

ST. MICHAEL/ST. MARGARET CHURCH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION HANDBOOK

Religious Education Program

Mission Statement

To build a foundation of faith through knowledge, service and the recognition of God's love within the 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.

St Michael/St. Margaret's Catholic Parish strives to be a Christian community faithful to the Gospel and the Catholic Tradition. The parish in reality is a community of communities. This community is made up of people young and old, who have come from many different walks of life, all united in the endless struggle and search to know, love and serve God, self and one another. This unique diversity offers not only a challenge, but also a rich resource for learning.

ELEMENTS OF CATECHESIS

Four elements essential to our religious education program:

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 Catholic 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

The Goals of St. Michael/St. Margaret's Parish 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 as they become ready to receive the sacraments.

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 give the youth an experience of the Church as community.

To deepen the prayer life of the children and youth.

To motivate the 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 PARENTS

It is the role of the parish to **assist** parents in nurturing the faith of their children. Parents who are enrolling their children in the parish catechetical program will be assisted and enabled in their role as the primary educators of their children. It is essential that the parents cooperate with parish policy and work with those who are the designated leaders of the parish program. In order to promote the faith growth of the children and youth and to insure a smooth-running program, parents are asked to fulfill the following expectations. A parent who would like their child to attend the program...

Shall be a registered member of the parish.

Attends Mass weekly with the child and takes responsibility for their role as primary educator(s).

Collaborates with the catechists in the program by sharing faith with their child at home and by making sure the child does any required follow-up to the lessons taught in class. Teaches the child the traditional prayers of the Church at home.

Maintains an open line of communication with the child's catechist.

Makes sure the child arrives prepared to participate at the scheduled time in the proper location, and that they are picked up promptly at the end of class.

Attends parent meetings when requested.

Is supportive of the catechist especially in the area of discipline.

Reads this handbook, completes and turns in the forms necessary for registration, providing all pertinent sacramental, medical and emergency information.

Informs the religious education leader of the rights of the non-custodial parent in the case of divorce.

Alerts the religious education leader of any changes that occur such as address, medical information, special needs, family situation, etc.

ADMISSION POLICIES

St. Michael/St. Margaret's religious education program does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, national origin, religion or physical challenges.

Any family that is registered in St. Michael/St. Margaret parish may enroll their children in the catechetical program. In order for their children to be admitted, the family must complete the appropriate registration and student information forms and indicate that they have read and accept the policies contained in this handbook. These forms are available from the religious education office.

Students are enrolled in the grade in which they are currently attending in school, unless other arrangements are made with the religious education leader.

A general registration session for all children is held each August/September. Families who wish to enroll their children at other times during the year may do so by contacting the religious education leader.

FEES

The Pastor, in cooperation with the Religious Education Board, determines the annual fees for the Religious Education Program. The following materials and retreat fee schedule has been established: \$75.00 per family. *No student will be prevented from attending because of his/her parents' inability to pay.* Registration materials and retreat fees are non-refundable after the start of classes.

BAPTISMAL CERTIFICATES

Families with children who were not baptized at this parish must bring a copy of the baptismal certificate, along with any other sacramental records, when they initially enroll their child in the program. Children who have not been baptized will be accepted into the program provided the family intends to have them baptized and is willing to sign them up for the children's initiation program.

COMMUNICATION

Catechists that teach the classes in the religious education program are volunteers. The parish has made every effort to screen them to insure that they are capable of handling the responsibility involved in this ministry. The parish also offers training courses that increase the skills needed for the catechists to be successful. The religious education leader supervises the catechists in order to help them fulfill their responsibility. As parents you are asked to recognize the challenges involved in being a volunteer catechist and to support them in whatever ways possible. If any problems arise however, please first contact the catechist to discuss the situation. If that does not lead to a satisfactory resolution, please contact the religious education leader. All parishioners have the right to final recourse from the pastor of the parish.

CLASSES

ATTENDANCE

Children who are enrolled in the parish catechetical program are expected to be in attendance each week. It is the responsibility of parents to insure their presence. Only a child who is ill or has a family emergency or special circumstances to be determined by the Religious Education Leader will be excused. If your child is to be absent, you are asked to contact the religious education office in advance. Because classes are held only once a week and each class builds on the material covered in preceding classes, the child who is absent misses a great deal and will have to make up the material that was covered in the missed class. If a pattern of continued absence occurs, the religious education leader will contact the family to address the problem and offer support as needed.

ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL

Classes are held in the St. Michael School in Greenville and in the basement of St. Margaret Church in Jamestown. Supervision will be provided for students during the stated class times. The program is not responsible for supervising children arriving more than 15 minutes early, or for the activity of the children 15 minutes after dismissal.

ST. MICHAEL STUDENTS:

Arrival: Parents are to drop all students grade Pre-8 at the white school side door.
Children should report to the 1st floor hall.
9th-12th Grade should report to Lateran Hall.

Dismissal: Parents Pre-6 are to pick students up at their classroom door. Any student who is not picked up directly following class will be walked to the religious education office for parent pick up.

ST. MARGARET STUDENTS:

Arrival: Students should just proceed downstairs following Mass. Parents may escort them if they wish.

Dismissal: Students may be picked up at the front of the church. Parents of preschool through kindergarten **should** come in to pick their children up inside, but all parents are welcome to come inside to get their children after class.

CLASS SCHEDULE

ST. MICHAEL STUDENTS PRESCHOOL-8TH GRADE:

Classes for age 4 Preschool-8th grade are held on Sunday morning from 10:10-11:20 AM.

ST. MARGARET STUDENTS PRESCHOOL-8TH GRADE:

Classes for age 4 Preschool-8th grade are held on Sunday morning from 10:00-11:15 AM.

ST. MICHAEL & ST. MARGARET 9TH-12TH GRADE:

Our program for senior high students is called CREED. Youth from both St. Michael's and St. Margaret's come together for meetings twice a month on Sunday evenings from 6:00-8:30 PM. It is generally the 1st and 2nd Sunday of the month unless otherwise indicated by the yearly schedule. The CREED program combines both religious education and youth group. Students experience religious instruction, various forms of prayer and worship, community building and service through large and small group activities.

A calendar of classes is given to all registered families at the beginning of each school year with the starting and ending dates, along with all breaks.

Retreats are planned for every grade each year, and combine St. Michael's and St. Margaret's students. Students are expected to attend their grade level retreat. This is a Diocesan requirement.

CLASSROOM VISITS

Parents are allowed to visit their child's classroom at any time. They are requested to sign in with the program leader before entering the classroom.

HOMEWORK

Catechists are encouraged to assign work for the children to do at home with the assistance of their parents. Parents are encouraged to ask their children about homework after each class. It is very important that parents help their children learn the prayers required at each grade level.

PROGRESS REPORTS

Parents will receive a progress report on each of their children 2 times per year in preschool through 8th grade. **Please return your child's report card to their teacher after you review it, so we do not have to issue new ones for the 2nd grading period.**

STUDENT RECORDS

The religious education leader will maintain information on each student. This includes the following: A family registration form, a copy of each child's Baptismal Certificate if baptized outside the parish, sacramental preparation forms, a record of the sacraments received at St. Michael/St. Margaret's and attendance records.

Parents can review these records during normal working hours by contacting the religious education leader. These records are the property of St. Michael/St. Margaret and are available to all the professional staff of the parish. This material will not be released to anyone outside those mentioned above without the written consent of the parents.

CURRICULUM

St. Michael/St. Margaret's parish follows the Diocese of Erie Curriculum Guidelines issued by Bishop Donald Trautman in January of 1995. Textbooks and other materials used in the classroom of St. Michael's and St. Margaret's are in conformity with the teachings found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and have been selected to most closely match the Diocesan Curriculum. They have been chosen because they offer catechists the resources necessary to conduct classes, which include all the elements of the ministry of catechesis.

Grades K-8 *Faith First, Legacy Edition, RCL*

Grades 9-12 *The Catholic Faith Handbook For Youth, St. Mary's Press;*
The Catechism of the Catholic Church; Youth Bible

Grade 11 *Confirmation For Younger and Older Teens, RCL*

HOME-SCHOOLING

Some parents, especially those who home-school their children instead of sending them to public school, may choose to offer catechetical instruction to their children at home. It is the parent's responsibility to communicate to the religious education leader that they wish to offer catechesis to their children at home. The option of home schooling can be done in every grade except the years of sacramental preparation, which include 2nd, 3rd, 9th, 10th and 11th.

YOUTH GROUP

St. Michael and St. Margaret's Religious Education students and St. Michael School students in 6th-8th grade, may participate in Junior High Youth Group. Activities are planned at least once a month for the experience of community building and service. Senior High Youth Group is a part of the CREED program.

