

Catechist Handbook

2016-2017



Saint Michael Parish School of Religion

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Greetings and blessings to you, and a big welcome to all new and returning catechists! I am honored and excited to have you, each and all, participating in our PSR program this year. I know we will make a great team in the efforts of educating our youth in their faith, and I am excited to serve with you and alongside you in this parish and diocese.

The goal of this handbook is to help you become more familiar with the PSR program here at St. Michael's, its mission and methods, and to provide important resources and references to make your job as a catechist as easy and fruitful as possible. Please know that I recognize the sacrifice of your time and talent, and I am so grateful for your service. If there is ever anything I, or the Office of Religious Education, can do for you, do not hesitate to let us know!

As we begin this year, let us take a moment to call to mind our mission as educators: to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in leading the children to a deeper relationship with our Triune God, poured out in relationship as faithful disciples of Christ. As it states in the *National Directory for Catechesis*, "The aim of catechesis is communion with Jesus Christ. Catechesis leads people to enter the mystery of Christ, to encounter him, and to discover themselves and the meaning of their lives in him" (55). Let us pray that we may grow in this union with our Creator, so as to witness to and encourage the deepening of faith in others.

Know of my prayers for a blessed and fruitful year in Christ for you and your families!

Kathleen Henry
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I. Program Information

Classes will meet on Sunday evenings from **4:30pm until 5:45pm**. Because we keep the doors locked for the safety of the children, either the Director of Religious Education, or a volunteer, will wait by the door by 4:00 pm to let you in, to ensure you have enough time to set up your classrooms, make copies, or gather any materials you need for the class.

For safety reasons, students and parents will enter the building through one door, and that door will be monitored by a parent volunteer or teacher's aide. Parents must sign their children in and out of their classrooms. As a teacher, you will be provided with a sign in sheet with the student's name and spaces for parents to sign them in and out. This helps us to ensure the safety of all the children and also to record and monitor attendance, and to keep record of those present in the building.

The Office of Religious Education is open Monday through Friday, following the St. Michael School Schedule. Feel free to contact the office with any questions or concerns.

II. Volunteer Information

St. Michael's has a wide range of volunteer opportunities to meet the interests and gifts of our volunteers! Please see the options and descriptions below. All PSR volunteers need to sign in and sign out in the "Volunteer/Visitor" binder located in the PSR closet. Any guest speakers, parents, or visitors must also sign in/out of the binder located in the closet. This helps us to account for all adults and children in the building, should for any reason we need to evacuate, and for our Safe Environment records.

Primary Teachers:

The main catechist is primarily responsible (although many enjoy collaborating with their aides in lesson planning) for the lesson planning and classroom instruction, as well as to ensure the goals and standards of the religious curriculum for each grade are met. Textbooks and other materials should be used to work towards the standards set forth by the Diocesan Graded Course of Study, which is the diocesan-wide curriculum for religious education. For more information, and for online access to the learning objectives for each grade, please visit:

<http://www.cdeducation.org/ReligiousEducation/Curriculum/ReligionCourseofStudy.aspx>

Teachers should submit their lesson plans to the DRE and indicate their progress towards learning objectives. Lesson plans can be submitted weekly in the "religious education" bin in the closet.

Teacher's Aides:

Teacher's aides are asked to assist the primary catechist by helping maintain a positive learning environment. This can include, but is not limited to the following:

- *assisting with the distribution of papers and activities
- *ensuring that games are played fairly
- *escorting a child to the restroom or getting the attention of a hall monitor if there is a medical or learning need
- *helping to maintain the focus and attention of the group

Although you will not be primarily responsible for the lesson planning and teaching, your assistance and presence is of great importance, and I am very grateful to you for your service. Teacher's aides often fill in for the primary

teacher in the case of illness, family commitment, or “last minute” emergency situations if they are comfortable doing so.

Hall Monitors:

Hall monitors play a very important role in helping to maintain the safety of all the children and adults on the property during PSR classes. When you arrive, please obtain a hall monitor badge from the PSR closet, so you will be identifiable to teachers, parents, and students. You are the DRE’s “eyes and ears,” as it is unfortunately impossible to be present on three floors at once. Please be aware and alert at all times while present; if you have any concerns or questions, please notify the DRE immediately.

