

# **ST. MICHAEL CHURCH FAITH FORMATION VOLUNTEERS' HANDBOOK**

## **Faith Formation Program**

### **Mission Statement**

**To build a foundation of faith through knowledge, service and the recognition of God's love within parish, community, universal church and world.**

### **Vision Statement**

**To educate in the Catholic tradition and enable families to belong to the life of our parish, where their talents are recognized and they are empowered and called to share their gifts, serving God and the community.**

## THE CATECHIST

The catechist has one of the most important jobs in the world. They have the opportunity to share their faith in Jesus Christ and the Traditions of the Church with fellow Christians. This ministry in the church participates in the ministry of the Bishop of the diocese, who is its chief teacher. The Bishop delegates this responsibility to the pastor of the parish, who in turn shares this privilege with the catechist. To share in this task of the church is a great privilege and a great responsibility. **The term *Catechist* is meant to include all volunteers who assist in the Faith Formation program.**

Parents are trusting that catechists will responsibly assist them in nurturing the faith formation of their children. Catechists provide an environment which nurtures the faith life of their students and ensures their safety. In order to do this, it is crucial for all catechists to be aware of their responsibilities and have a clear understanding of their duties. This handbook provides information that will enable catechists to perform their duties and administer the Gospel of Christ effectively.

Because of the importance of the ministry and the responsibilities inherent in it, this parish will use only catechists who are 18 years of age or older and fully initiated (confirmed) into the Church. Responsible youth under the age of 18 may function as classroom aides. **The Diocese requires that there always be two fully cleared and approved adults with students in all settings.**

## CATECHESIS

The Catholic Church has issued many documents that describe the ministry of catechesis. This program is based upon the principles and guidelines found in these documents. *The General Directory for Catechesis, the National Catechetical Directory, the Catechism of the Catholic Church* as well as diocesan statements on the ministry of catechesis, provide a framework for parish programs. The following is a summary of the most important directives provided by these documents and a clarification of how they help guide the catechetical program in the parish.

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* quotes John Paul II from *Catechesi Tradendae* as he describes what is entailed in the ministry of catechesis:

Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life. *CCC, #5*

*The National Catechetical Directory* further clarifies what elements should be a part of a catechetical program:

Like other pastoral activities, catechetical ministry must be understood in relation to Jesus' threefold mission. It is a form of the ministry of the word, which proclaims and teaches. It leads to and flows from the ministry of worship, which sanctifies through prayer and sacrament. It supports the ministry of service, which is linked to efforts to achieve social justice. *NCD, #32*

## **ELEMENTS OF CATECHESIS**

Guided by the principles found in the documents of the Church in the ministry of catechesis, the catechetical program of this parish will include the following elements:

### **Message**

The story of Scripture and the teachings of the Church will be communicated within the context of the faith story of each student and the signs of the times.

### **Community**

Efforts will be made to form Christian community among the students through interaction and faith sharing.

### **Worship**

The participants will experience many forms of prayer and worship to help them become prayerful people.

### **Service**

Participants will be called to service and justice, which is inherent in the message of Jesus and the teachings of the Church.

## **PROGRAM GOALS**

St. Michael's Catholic Parish strives to be a Christian community faithful to the Gospel and the Catholic Tradition. The parish is, in reality, a community of communities, all united in the endless struggle and search to know, love and serve God, self and one another. The unique diversity of the parish offers at once a challenge and a rich resource for learning. The goals of St. Michael's Catechetical Program are:

To provide a program of formal religious instruction for the children and youth of the parish.

To support parents in their role as primary educators of their children.

To offer sacramental preparation to children and youth.

To help youth discover the richness and challenges of Scripture and the teachings and traditions of the Catholic Church.

To build a strong Catholic identity among the youth of the parish.

To allow youth to experience the Church as community.

To deepen the prayer life of children and youth.

To motivate youth to live lives rooted in charity and justice based on the moral teachings of the church.

To expose students to the liturgical and sacramental richness that is part of the Catholic Tradition.

To enable students to become responsible, self-reflecting, loving and praying individuals.