SACRAMENTS/LITURGY

The parish follows the diocesan policies for sacramental preparation. The final decision about sacramental readiness for all students will be determined by the Religious Education Leader in collaboration with the Catechist for their sacramental level.

FIRST RECONCILIATION

Children are prepared for the sacrament during 2nd grade. It is recommended that students have a year of religious education before entering this sacramental year. The preparation involves parent/child meetings, a retreat day, catechesis at home, along with classroom preparation as found in the regular classroom text. First Reconciliation will be held in the month of February or March. At St. Michael's, it will be done at a special Student/Family Reconciliation Service on a Saturday. At St. Margaret's, it will be done after 9:00 Mass on Sunday morning, with the students participating in the Mass.

FIRST HOLY COMMUNION

The students are prepared for the sacrament in the 3rd grade. The preparation involves parent/child meetings, a retreat day, catechesis at home, along with regular classroom instruction. First Holy Communion is celebrated the first weekend of May. At St. Michael's, it is celebrated at one of the scheduled Sunday Masses. At St. Margaret's, it is celebrated during the 9:00 Mass on Sunday morning.

CONFIRMATION

This sacrament is celebrated for students in the 11th grade. All students from both St. Michael's and St. Margaret's receive the sacrament together at St. Michael's on a date set by the Bishop, usually in April, May or June. We do not know the date until the end of January or early February. The preparation begins in the 9th grade year and involves:

SERVICE: (This format was instituted to encourage the practice of service throughout life.)

9th grade year – 5 Church Service hours and 5 Community Service hours must be done on student's own time by the end of their 9th grade year. Service hour sheets must be turned in to report these.

10th grade year - 5 Church Service hours and 5 Community Service hours must be done on student's own time by the end of their 10th grade year. Service hour sheets must be turned in to report these.

11th grade year – 5 Church Service hours and 5 Community Service hours must be done on student's own time by the service hour due date on your Confirmation schedule. Service hour sheets must be turned in.

In order for any service hours to be counted, service hour sheets must be completed and turned in to the Religious Ed. Office.

WORSHIP:

Students are expected to attend weekly Mass and Holy days of obligation. Some CREED times and retreats will include Mass.

MESSAGE & COMMUNITY:

One Parent/Student meeting at the beginning of the 11th grade year.

An Interview with one of St. Michael's priests or the religious education leader during the 11th grade year.

Mandatory meetings twice monthly. Two will be Student/Sponsor meetings in the 11th grade year. Only two absences are allowed each year, and any days missed in 9th-11th grade beyond two will have to be made up.

Mandatory retreats in 9th, 10th and 11th grade. Confirmation will be delayed if the student does not attend the 11th grade retreat.

A letter to the Bishop must be written in 11th grade describing the student's preparation and readiness for the sacrament of Confirmation. A detailed list will be given to each student on what is to be included.

CELEBRATION OF THE LITURGICAL YEAR

In an attempt to help children and youth understand more deeply the power and mystery of the sacred liturgy, they will be given the opportunity to celebrate the seasons of the Liturgical year. Youth will also be given opportunities to plan and celebrate paraliturgies (prayer services) and Eucharistic liturgies (Mass).

REMEDIAL FAITH FORMATION

Students who are lacking faith knowledge and/or sacraments appropriate for their age can get separate instruction to catch up. Parents of these students should contact the Religious Education Office to discuss it with the Religious Education Leader and make arrangements for tutoring.

DISCIPLINE

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 students are expected to carry out the following responsibilities:

1. Show respect to catechists, other students and program personnel.
2. Treat the property, good name and physical safety of others with respect.
3. Be present only in the areas of the building for which they have permission at a specific time.
4. Act in a safe manner in and around the building.
5. Use voice and display actions in a manner which is appropriate for a classroom.
6. Be respectful of the study time of others.
7. Use of or possession of illegal drugs, alcohol, tobacco or weapons of any kind is strictly prohibited. Such items will be seized and parents notified immediately.
8. Refrain from using cell phones and other electronic devices during Religious Ed. classes and church youth activities. See policy below.

Good discipline is self-discipline and is always 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. These corrections will always be done with the best interest of the child in mind and at no time will St. Michael's or St. Margaret's accept the demeaning or intimidation of children in the name of discipline.