Some important things to note:

1. Classroom doors should be left open unless there are more than **2 adult volunteers present**. If you notice that a door is closed with only one adult volunteer, kindly re-open it.
2. Classes should not leave to go to the Church without **2 volunteers**. If a class needs extra assistance you may accompany them, after notifying the DRE that you will be absent for a period of time.
3. If you see someone you do not recognize, please ask if they need assistance. If they are a parent, escort them to their child’s classroom or to the office. Report any suspicious presence to the DRE immediately.
4. Restrooms: it is important to be in compliance with the diocesan Safe Environment Program, that we monitor the restrooms during PSR classes. The main multi-stall restrooms are for children only. **Adults should only use one the single bathroom on the first floor, indicated with a sign.** If you see an adult going into the children’s restroom, please stop them and advise them of their designated bathroom. Below is a list of the restrooms for your reference, depending on the floor you are monitoring:

Top Floor: Girls (Children’s) restroom

Middle Floor: Boys (Children’s) restrooms and single restroom for Adults

Bottom Floor: Boys and Girls Restrooms (Children’s) near the gymnasium.

5. You may run into parents who have questions. Please direct them to DRE for assistance.

Retreat Ministry:

Each year, we have a retreat for students in 2nd and 8th grade, who will be receiving a sacrament in the spring. We need adult volunteers to assist with various “behind the scenes” tasks: serving food, helping to lead small groups, and assisting the DRE with other tasks. If you are interested, please contact the DRE for further information.

III. Textbooks

This year, I am happy to announce that we will be using *Alive in Christ*, by Our Sunday Visitor in grades 1-8. Supplemental materials will be used for sacrament preparation, or to provide greater depth of study to a particular area as deemed appropriate. Seasonal items, crafts, and additional materials and videos are available upon request.

If you would like examples of sample lesson plans, or wish to look into the scope of the program you can visit the following website:

Last updated: 6/2/2016

Teachers and volunteers will be given an access code to facilitate lesson planning and home-study.

IV. Sacrament Prep

Children typically make their First Communion in 2nd grade, and Confirmation in 8th grade. For each sacrament, attendance in the previous year of religious education classes is required. I meet with the catechists for 2nd and 8th grade to discuss the specifics of preparation, and attendance to the retreats, parent meetings, and sacraments by the volunteers in that grade is strongly encouraged!

V. Classroom Management/Disciplinary Policy

I recognize and acknowledge the sacrifice of your time, and it is my goal to make this experience fruitful and enjoyable for both you and your students! A few basic things to note about classroom management:

1. In the event that you are the only adult in the classroom, please leave the classroom door open. This is to maintain compliance with diocesan Safe Environment Regulations, and also allows you to communicate easily with the hall monitor should you need assistance.
2. At the beginning of the year, it is always extremely important to establish class rules. If you are struggling with a particular student or find that the classroom environment has become disruptive, remind them of the rules. If the problem still persists, ask the hall monitor to bring the Director to your classroom. Know that the Director will be happy to come and speak with the class.
3. We are so grateful to have so many classrooms to use for PSR, but we do need to be mindful that our classrooms are shared with the students of St. Michael's school, who often keep personal belongings in their desk and in the classroom. Please remind the students to respect the belongings of others, and to stay out of the desks. You may always turn the desks around, which removes the temptation altogether.
4. If after establishing classroom rules and expectations, a student is still misbehaving, please send home a Disciplinary Action Form for the parents to review, sign, and return to you the following week. If this happens three times they will be asked to meet with the Director of Religious Education to discuss future directives.

VI. Support

Please know that we here in the Office of Religious Education are here to help you! If there is ever anything you need, do not hesitate to call or email the Office of Religious Education, and we will get back with you as soon as possible.

Education Opportunities:

There are additional opportunities throughout the diocese for certification courses and training opportunities that will help support your knowledge of the faith and your ability to minister to the children of our PSR program. Notifications of such opportunities will be emailed and also posted in the PSR closet. You have volunteered for the great task of being an extension of the teaching office of the Church, not only through your words, but also through your actions and witness. Know that both the Diocesan Office of Religious Education and Catechesis and St. Michael's Religious Education office are ready and eager to support you in whatever way we can!

Teacher Meetings:

Last updated: 6/2/2016

The DRE will have a few mandatory teacher In-service days each semester to communicate important information relative to curriculum implementation, safety procedures, liturgical and seasonal activities, and spiritual development. It is my hope that these meetings will not only enrich your own faith, but equip you with the tools necessary to feel confident and prepared in your role as catechist. To make it more convenient for your attendance, I will hold the meetings during a normally scheduled PSR class time. Instead of coming to class, students will complete a home study lesson while teachers meet with the Director for education, formation, and fellowship. The dates of our meetings for the 2016-2017 school year are as follows:

Sunday, November 6
Sunday, April 23

VII. Forms and Policies

Bathroom Policy:

Single Bathroom:

There is a single stall bathroom on the middle floor near the PSR closet that can be used for families and adults/catechists during PSR. Main, multi-stall restrooms, should be used by **children only** during the PSR class times.