## **ROLE OF THE CATECHIST**

A Catechist is called to ...

Be a witness of the Good News of Christ and the Catholic faith and be a model of the attitudes and actions of a disciple of Christ.

Be willing to share his/her faith story, when appropriate, with the students.

Be a practicing Catholic who accepts the teachings of the Church and follows its laws.

Be a person of prayer.

Share the love of Christ with the students through openness, listening, respect and forgiveness.

Continue to grow in his/her understanding of Christ's call and Church teachings.

Continually evaluate his/her performance as a catechist and try to improve.

Communicate the authentic teachings of the Catholic Church.

Pray and celebrate liturgy with the students.

Challenge the students to live lives of justice and love based on Scripture and the moral teachings of the Catholic Church.

Foster community among the students in the classroom.

Follow the policies and procedures set forth in this handbook.

## **DUTIES OF THE CATECHIST**

When a person accepts the role of catechist in the parish faith formation program, it is assumed the person is willing to complete the following tasks and accept the following responsibilities. Catechists who have questions about any of the following duties should discuss them with the faith formation leader.

### **Each Catechist will...**

Attend meetings and training sessions scheduled by the faith formation leader.

Be present for each catechetical session at least 15 minutes before class begins in a prepared and organized manner to begin at the scheduled starting time and remain after the session is finished long enough for students to be properly dismissed and to return the classroom area to its original state.

Spend an appropriate amount of time planning before each class.

Follow the diocesan guidelines of the grade level objectives required through the use of the curriculum provided along with the appropriate internal and external resources.

Supervise the students in the class he/she is teaching, making sure to provide a safe catechetical environment.

Use the time during class to form and inform the faith of the students in his/her care.

Maintain discipline in the classroom following the policies outlined in this handbook.

Provide prayer experiences for the students in the class.

Follow diocesan and parish policies regarding catechesis.

Seek diocesan certification as a catechist in a timely manner.

Provide all necessary clearances and complete all paperwork and in-services required by the parish and diocese.

Follow diocesan and parish policies related to health and safety.

## **BENEFITS PROVIDED TO THE CATECHIST BY THE PARISH**

Fees for approved workshops and in-services.

Orientation and training.

No fees charged for catechist's children in the faith formation program.

## **CATECHIST ETHICS**

Catechists will model a Christian life-style in and out of the classroom.

Catechists will follow the teachings and laws of the Church.

Catechists will display a positive attitude toward the students and their families.

## **CATECHIST SCREENING**

Everyone who works with children in the parish catechetical program will be screened through the Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record check – PA Act 34 and the Department of Public Welfare Child Abuse History Clearance – PA Act 151 and the Federal Criminal Record Check with fingerprinting if not a PA resident in the last 10 years (or an affidavit if you have been a resident in the last 10 years), and a clearance from the Diocesan Office for the Protection of Children and Youth as required by the Diocese of Erie. Catechists will be responsible for filing for these clearances and providing the results before they can work with children. The State Police Criminal Check and Child Abuse History clearances can be done online for free for volunteers. The fingerprinting clearance can be done at the Intermediate Unit in Grove City for a charge. This process determines if the individual has a criminal record and is required for the protection of the children. Catechists are also required to participate in an online Diocesan-approved Child Abuse In-Service, and sign an Intent for Compliance to follow the Diocesan Child Protection Policy. This in-service will enable the catechist to understand and respond to issues of child safety and welfare. The catechist is also required to sign a form yearly to function as a mandated reporter for abuse (see below) and also to sign a practicing Catholic form yearly. The clearances and in-service must be renewed every 5 years.

## **CHILD ABUSE REPORTING**

St. Michael's Faith Formation volunteers are mandated reporters and are required by the Pennsylvania Revised Code and Diocesan Policy on Child Abuse to report suspected or actual child abuse or neglect by following the procedure to report child abuse according to the Office for the Protection of Children and Youth of the Erie Diocese. This information can be found at [www.eriecd.org/childprotection/reportabuse.html](http://www.eriecd.org/childprotection/reportabuse.html). A failure to report is a felony.

