

ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA RELIGIOUS EDUCATION HANDBOOK

One of the things we are most proud of at St. Catherine's is our Religious Education program. Part of the success of any program is that those involved work as a team sharing a common goal. We plant the seeds and God in His love graces our life with the gift of faith.

It is important that we keep in mind that the Church in celebrating the Sacrament of Baptism instructs the parents that "You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training him (her) in the practice of faith. It will be your duty to bring him (her) up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor" [from the Rite of Baptism].

Parents always have been and remain the primary religious educators for their children. We assist them in that task by laying a solid foundation, encouraging spiritual growth, fostering discipleship, and helping their children develop a lasting relationship with God.

To the best of our ability, we provide a safe environment and establish a Christian atmosphere where we try to treat each other the way Jesus would want. We provide a program involving weekly classes, retreats, service opportunities, special liturgies and opportunities for prayer and the reception of the sacraments. We also encourage participation in traditional activities such as the Christmas pageant, Stations of the Cross, May Crowning and youth activities. Our curriculum includes Scripture based material, and therefore, we expect that the children are participating in the celebration of Sunday Mass. Our classes are made up of students from five different communities, which we consider an advantage. We try very hard to make sure that there are at least two students from each school in every class, and mix the classes to encourage community building. (Once the lists are compiled, it is very difficult to transfer students without upsetting the class dynamics. Please bear this in mind when registering your children.)

Communication is most important in this team effort, and therefore we encourage an open line between parents, professional and volunteer staff and students. We are available for questions, problem solving and encouragement, and it is our hope that this will be reciprocal.

ADMISSION POLICY

The Religious Education Program is open to all registered members of St. Catherine of Siena Parish. Special needs students will be placed into the mainstream when possible. Arrangements will be made to the best of our ability for any child who cannot be placed in the classroom situation. According to diocesan guidelines, children preparing for the reception of a sacrament must be enrolled in a religious education program for at least one year prior to the preparation for that sacrament at St. Catherine's. As of September, 2005, all new registrations must be accompanied by a baptismal certificate.

ATTENDANCE

Good attendance is expected on all levels of the Religious Education classes. Attendance records are kept on a weekly basis. If more than ¼ of the classes are missed, make-up work must be shown and a written test taken before advancement to the next level. Although we encourage parents to call if an absence occurs, it does not change the fact that the child is missing and therefore will be marked absent. For grades 1 through 6 where there are approximately 24 class days this means once you are absent 5 times you have missed ¼ of the classes. For grades 7 and 8 which have only 13 classes, 3 absences will require that you take a test and show make-up work. No registrations will be accepted for the following year until these requirements have been satisfied. For grades 9 and 10, more than 3 absences will require the student to repeat grade level work the following year. The Confirmation course entails group-based activities which are completed within a large group followed by small group participation in a classroom environment. Because of this, attendance is monitored carefully and there is no Home Study or alternative night option.

Students in all grades will receive a copy of his/her class schedule in September. Should an absence occur, it is the parents' responsibility to see that their child completes the work. When possible, the schedule will follow the Mountain Lakes School calendar and classes will be in session when the district schools are open and not in session when they are closed, with the exception of Jewish holidays. Please note that during the school year 2011-2012 there are some vacation days that occur when we are unable to follow the Mountain Lakes School calendar. We reserve the right to add class sessions to our calendar if needed because of weather related closures to our normal schedule. We will make every effort to inform the parents if makeup classes are deemed necessary. *All weather related closures will be listed on our website www.stcatherine-ml.org.*

CLASSROOM ALTERNATIVES

A.) Alternative Day

We will attempt to schedule a group on an alternative day of the week providing the following conditions can be satisfied:

- (1) We need to be notified of any conflict by September 1st of the upcoming school year, regardless of when the semester begins.
- (2) We must have at least 8 students who can attend this group and they all need to agree on the alternative day. This would have to be a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoon or a Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday evening **all subject to classroom availability**. This class is held in the Parish Center and a staff member is required to be present.
- (3) One of the parents in this group must volunteer to teach. Keep in mind that this is a Catechist-based program and requires significant preparation, as well as conformity to diocesan requirements for teachers.

B.) Home Study

There will be provisions made for children in grades 1, and 3 through 8 who cannot make any classes during the year and need to be taught at home or tutored. **Please note: Grades 2, 9, and 10 do not have the option of Alternative Day or Home Study.** The following guidelines pertain:

Grades 1, 3, 4 & 5

This is an option provided we are notified prior to September 1st of the current Religious Education year.

