ attending to and caring for the classroom setting.
- ❖ connecting with parents to foster a cooperative relationship.
- ❖ flexibility in modifying a lesson if it becomes appropriate.
- ❖ collaborating with other catechists, especially in your grade level.
- ❖ ongoing formation of your own faith development.
- ❖ communicating ideas, needs and concerns to Michelle or Don.

Catechist Certification

The Diocese of Lansing offers three levels of catechist certification:

- ❖ Basic – 20 certification hours which include 10 hours in Methodology.
- ❖ Intermediate – 30 certification hours which include 10 hours in Methodology.
- ❖ Advanced – 50 certification hours which include 10 hours in Methodology.

Certification hours are obtained by attending sessions specifically designed for catechists. The Diocese of Lansing determines the content of these sessions. The Diocese does not expect each catechist to come with his or her certification completed, nor to complete it within the first year. However the Diocese does require that each catechist spend some time each year on his or her certification hours. The parish will pay for the cost of these formation sessions. These sessions are held at various locations, which include our parish, regional gatherings, and Diocesan gatherings.

CURRICULUM

The Text

We use the textbook series *Be My Disciples* published by RCLB (Resources for Christian Living-Benziger) for grades 1 through 5. This series is spiral in nature; the children are exposed to the foundations of our faith (Creed, Sacraments, Morality and Prayer) each year at a level appropriate for their age. In grades 6 through 8, we use the Catholic Connections curriculum by St. Mary's Press.

The Catechist Teaching Manual details characteristics of the children at each grade level, outlines the philosophy of teaching religious education and explains the organization of the student books. Each chapter has helpful hints, suggestions for activities and ideas for projects.

The accompanying websites, www.bemydisciples.com and smp.org, has additional information for catechists, including current event correlations. The *Be My Disciples* program provides blackline masters of reproducible activities for each chapter and assessment tools, while these things can be found online for Catholic Connections.

Community Events

An important component of our curriculum are the community events which happen twice each year. These take place at a regularly scheduled session and all children participate together. The responsibility of the catechist on these days is to be present and to assist their class with the activities; no preparation is necessary.

Gathering Time

Children in grades 2-8 gather together for 15 minutes at the beginning of the session. This is a time to come together to discuss the events of the day, sing and experience community. Catechists are to be with their children during these gathering times.

Lesson Planning

Successful lesson planning includes these points:

- ◆ Follow the Chapter Assignments guide, obtained at the beginning of the year from Michelle or Don.
- ◆ Read through the chapter in the catechist guide.
- ◆ Make notes.
- ◆ Outline what you will cover and what activities you will do.
- ◆ Put it away for a while and let it sink in and let the Holy Spirit work through you. Don't forget to pray:)
- ◆ Check out any resources for ideas on prayers, activities, and projects.
- ◆ Come back to the catechist guide and finalize your plans.
- ◆ Gather your material and supplies.
- ◆ Make a final check the day before class.

Session Hints

- ◆ Arrive early (at least 15 minutes) and set up your room.
- ◆ Pray.
- ◆ Participate with the children during gathering time.
- ◆ Follow your session plan, but be flexible knowing the Holy Spirit is at work.
- ◆ Be willing to modify your plan during class, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide you.
- ◆ At some point after class, take a few minutes to review how things went, what worked and what you may want to do differently. Make notes in your planner so you'll remember for the next session or even for next year.
- ◆ Clean up your classroom and turn out the lights.

Supplies and Resources

Each classroom is stocked with the necessary needs of that grade level; scissors, pens/pencils, glue, crayons/markers, etc. All other supplies are located in the kitchen at Disciple House. There you will find construction paper, art and craft supplies, books, CDs/DVDs; all kinds of things!

Resources for catechists to use to enhance their sessions are located in the same kitchen at Disciple House. There are games, project books, puzzle books, etc. Please feel free to check out, take home, utilize and return any of these in a timely fashion.

The Schedule

Our schedule begins in September and ends in May with holiday breaks throughout the year. Catechists have opportunities for formation sessions that will be offered; we will let you know when and where these will be held.

Cancellation Policy

Classes will only be cancelled if poor conditions exist at the time of the session. School cancellations will not necessarily indicate a cancellation of REP. Catechists and families will be notified via our School Messenger phone message/text distribution service and an email will be sent.

Attendance & Record Keeping

At the beginning of each session please pick up the attendance report in your mailbox and note any child who is not present. Place this form outside your room in the file folder on the tack strip. The office assistants will pick up the form and record absences online for each class and return the attendance report to your mailbox.

Visits from Fr. Brendan or Deacon Randy

Either will gladly attend your class for a question and answer session or to present a topic if you would like. If you would like to schedule a visit, please give a choice of two or three dates and present them well in advance to Michelle or Don.

Behavior and Discipline

How we approach discipline is important and will set the tone for our classrooms. Behavior is a matter of treating others as Jesus would want us to; it is about living out the Gospel values.