## CODE OF CONDUCT

To share in the ministry of Christ is a great privilege as well as a tremendous responsibility. The privilege is the joy of sharing in the mission of Jesus Himself. The responsibility is acting in a way that conforms to the attitude and actions of Christ. As is evident in the Gospels, Jesus had a deep, abiding respect for each human being and never did anything that harmed or misled people in their personal or spiritual life.

The public needs to know that the Church is committed to protecting the children/youth who are entrusted to its care and to ensuring that those offering services are in right relationship with the children/youth receiving services.

There is a challenge in the Scriptures to “live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:1-3).

In this spirit, Personnel

- Are expected to represent the Church in a faithful, authentic and loving way, supporting the teachings, disciplines and tradition of the Catholic Church.
- Will exhibit the highest Catholic ethical standards and personal integrity in their day-to-day work and personal lives;
- Will conduct themselves in a professional manner in both church and work environments, avoiding any flagrant or public misconduct;
- Will hold one another accountable to conduct and standards appropriate to their respective roles;
- Will foster the dignity of each person and be committed to the best interests of others;
- Will respect the integrity of all individuals and protect the confidentiality of all information to which they have access;
- Will not take advantage of any relationship with a child/youth for their own benefit;
- Will not physically, sexually or emotionally abuse anyone;
- Will not neglect a child who is in their care.

## THE CATECHETICAL PROCESS

Catechesis involves instructions on and apprenticeship in the teachings and traditions of the Church, and therefore catechesis is much more than merely a transfer of information. The ultimate goal of catechesis is an increase of personal faith and the resultant transformation of the person being catechized, as well as the Christian community and the world at large. In order for this to happen, it is necessary for the catechist to use a process that promotes growth in faith and life-changing behavior at the same time. Each catechist must understand that in order to fulfill their role, they will have to pay as much attention to the *way* they teach as to *what* they teach. The following process or something similar is generally used in the modern catechetical materials. Our curriculum provides these concepts. Awareness of it helps in your planning.

**STEP ONE: LIFE EXPERIENCE** The process begins with an attempt to get in touch with the life experience or “story” of those to be catechized. As believers get in touch with their story, they become aware of God’s presence in the world and God’s action in their lives. Sharing their story and hearing the stories of others reinforces this awareness and sets the stage for the proclamation of the Gospel.

**STEP TWO: REFLECTION** Through questions and discussion, the life experience of the believer is deepened. As believers examine their experiences together, awareness of the deeper meaning of the experience grows. Life experiences become faith stories in which God and the believer become co-authors.

**STEP THREE: MESSAGE** At this point the Catholic Christian Tradition, which includes Scripture, is examined as the larger “story” which gives the individual story both context and meaning. The student discovers who they are in relation to the community of faith. The stories of Scripture and the language and formulas that communicate the beliefs the Catholic Church teaches are handed on as the way Catholics have understood the Christian message through the ages.

**STEP FOUR: DISCOVERY** Now the group makes the connection between their own faith story or life experience and the Christian story. Each sheds light on the other. This step is basically dialogue between believers and the Tradition.

**STEP FIVE: RESPONSE** Finally, the believer is challenged with the question, “So what?” The message of Christ is not meant to be merely the topic for discussion among Christians, but a challenge to be put into action. At this time the catechist can suggest ways for the group to respond and believers can challenge one another in their efforts to live the faith.

## **CATECHIST CERTIFICATION**

In order to carry out this important ministry, training and resources are essential. In his first encyclical letter, *Catechesi Tradendae*, Pope John Paul II states:

As the twentieth century draws to a close, the Church is bidden by God and by events...to renew her trust in catechetical activity as a prime aspect of her mission. She is bidden to offer catechesis her best resources in people and energy...in order to organize it better and train qualified personnel. This is no mere human calculation; it is an attitude of faith. And an attitude of faith always has reverence to the faithfulness of God, who never fails to respond. CT, #15

In order to carry out this call for trained catechists, the diocese has developed resources and programs. Information can be obtained from the faith formation leader or the diocesan Department of Religious Education.