- A.) Parents will be given a textbook, and when possible, a manual. The book consists of 24 lessons which all need to be completed before the text is handed back in March. Although the schedules may not reflect it, the **entire** book is covered during class time, and therefore must be completed when home schooling. The parent is considered to be the teacher at this point. No child should be working on the material without assistance from an adult.
- B.) Students will need to come to the Religious Education office 2 times during the school year to show work and progress and meet with the Director. There would also be a final meeting to take a final exam and hand in the book.
- C.) If there is a Class Mass, the student is expected to take part.

Grades 6, 7 & 8

Home study is an option for 6th, 7th and 8th graders, provided we are notified about the need prior to September 1st of the current Religious Education year - regardless of grade. This option involves working with our text at home and then scheduling an exam to be taken at our parish center by March 1st. A passing grade of 65 must be attained on the exam for the student to move on to the next level. If the home study option is chosen, it will be the student's/parents' responsibility to schedule the exam on any Monday through Wednesday evening before March 1st. The Home Study option will not be available to any student who does not comply with aforementioned guidelines. As with grades 1-5, an adult is required to work with the student.

SACRAMENTAL GUIDELINES

Diocesan guidelines for each of the sacraments are available in the Religious Education office. Baptismal certificates must be on file in our office prior to the reception of any sacrament and should be included in any new registrations. A parent meeting prior to the beginning of the preparation for any sacrament is required to show commitment and to answer any questions concerning the theology or celebration of the sacrament. It is assumed that the children will also be attending Mass on a regular basis especially during this time of sacramental preparation.

In addition here at St. Catherine's for:

Reconciliation and First Communion:

- (1) Classes take place in a classroom setting;
- (2) Reception of the sacrament normally takes place in the Fall for Reconciliation and in the Spring for First Communion during the child's second grade;
- (3) Materials are covered in the classroom and at home;
- (4) A written test is taken and passed at the completion of each of the courses.
- (5) Two optional two-hour Saturday retreats are being held, one in the fall for Reconciliation and one in the spring for First Communion.

Confirmation: (1) Attendance: Classes are held in a classroom setting and take place over a two year cycle with attendance monitored carefully. Please note, if the behavior of a student is not Christian behavior, he/she will be asked to leave the class and it will result in an automatic absence.

(2) Retreats:

Diocesan guidelines require a Confirmation retreat.

A) In the early fall the tenth grade students will attend a weekend long retreat. This retreat is the bridge between the ninth and tenth grade programs and begins the final six months of preparation for the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation. **We strongly encourage parents to make this one weekend a priority in their child's life.** If for some reason – illness, family commitment or some serious family issue precludes your child from attending, we will do everything in our power to find another weekend Confirmation retreat as a substitute. Bear in mind that this substitute weekend needs to conform to our guidelines and occur prior to our Confirmation date.

B) In the fall of ninth grade, an “in class” retreat is held during an extended class session included in the ninth grade schedule. Both retreats are an integral part of the program. Please be advised that state law prohibits coaches and moderators from discriminating against students as a result of religious commitments. We will be happy to support you should any dispute arise.

C) *Additionally, we ask that you notify us again of food allergies before retreats or any event where we are serving food.

(3) Christian Service:

“For I have set you an example that you also should do as I have done to you” *John 13:15*. These words were spoken by Jesus to his disciples after he washed their feet at the Last Supper, a visible sign of service to others. The Evangelist John makes the point that serving others is at the heart of being a follower of Jesus. Discipleship, which is what we are called to, is a very important part of who we are as Christians. It is for this reason that our criteria for readiness for receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation include a service component that we refer to as apprenticeship. If in Confirmation we are asking our young people to commit to being followers of Jesus, then they also need to commit to service. Therefore, we will ask all candidates to sign a commitment form upon entering ninth grade which will include a pledge that over the next two years they engage in an **on-going** project or projects of service to others. There is no time limit or expected number of hours. However, on-going implies a process of service over a period of time. All ninth graders are required to explain in writing what their project will be and who will be the adult directing them. We will assess their progress at the beginning of the tenth grade. If there is no sign that any effort has been made toward this process, we will evaluate whether or not the candidate should be recommended to continue in this program at that time. Discussion at this point will include parents if necessary. At the final interview session in February of the tenth grade, a determination will be made as to the readiness of the candidate to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation with his/her class, or if they will need more time to complete the apprenticeship aspect of the program.