We must treat each of our children as the precious gift from God they are. If children do not feel your respect and caring when they come through our doors, then all of the teaching you do will have little or no effect. However, those same children must not be allowed to treat others with disrespect or cruelty. All discipline that takes place during our time together should be done in a caring manner with firmness and consistency.

There are several different methods of behavior management that can be used effectively in your group. Please let us know if you are interested in reading about and/or discussing these.

If you must discipline a child more than twice in a session please send that child to Michelle or Don. You have only 1.5 hours each week with the children and it is not fair to spend more than a small fraction disciplining one child or attempting to get a child to be cooperative. We will talk with the child and take any action that is necessary in the situation. This helps to reinforce our expectations of respect and caring of all.

Parents of children who do not respond to either the catechist or one of us will be called and asked to meet with the child, Michelle or Don and possibly the catechist. Children whose parents are called more than two times will be permanently removed from your room.

Children with Special Needs

We do not turn away any child because of special needs they may have. It is our policy to include any child in a regular session (with appropriate assistance), to provide one on one catechesis, and/or small group catechesis. If you have a child with special needs in your group, you will be notified and given the information you need to have successful class times. Please feel free to contact Michelle or Don if you feel the situation is not working out.

Mass and/or Reception of Reconciliation at an REP session

Catechists do not, as a rule, take the children in their session to Mass. Please do not plan to attend Mass with your class unless you have received specific permission from Michelle or Don.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is available to all parishioners each Saturday at 4:00 pm (3:30 pm during Advent and Lent) as well as specially set weekday times during Advent and Lent. We do not plan for a communal reception of the Sacrament at REP for several reasons; Fr. Brendan is not available for the Reconciliation at all REP sessions and this is a parental responsibility, so we encourage all families to attend the sacrament together for the spiritual benefit that is available to them.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES AND HEALTH/SAFETY ISSUES

*Please follow these instructions in the event
of an emergency!*

Fire – study the exit instructions in your session room and follow it in the event of a fire. Each group will go to a designated area to be gathered again when it is safe. PLEASE WATCH for alternate directions in the event that our gathering place is compromised. A fire drill will occur in the Fall.

Tornado – At Disciple House, all children will gather in the basement. A tornado drill will occur in the Spring.

Lock Down for security concerns- Exterior doors will be locked with deadbolts activated. Blinds will be closed in all rooms where possible. Children will be moved to areas that do not have windows.

Information about our children

Health Forms – these are online and can be consulted for emergency numbers when a child has been injured or becomes ill. The Office Volunteers, Michelle or Don can do this for you.

Allergies and medical conditions – if a child has an allergy or medical condition that we need to be aware of, it is listed under the child's name on the detailed class list. **Please pay close attention to this information as some of our children have potential anaphylactic responses to allergens.**

Permission Slips – children may not be taken off the premises of St. Joseph Parish without the written permission (on official permission forms) of the parents. This means you must be thinking several weeks in advance if you want to take a field trip. Permission forms are located in the Disciple House kitchen.

Snacks - Do not feel that you must provide snacks for the children during the session. Some catechists enjoy doing this, but please check allergies of your students beforehand. If you would like to solicit help from your students' parents, we can put together a Sign Up Genius form for your class. We can notify parents of any allergens and then the parents may take turns providing a snack for each class. Please let Michelle or Don know if you would like us to do this for your class.

Pick-Up Policy for Children

Children who are in Kindergarten through 2nd grade MUST be picked up from their classroom. This pickup must be done by a parent or designated adult unless the parent has requested, in writing, that an older sibling pick up the child.

Children in grades 3 – 8 may be dismissed without being picked up by a parent.

EARLY pickups of ALL grades must be done by the parent or designated adult at the session room! Catechists should never be alone with a child. If all of your children have been picked up and you are the only adult in the room, please bring your child to the entry where they will be picked up so that you are in the presence of other adults.

LEGAL ISSUES

Criminal Background Check

The Diocese of Lansing has mandated that each volunteer who works with the children of any parish consent to a background check. This effort is made in order to protect our children to the very best of our ability.

Protecting God's Children Sessions for Adults

The Diocese of Lansing mandates this workshop for each person who volunteers with our children. These workshops are held at various locations throughout the diocese as well online through virtus.org.

Protecting God's Children Component for Children

Since 2005 there has been a children's component to Protecting God's Children. It has been mandated by Bishop Earl Boyea of our Diocese of Lansing that all children receive this information once every three years. In 2019 a new safe environment session for children has been implemented called The kNOw Program that is designed for parents to view with their children.

Sexuality Issues

When we address the issues of morality, especially in the older grades, the topics of sexuality and sex sometimes come up informally through questions from the children and must be addressed appropriately when they occur.

When the curriculum calls for formal teaching on the subject of sexuality, parents *must be notified in advance*. The parent can then make the decision to keep their child home if they are uncomfortable with the topic being presented. A waiver will be sent via email for parents to review and return to us.