## **CATECHIST EVALUATION**

The faith formation leader is responsible for the supervision of each catechist. During the year each catechist will be observed by the faith formation leader and given feedback on their performance. The Catechist Observation Form will be used to report the results of the evaluation to the catechist. The purpose of these evaluation sessions is to continually improve the parish program by supporting those who teach in it.

## **SUSPENSION**

The parish reserves the right to suspend and/or renew the volunteer ministry position of any catechist who is not successfully performing their duties or who is not fulfilling the responsibilities in this handbook. Any catechist who is accused of a serious crime or who is discovered to have committed a serious crime will be put on immediate leave until the matter has been investigated and it is determined by the pastor that there is no danger to the children or youth of the parish. Conduct inside or outside of the program that is detrimental to the reputation of the program/parish or the safety of others may be grounds for suspension or expulsion at the discretion of the pastor.

## CURRICULUM

The catechetical curriculum must communicate clearly and completely, according to the age level of the person being catechized, the teachings and traditions of the Catholic Church. The source for these teachings and traditions is Scripture and *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. These resources have been made accessible and age appropriate by the development of a *Diocese of Erie Religious Education Curriculum*.

Textbooks and other materials used in the classroom are in conformity with the teachings found in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. They have been chosen because they offer catechists the resources necessary to conduct classes, which include all the elements of the ministry of catechesis.

Presently the textbooks used are:

Grades Kdg.-5 *Pflaum Gospel Weeklies*, Pflaum  
Grades 2 & 3 (In Addition) *Blessed*, Dynamic Catholic  
Grade 6-8 *Edge Curriculum*, Life Teen & *Catholic Youth Bible*, St. Mary's Press  
Grades 9 & 10 – *Chosen*, Ascension Press, & *Catholic Youth Bible*, St. Mary's Press

The text material has been evaluated and found acceptable by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Catechism of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The materials should be used by the catechist as the primary resource for planning and teaching. Catechists may supplement them with other materials that are in conformity with the Diocesan Guidelines and *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Additional supplies and resources beyond the basic items provided which the catechist would like to have for use with their class, may be requested at least two weeks in advance.

## **COPYRIGHT LAWS**

Catechists are expected to be aware of and adhere to copyright laws regarding both print (word or music) and media materials (music, video, digital images, etc.). These laws regulate the copying and distribution of information created by someone other than the catechist. As a general rule of thumb, catechists are permitted to make one copy of print material for their personal use. While there are some print materials which are considered public domain and may be copied freely, these materials are few and rare. Therefore, it is the expectation that any material that is copied for distribution within the faith formation program be explicitly marked with required permission to copy information. This permission is obtained by calling or writing the publisher of the material and asking for permission to copy. This regulation expressly forbids copying any textbook/workbook/activity book pages for distribution to a class unless there is an explicit statement in the text stating permission is granted.

## **PLANNING**

Because of the importance of planning and organization in order to teach effectively, each catechist is expected to spend sufficient time prior to class planning his/her lesson. A lesson plan is recommended for each class. A schedule of the lessons to be taught each class time is provided at the beginning of the year. Every effort should be made to stay on track with the schedule so that all of the lessons can be completed in the class year.

## **SUBSTITUTE CATECHISTS & AIDES**

Catechists and Aides who have to miss a class session are to call the faith formation leader as far in advance as possible. The catechist and aide need to let the faith formation leader know so that a substitute can be found before the class. It is the responsibility of the catechist to have a lesson plan available for the substitute to use.

## **PRAYER/LITURGY**

Catechists are expected to provide the young people in their class with opportunities to experience a variety of prayer forms and learn the traditional prayers of the Catholic Church. In this process catechists can rely on the child's experience of prayer within their family. These prayers are to be learned with the cooperation and help of the family, especially in the elementary years. Catechists should provide parents with a list of these prayers and inform them of their responsibility to pray with their children as the children learn the prayers in class.