Our purpose and our responsibility is to make sure that our candidates realize that the Sacrament of Confirmation incorporates them more firmly in Christ, strengthens their bond with the Church, helps them to bear witness to the Christian faith in words and deeds and associates them more closely with Jesus' mission of service. We want them to realize that this is a life-long commitment, not a graduation from Religious Education.

(4) Parent Meetings:

At least one parent is required to attend the two parent meetings held over the course of the two years of preparation. However, as always, should a question or concern arise the staff is available to address the situation at any time.

(5) Interviews:

The two-year program will include 3 interviews with each candidate and a staff member, and one interview, if necessary, with parent and staff member. They will include:

(a) Student Interview:

- 1) An interview in October of the 9th grade where goals, attendance, behavior and discipleship will be discussed. Also service project ideas are all due at this time.
- 2) An interview at the beginning of grade 10, where goals and service projects are assessed and Christian Maturity evaluated. **At the end of the first semester a written take-home exam will be given that will need to be submitted before beginning the second semester.**
- 3) A third and final interview in February of 10th grade just prior to Confirmation to determine if indeed the candidate is ready. The candidate must be able to articulate his/her faith, and the written test will be discussed. Each candidate will also be required to write a short paper on the experience of service to others, and a paper on why they chose a particular saint's name as their Confirmation name.

(b) Parent Interview:

Should a parent be unable to attend the 9th grade parent meeting, it will be necessary to schedule a one on one meeting with a staff member. This will be an opportunity for parents to take an active role in the Confirmation process.

BEHAVIOR

The atmosphere at St. Catherine's should be a Christian one. Respect for each other and for one's self is paramount in a religious setting. Conduct unbecoming a Christian student and/or inappropriate behavior cannot be tolerated in such a setting. If a disciplinary problem arises in the classroom, the teacher will try to handle the situation. If it becomes necessary, the director of the program will step in. If the director needs to step in more than once for a particular student, the parents/guardians will be informed. If action needs to be taken by the director two or more times, other arrangements will be made for the student's religious training. In addition, if at any time it is felt a child is a danger to him/herself or to others, they will be removed from the in-school program immediately. It is felt that by the time a student reaches the Confirmation program, that acceptable behavior is the norm. It is assumed Christian Maturity would dictate proper behavior. However, if this is not the case, the student will be sent home immediately and an automatic absence will occur. Since only three absences are permitted each year, this could affect the date of Confirmation showing us that he/she is not ready to make this commitment at this time. **Please be advised that cell phones, iPods or any form of technical communication are not permitted to be used during classroom time.** It would help tremendously if they were not brought into the classroom, but left at home for the 1 1/2 hours the student will be attending class.

ADVANCEMENT CRITERIA

In order to advance to the next level, all students must adhere to the Attendance Policy. In addition, all grades will have some form of evaluation by the end of the year. Beginning with grade 6, a grade level written exam will be given at the end of each semester, and a satisfactory grade of 65 must be attained before advancement occurs or before registration forms are sent out for the following year. Instead of a written exam, a tenth grade evaluation will consist of an interview between the confirmation candidate and a staff member.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

Most of our classes take place late in the afternoon or evening. Children should be dropped off and picked up at the parish center. Students will not be permitted to walk out into the parking lot unattended by an adult. In inclement weather, children will be dismissed from the hall. If a child lives within walking distance and will be responsible for him (her) self, please advise the Religious Education office in writing. Classes begin at 4:00 p.m. in the afternoon for grades Kindergarten through five and dismissal is at 5:00 p.m. Classes for grade six at 7:00 –8:15 p.m. and grade seven through ten begin at 7:30 and dismissal is at 9:00 p.m. Evening students arriving more than 30 minutes late or leaving more than 30 minutes early will be marked absent for that evening. It is expected that students will be picked up as close to dismissal time as possible. This is especially important with the evening classes, and we ask all parents whether they are picking up only their child, or are involved in a car pool, to be considerate of our volunteer staff of teachers by being on time. If a child must be picked up before dismissal time, an adult is required to report to the office and sign the student out.

EMERGENCY CLOSING

Should it become necessary to close unexpectedly, we will make every effort to contact the schools, and in some cases, the parents. However, if there are ever any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Religious Education office at 973-334-5257, or check our website at www.stcatherine-ml.org

RIGHT TO AMEND

If for any reason we feel these guidelines need to be amended, we will do so in writing promptly to all parents/guardians. The policies of this handbook were enacted May 20, 2011.

Reverend Peter Filipkowski
Pastor

Mrs. Barbara Buck
Director of Religious Education