CELL PHONE/ELECTRONIC DEVICES POLICY

Cell phones and other electronic devices, including MP3 players, Ipods etc. are not to be used during Religious Education 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 PROCESS

The following is the order of measures to be taken when discipline is warranted:

At the time of the first correction, the student will be warned.

Students whose behavior becomes a continual problem in the classroom will be sent out of class to the religious education leader. Any time a student is sent from class for discipline reasons, his/her parents will be contacted either by phone, in person, or in writing.

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 religious education leader to resolve the issues. At this time, the parents may be asked to sit in on the class for a few weeks to observe their child and his/her interaction with the catechist and other students.

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.

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

St. Michael/St. Margaret's pastor and religious education leader are required by the Pennsylvania Revised Code and Diocesan Policy on Child Abuse to report suspected or actual child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. All other staff members of St. Michael/St. Margaret's, both paid and volunteer, are bound by Christian conscience to report suspected or actual child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. All parish staff and volunteers who work with children are required to have clearances from the State Police (Criminal Record Check -PA Act 34) and the Department of Public Welfare (Child Abuse History Clearance – PA Act 151). All religious education staff and volunteers are required to participate in an in-service training on child abuse identification and reporting procedures.

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's or St. Margaret's, 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 (eg. 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. Judgments about re-admittance to the program 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 else, 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, non-aggressive 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 conflict 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 re-admittance to the program will be made on a case by case basis and this decision is at the sole discretion of the pastor.

HARASSMENT

Respect for the dignity and worth of each individual is a basic precept of Catholic doctrine and therefore of St. Michael/St. Margaret's 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 when necessary.

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 his/her race, sex, creed, color, age or disability. Harassment may take the form of discrimination, unwelcome or critical comments or action. Harassment on the basis of sex might include 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 the 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. Parents who become aware of incidents of sexual harassment should report them immediately to the pastor or to the religious education leader.

WEATHER AND OTHER EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

CANCELLATION OF CLASSES

Because of inclement weather, classes may be canceled from time to time. The following direction for parents is offered: To find out if classes are canceled, parents should listen for reports on WGRP and WPIC radio stations, and/or Channel 21 TV.

SAFETY PROCEDURES FOR FIRES AND OTHER EMERGENCIES

There are safety procedures posted in each room for fire and tornado emergencies. Catechists will instruct the students in these procedures the first week of class. In case of fire or a tornado, attendance will be taken after an emergency evacuation and no child will be dismissed without his/her parent or guardian. Parents must check with the religious education leader before leaving with their child to avoid unnecessary search and rescue operations.

SICKNESS AND INJURY

SICKNESS

Should a student become ill while in class, parents will 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 religious education leader will make every effort to keep the child comfortable until he/she is picked up. Medications will not be administered to the child.

MEDICATIONS

Children are not to bring medications with them to religious education classes without advance permission of the religious education leader. It is the responsibility of parents to notify the religious education leader immediately of any changes in allergies or dietary restrictions.

INJURY

Catechists are asked to report any injury to the religious education leader immediately. If an injury occurs, first aid will be administered in strict accordance with the *Blood-borne Pathogens* regulations of the Diocese of Erie and the parents will be contacted. If the injury requires immediate medical attention, the religious education leader will call the appropriate emergency services, followed by a call to the parents. A first aid kit is available in the religious education office.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Parents will be notified regarding any event or field trip for which the children will be taken off the parish grounds. No child will be required to attend such an event. However, if the child does desire to attend a field trip or special event, the parent must fill out a permission slip and turn it in to the religious education leader. No child can be taken on such trips without the required permission/medical forms.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

St. Michael/St. Margaret's participates in the Diocese of Erie Student Assessment that involves Grades 5, 8 and 11 completing a national assessment instrument in the spring every third year. The assessment tool has been referenced to the diocesan curriculum as well as to national textbook series. The assessment provides information concerning specific strengths and weaknesses of the program. Students are assessed on knowledge and practices.

We recognize that there is a difference between faith and information about faith. These assessment instruments measure "information about faith" not faith itself.

NON-CUSTODIAL PARENT RIGHTS

The Religious Education Leader needs to be informed by the custodial parent of the rights of the non-custodial parent with regards to picking the child up from any religious education class or event and what information should be sent to the non-custodial parent. There is a place on the registration form that serves the purpose of giving this information. If the circumstances should change at any time during the year, you need to contact the religious education leader with the changes.

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