It is essential for all catechists to take the opportunity to deepen the students' experience of liturgy. Discussing the Sunday readings, the seasons of the Church year, holy days and saints' feasts days, rituals, liturgical practices and symbols can help youth understand and celebrate their Catholic heritage.

## **ATTENDANCE**

Each catechist in Grades K-6<sup>th</sup> must record attendance at the beginning of each class using the role list received and then the form should be put back in the grade level class folder to be picked up from your classroom after class. Forms will be provided each class time in the grade level class folder. Catechists of older students will be provided with sign-in sheets for the students to use each class and those should be turned in after class in the class folder.

## **NON-CUSTODIAL PARENT RIGHTS**

Catechists will be advised by the faith formation leader of the non-custodial parental rights of each child from a divorced family when this information is available. It is the faith formation leader's responsibility to have duplicates of any parental correspondence sent to the non-custodial parent as well as the custodial parent if this has been requested. Catechists must recognize that occasionally children will miss faith formation because of custody issues. It is never in the best interest of the child to force competition between time with a parent and time in a faith formation program. Compassionate understanding is needed even when these situations cause absence.

## **HOMEWORK**

Catechists may assign homework, but should at least send paperwork home from the lessons done in class. This will enable the parents to keep informed about the material being covered, and involve them in their child's formal faith formation. Parents are asked to assist their children with all home assignments.

## **PROGRESS REPORTS**

Students in 7<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> Grade will receive a report twice a year which shows what they have completed and/or what is still needed in preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation up to that point. Catechists in these grades must be diligent in keeping accurate attendance and in turning in all Confirmation requirement paperwork into the Faith Formation Office so that these records will be complete. This will include Saint Papers, Sponsor Papers, Confirmation Information Forms, Make-up Class Work, Bishop's Letters and all other necessary forms students provide for their sacramental preparation. The reports will be done and sent from the Faith Formation Office.

## **SUPERVISION**

Catechists are responsible for the supervision and safety of the children in their care. Catechists must be present at all times when class is in session. A catechist may leave his/her classroom only in a case of emergency.

Catechists must take care to keep all equipment in working order and notify the faith formation leader when something is in need of repair or replacing, keep the classroom free of hazards, and monitor all student activities.

Catechists who see students wandering the halls or left unattended are to report this to the faith formation leader immediately. Catechists who discover an unrecognized adult in the building are to escort the person to the faith formation leader's office immediately.

When supervising the dismissal of the children, never let a child go with any adult that does not have explicit permission to pick the child up from the program. Class folders have a cover sheet with the names of all people parents have given permission to for picking up their child. Students in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and higher may leave class unattended.

## **SUPERVISION cont'd.**

Catechists must respect the students' right to privacy and refrain from casually sharing personal evaluative information about the students. Special care must be taken not to inform other catechists about student behavior problems unless it is important for the growth of the child, and the effectiveness of the catechist. Any information shared should be objective in nature, constructive and relevant to the program. No information about students should be shared with anyone outside the program except for those who are responsible for the student's care.

## **DISCIPLINE**

Catechists are responsible for the safety and welfare of the children in their class. Also, they are responsible for creating an environment in the room which is positive, Christian and conducive to learning. In order for that to happen, the catechist must establish him or herself as a leader in the classroom and set behavioral expectations for the children. Being on time and prepared with immediate activities for the students are critical to success in this regard. The following policies will provide guidelines in this area.

Everyone involved in the program is challenged by the words and example of Jesus to respect each person's right to be treated not only with dignity and respect but also with love. In order to provide for a safe and well-ordered program, in which students and catechists can learn to follow Jesus' call to love, some rules for behavior are necessary. Students are expected by their behavior to make the classes safe and positive experiences for themselves and their classmates. The program exists for student growth and in turn they are expected to carry out the following responsibilities:

1. Respect is to be shown for all students and catechists as well as other adults in leadership roles.
2. Students are expected to display Christian values in the way they dress, speak and behave.
3. Students are expected to treat the property, good name and physical safety of others with respect.
4. Students are expected to be present only in the areas of the building for which they have permission at a specific time, and are expected to act in a safe manner in and around the building.
5. Students are expected to use voice and display actions in a manner which is appropriate for a classroom and is respectful of the study time of others.
6. Use or possession of illegal drugs, alcohol, tobacco or weapons of any kind is strictly prohibited. These items will be seized and parents notified immediately. Students will be immediately removed from the environment.
7. Refrain from using cell phones and other electronic devices during Faith Formation classes and church youth activities. See policy next page.