Main Bathroom Locations:

Bottom floor: locker rooms for boys and girls for the convenience of classrooms on the lowest floor.

Middle floor: boys restroom, for use of male students on the middle and upper floor PSR classes.

Top floor: girls restroom, for use by female students on the middle and upper levels.

The responsibility of the hall monitor on each floor, is to help direct children to the proper restroom and ensure they arrive back to their classroom.

Specific Restroom Policy and Best Practices for younger children:

1. Please encourage parents to take younger children to the restroom before (or when) they arrive to class. There is a single bathroom on the middle floor by the PSR closet they can use should they want to accompany their child. Hopefully this will help to reduce the number of needed bathroom breaks.
2. During class, a student needing to go to the restroom must be accompanied by an adult, who will wait outside the restroom. This adult may be the Teacher Aide or Hall Monitor.
3. If the student is in need of assistance, the Hall Monitor or Teacher Aide should ask another adult to accompany him/her to assist the student. The standard policy is “two-deep” in such situations.
4. If the child is of the opposite gender, and a period of time has lapsed causing concern, ask the hall monitor to notify the DRE to seek another appropriate volunteer or to assist in the situation.
5. If the child needs assistance with zippers or buttons, etc., this should be done in the hallway or other common space with another adult present if possible, but always in an open area.

Code of Conduct and Diocesan Harassment Policies:

Last updated: 6/2/2016

Each year, volunteers must review and sign a copy of the Code of Conduct for Catechists and Diocesan Harassment Policies. Digital copies will be provided for your reference on the website (as well as paper copies in the PSR closet). For your convenience, there will be one volunteer acknowledgement form for you to fill out and return to the office of religious education, stating that you have received and read the handbook and additional policy forms, and that you agree to comply with the information contained therein.

VIII. Emergency and Safety Procedures:

Each teacher has a flashlight in his/her bin should there be a power outage and the building loses electricity, in addition to a copy of the emergency drill procedures.

Band-aids and other first aid supplies are located in the PSR closet.

Each year, the DRE will conduct safety drills with the students for a fire or tornado. On the first day of class, please review the procedures along with class rules and expectations for the year. Teachers and volunteers will be prepared to handle an intruder, and that drill will not be rehearsed with the students. Please see below for St. Michael's Emergency Procedures:

ST. MICHAEL'S PSR EMERGENCY PLAN

IN CASE OF FIRE:

- All students and volunteers should **quietly** and **calmly** exit the building with their class via the closest stairwell and walk towards the baseball field.
- At least one hall monitor/volunteer should ensure a safe walking path between the coned area and the field.
- Students who exit the building through the east door should walk alongside the school building, being mindful of cars, towards the field.
- When students arrive at the field, they should form a line behind their teacher as attendance is taken.
- Teachers must send an account of their class to the DRE with the form provided.

IN CASE OF TORNADO/HAZARDOUS WEATHER:

- Move to designated area in basement floor. Teachers on the top and middle floors should leave doors OPEN. Lower level doors are CLOSED. Lights off on ALL LEVELS. If possible, crack your windows open.
- Bring your class roster and flashlight. Take attendance and notify DRE with form provided.
- The ENTIRE student body will assemble in the lower level of the building. All students should come down in single file and remain standing until your teacher gives you the signal to be seated. Absolute silence should be maintained.
- Once the signal is given, students are to be seated on the floor facing the wall, with knees tucked in and arms above their necks.

IN CASE OF INTRUDER:

- **CALL 9-1-1**

- If it is possible to leave the building safely (i.e. it has been announced that intruder is on a different floor), exit and move towards designated exit area (the field)
- If exiting is not an option, secure the children in the classroom and lock the door:
 - Cover the windows and barricade the door with desks, etc.
 - Keep children safely hidden under desks, tables, or in closets if permissible.
 - Teachers should take attendance and notify DRE by walkie talkie or by texting
- Students outside of classroom and hall monitors stationed on each floor should go immediately to the nearest room
- If you encounter an intruder and do not have time to barricade, etc:
 - Yell and scream, ask questions: this could distract them and may prevent them from harming someone
 - Run, defend yourself, and take cover if possible.