## **CELL PHONE/ELECTRONIC DEVICES POLICY**

Cell Phone and other electronic devices, including MP3 players, Ipods etc. are not to be used during faith formation classes and church youth activities. They are a distraction, therefore hindering participation, so if any of these things are seen or heard, they will be confiscated and not returned until the end of the class or activity.

## **DISCIPLINARY ACTION**

Good discipline is aimed toward growth. We recognize that children may make mistakes and the role of the catechist at times will be one of guiding and correcting those mistakes. Catechists will handle discipline problems in a positive manner in the following order:

1. Catechists are encouraged to handle minor discipline problems in their classroom. At the time of the first correction, the student should be warned.
2. Students whose behavior becomes a continual problem in the classroom should be sent out of class to the faith formation leader. Anytime a student is sent from class for disciplinary reasons, parents will be contacted by phone, in person, or in writing by mail or email.
3. If the student's behavior continues to be a problem, the student will be removed from class and the parents will be contacted again. In order to return to the classroom, the student and parents will meet with the catechist and faith formation leader to resolve the issues.
4. As a last recourse, when a conflict between a student and catechist cannot be resolved, the parents will be asked to finish the year at home with the child. The child will be treated as one who is being home-schooled and the parish will follow the Diocesan guidelines concerning home-schooling. The child will be readmitted into the program in the next calendar year with no prejudice.

Any form of abusive treatment (either verbal or physical) or corporal punishment of a student by catechists is strictly forbidden. Catechists must never abuse a child verbally or touch a child in a way that could be construed as punitive. If a catechist strikes or injures a child or if there is a serious altercation between a catechist and a student or between students, it must be reported immediately to the faith formation leader. The parish will support the catechist in the event of legal action arising from such an incident only if the catechist was acting in self-defense and was in imminent danger from the student.

## **WEAPONS/ILLEGAL SUBSTANCE POLICY**

In order to ensure a safe and Christian environment, it is forbidden for anyone to possess a weapon or any object/material/substance that could be used as a weapon or confused with a real weapon by any reasonable person (toy guns, etc.) in the buildings, or within the geographic boundaries of St. Michael or St. Margaret, or in any location used by the parish to conduct any catechetical activity, or in any conveyance providing transportation to or from any activity related to the religious education program.

If a student is suspected of having an illegal substance (ex. weapons, drugs, alcohol, etc.), it will be the responsibility of the religious education leader, in the presence of another adult religious education staff member, to question the student to resolve the issue. If it cannot be done in a satisfactory manner, or if something illegal is found, the parents will be contacted immediately.

Weapons or potential weapons will be confiscated by the religious education leader when this action does not place the religious education leader in danger. If the student has used a weapon against another person or will not surrender the weapon or offending object/material/substance immediately and willingly, the local police will be called first, followed by notification of the parents. This is a zero tolerance policy.

Any student who violates this policy will be subject to immediate parish disciplinary action over and above any civil/criminal action brought by injured parties.

The student will be removed from the religious education class and an alternative method of religious education will be negotiated with the parents for the remainder of the year. Judgments about re-admittance to the program for the following year will be made on a case by case basis and this decision is at the sole discretion of the pastor.

If the incident involves an exchange of bodily fluids (for example, as in a wound which breaks the skin), the student will be asked to submit to medical tests for transmittable diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis B as recommended by a doctor. These tests will be at the parent's expense. In the name of being a community of Christians motivated by care and respect, this policy asks that the results of these tests, which are governed by guidelines of strict confidentiality, be openly shared with the respective parties on a need to know basis.

## **THREATS OF VIOLENT BEHAVIOR**

As a community of believers who value patience over aggression, and love above all it is inconsistent with our basic values to tolerate an environment of threat or fear. Threats of harm made against another individual or group of individuals are not acceptable and will not be tolerated.

This policy recognizes that in any community of people there will always be some conflict. Students will always be encouraged to manage their conflict in a positive, nonaggressive manner. Behavior such as cursing, pushing or fighting will not be tolerated.

In cases which are deemed by the catechist or religious education leader to be “minor” (meaning: no reason to believe the situation would lead to physical harm) the students will be separated and encouraged to work out their differences after a “cool-down” period.

If the catechist regards the altercation as “serious” (meaning: reasonable expectation that the conflict will lead to physical harm) the students will be immediately separated, the religious education leader will be notified, and the parents of the students will be called. The religious education leader must determine that the situation is resolved before the students will be readmitted to the program.

Students are expected to report to their catechist or religious education leader any threat made by a student that mentions the killing of any person. Such threats will be immediately reported to the pastor. It will be at the discretion of the pastor along with all adults involved to determine if a police investigation is necessary. In such a case, the student making such threats will be suspended from the program until such time as the police investigation is completed and the appropriate authorities are satisfied that there is no real threat of harm. Judgments about readmittance to the program will be made on a case by case basis and this decision is at the sole discretion of the pastor.

## **KEEPING STUDENT CONFIDENCES**

Occasionally students will share their personal problems with catechists. This can be very beneficial and healing for the child or youth. Catechists must make the student aware, however, that there is a point at which the catechist must share information with the student's parents or someone else who is responsible. A brief statement such as, "I will keep your confidence unless the life, health or safety of yourself or others is involved," can help students understand that catechists are legally responsible to pass on such information.

## **RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS**

Often, as catechists work with students, they form caring relationships with them. Good relationships with the students can help foster faith growth. However, caution must be exercised in relationships that develop between catechists and students. Some guidelines for these relationships are:

The catechist is the one responsible for making sure relationships with students are appropriate.

Catechists should avoid situations that would appear to be inappropriate.

Catechists must avoid being alone with students in an area hidden from view.

Caution must be used when touching a child. Any touch that could be interpreted as sexual must be avoided. Hugs should be appropriate and initiated by the child.

Catechists should never transport students when they would be alone with a student in the car. Call the parent and wait with the child.

If a relationship with one child keeps the catechist from meeting the needs of the other students on a regular basis, the relationship should be examined.

Catechists who find themselves sharing their personal problems with students that are well beyond what is appropriate should end the relationship.

## HARASSMENT

Respect for the dignity and worth of each individual is a basic precept of Catholic doctrine and therefore of St. Michael Parish. Each person is entitled to work in an environment free from discriminatory practices such as any form of harassment based on race, sex, creed, color, age or disability including sexual harassment. Parish leadership wishes to be vigilant regarding harassment whether between or among catechists and/or parish leaders, among students or between catechists/parish leaders and students. Such behavior will not be tolerated and if persistent harassment is proven, the offender will be dismissed when this is appropriate. Harassment of all forms is illegal as well as immoral, and individuals will be encouraged to seek legal protection.

The term “harassment” refers to behavior that is not welcome, that is personally offensive and that fails to treat others with dignity and respect. It includes treating someone unfavorably because of their race, sex, creed, color, age or disability. Harassment may take the form of discrimination, unwelcome sexual advances, requests or demand for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct, including, but not limited to:

Verbal conduct such as epithets, derogatory jokes or comments, slurs or unwanted sexual advances, intimations or comments.

Visual contact such as derogatory and/or sexually oriented posters, photography, cartoons, drawings or gestures.

Physical contact such as assault, unwanted touching, blocking normal movements or interfering with work, study or play because of sex.

Retaliations for having reported or threatened to report such harassment.

The term “sexual harassment” refers to harassment based on gender of the offended individual when the people involved are of different “levels” within the parish. It involves threats and demands to submit to sexual requests as a condition of employment, grades or other benefits or to avoid some other loss and offers of benefits in return for sexual favors. It also means creating a hostile environment for the student or employee such that it is an unfit environment for learning or work. Examples include, but are not limited to repeated unwelcome sexual advances, repeated sexually explicit jokes or comments, or the displaying of sexually inappropriate materials.

Allegations and complaints of any type of harassment must be reported as soon as possible. With any incident of harassment, the individual will be immediately removed from the situation and the disciplinary process will be followed starting at the step three level (refer to #3 on page 16). Parents who become aware of incidents of sexual harassment should report them immediately to the pastor or to the faith formation leader.

## WEATHER AND EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

### CANCELLATION OF CLASSES

When there is inclement weather, classes for Kindergarten – 10<sup>th</sup> Grade will not be cancelled unless Mass is cancelled. Parents are instructed to use their own discretion in the case of bad weather. Any cancellations will be announced on flocknote.

### SAFETY PROCEDURES

The Faith Formation has a policy for safety procedures in case of emergencies. Catechists will be responsible in instructing the students on these procedures during each school year.

In case of **fire**, the catechist's main responsibility is the evacuation and safety of the children, not extinguishing the fire. In case of fire, the following steps are to be followed:

If a fire is discovered, catechists should set off the fire alarm in the building or sound the appropriate alert.

Each class is to follow their designated evacuation route and gather at their designated gathering point outside the building.

Catechists are to lead their class in a calm and orderly manner.

Catechists should take their classroom folder with them and take role when they arrive at their gathering point.

Students must remain at the gathering point until dismissed by the catechist either to return to the class or to their parents.

In the case of impending **severe weather**, the faith formation leader will advise the classes if there is a need to take cover. Catechists will direct the class to go to the area designated for shelter during storms and take cover or, if that is not possible, to take cover away from windows, under the desks or tables.

### INJURY

If one of the students is injured, the catechist is to inform the faith formation leader immediately and apply first aid as appropriate. Gloves, bandaids and hand sanitizer are provided in each classroom so the catechist can avoid contact with blood and other body fluids. All injuries should be reported to the faith formation leader. If the injury is serious, the faith formation leader will contact the appropriate emergency services.

## **SICKNESS**

Parents are asked to please keep students home who are not feeling well. If a child tests positive for Covid or is under quarantine for exposure and needs to miss any classes, we ask that parents contact the Faith Formation Office, so we can provide make-up materials to be completed so it will not count as an absence, and so we can lift the family up in prayer. Catechists will be responsible for providing the make-up materials for the student. Should a student become ill for any reason while in class, the Faith Formation Leader should be notified so that parents can be contacted according to the information provided on the student registration form. If the parent is unavailable, attempts will be made to reach the backup person listed. The Faith Formation leader will make every effort to keep the child comfortable until he/she is picked up. Medications will not be administered to the child.

## **AIDS AND OTHER INFECTIOUS DISEASES**

Confidentiality for students who are HIV positive or have other infectious diseases is protected by law. These students are not required to inform the catechists or faith formation leader if they have these diseases. In case of injury or sickness, care should be taken to avoid contact with bodily fluids or blood. Rubber gloves are available in all the classrooms and disinfectant is provided in the first aid kits. All catechists are to be informed of and understand the Blood-borne Pathogens Policy of the Diocese of Erie.

Accidents and injuries involving bodily fluids or blood must be reported to the faith formation leader using the Incident Report Form. Catechists are to read the health information of the students in their care to anticipate any health problems that may arise. This information that is provided by parents is on the Confidential list of allergies and special needs of the students in your class found in your grade level class folder.

## **VOLUNTEER CATECHIST SUPPORT ROLES**

### **Classroom Aides**

The role of Aide is meant to be one of support and assistance in the classroom setting, as is needed by the catechist teaching. This might include such tasks as taking attendance, helping with supplies, activities, discipline and providing added knowledge and witness for the lesson.

### **Substitute Catechists & Aides**

Their role is the same as explained for the catechist and classroom aide to fill in when the usual catechist and/or aide is unable to be present.

### **Retreat Team Volunteers**

Their role is to help develop, plan and put into action the grade level retreats.

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