

# **St. Margaret Mary**



Religious Education  
Catechist Handbook

## **WELCOME**

Thank you for volunteering as a catechist in the St. Margaret Mary Religious Education program. The offer of your time, talent, knowledge, effort, enthusiasm and willingness to share your faith is greatly appreciated by the members of your parish family.

## **PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY**

The goals of the St. Margaret Mary Religious Education Program are to make every member's faith in God become living, conscious, and active through the light of instruction; to enrich the Catholic faith life of participants at their particular stages of development; and to help each person respond more fully to God's word.

Religious education is the lifelong process by which we become Christ-followers.

The objectives of our program are to provide educational opportunities for all of our parishioners from young children to adults, to encourage them to get involved, and to make each parish member an active participant.

The role of the catechist is to act as a faith facilitator, witness to the message of Christ, instructional leader, life-long learner interested in personal growth, and team member who exemplifies the desire to build up the religious education program and Catholic faith of our parish community.

## **INSTRUCTIONAL DUTIES**

1. Catechists should be knowledgeable about the basic tenets of the Catholic faith .
2. Catechists should study the background information and follow the teacher's guide in presenting lessons.
3. Catechists should prepare lesson plans for classes and follow the curriculum schedule given out at the beginning of the year.
4. Catechists are expected to keep up to date records of student attendance and progress. All required documents should be handed in to the religious education office on time, such as exams, community service records, progress reports and honor roll or other reward information.
5. Catechists are expected to maintain class discipline according to the program handbook sent to parents. Any students not in accord with the policy should be sent to the school supervisor or reported to the program leader or confirmation coordinator so further action may be taken. The catechist and class should not have to suffer because of the behavior of one or two children. The program guide states that: It is important that all students do their very best to be well-behaved and cooperative. The St. Margaret Mary student is to display and expect fair treatment. Courtesy and respect should be shown at all times. The general guideline is do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Specific rules will be set by teachers and students in each class at the beginning of the year.

Our policy will be to mail a written **behavior referral notice** to a parent if a child is disruptive in class. The problem should be discussed with the child emphasizing more appropriate ways of acting.

If a second problem occurs, the parent will again be informed. At that time the child and parent will be invited to join our Home Study Program of instruction.

It is our goal to provide the best religious education program possible for all of the children in our parish. With your help we can foster Jesus' message of care and respect for others and show that concern as well.

6. At no time should a catechist leave his/her class unattended unless absolutely necessary. If necessary, be sure that students know what procedures they are expected to follow. Ask another adult to “keep an eye” on your group.
7. If a student becomes ill or is injured during religious education class time, ask another adult for help. A first aid kit and rubber gloves will be available at the school and church. Catechists teaching at home should have basic supplies. The program leader and parent or emergency contact person should be notified as soon as possible to provide additional care or take the child home if necessary. If immediate medical attention is needed, the adult in charge should call emergency 911 for assistance. Any incident should be reported to the religious education office.
8. Students at school are **not** allowed outdoors for free time and should not use playground equipment or the playscape. Teachers may accompany their students outside to conduct all or part of a lesson, weather permitting and with the permission of the program leader.
9. Procedures for evacuating the site of religious education activities in case of fire or other emergency situations will be discussed with volunteers and students by the program leader and practiced as necessary to safeguard children and adults.
10. If Religious Education lessons or meetings must be cancelled due to bad weather or any other reason, a notice will appear on the website [www.stmmswre.com](http://www.stmmswre.com), Channel 3 TV and radio station WTIC 1080 AM will broadcast the message. The religious education staff will also attempt to contact volunteers. If you are in doubt, or will not be at home before class time, feel free to call the office at 860-644-2549. If a home group teacher must cancel a class, he or she should contact each student.

### **NON-INSTRUCTIONAL DUTIES**

1. Catechists are expected to be at the class site on time or early.
2. Parents, guardians or responsible adults should escort students to the program site and confirm their arrival with the teacher or adult overseeing the program. Catechists are then responsible for the supervision of the students. Catechists and other staff members should take responsibility for students if a need arises, even if they are not assigned to their group or class. If a student is in a hallway when he or she should be in class, for example, the catechist who learns of this situation needs to report it. If students are “fooling around” and/or presenting other problems before or after the lesson time, the catechist needs to address the behavior.
3. Parents are expected to pick up students on time at the end of the religious education activities. Catechists should dismiss children from classrooms, church or home when a parent or guardian named on the registration form comes to the classroom door or lesson site. If parents are ten minutes late, walk remaining students to the program supervisor. Teachers of home groups may report delays to the religious education director or confirmation coordinator.
4. Church, school and home lesson areas should be left in good order. Return all religious education supplies to their storage space. Clean the floor and tables at the church and put all chairs back where they belong. At the school, be sure all chairs are up, windows are shut and lights are off.
5. Catechists are expected to attend all volunteer meetings provided for them. They should also attend parent meetings, retreats, service programs and other activities for their students if requested by their religious education leader. When this is not possible, they must contact the program head in advance to make other arrangements.
6. All religious education lessons, activities and events must be planned by the St. Margaret Mary Religious Education Program Leader or Confirmation Coordinator and approved by the Pastor in advance to be considered part of the St. Margaret Mary religious education program. No field trips will be allowed without pre-approval by the Pastor. Permission slips must be provided by the religious education office. Only this form may be used. Parents or

guardians must submit a completed permission slip before a child takes part in the activity planned. Adult participants including group leaders and chaperones must sign a liability waiver.

7. All forms of field trip transportation must be approved by the pastor. If a private passenger vehicle is used to transport students other than the driver's own child, the responsible adult must submit a form provided by the religious education office in advance.
8. Catechists should follow copyright laws in the use of materials for the religious education program. In order to achieve greater efficiency, avoid frustration and save you an unnecessary trip, we ask that **all** requests for copies be dropped off at the religious education office or phoned in by **noon on Monday**. (we have copies of each grade's resource materials.) The prepared copies will be available on the day of your class. If you wish to come in and browse or look for materials, please feel free to come in any day (Monday-Friday) between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. If for some reason we are not in the office, please go to the upstairs rectory door and the secretary will let you in to the resource room.
9. Student records will remain private and confidential. The content of student files will be released only to authorized persons with the approval of the pastor.
10. Catechists are responsible for reporting remarks or actions of students to the pastor, director of religious education, confirmation coordinator and parents when matters of health, life or safety are involved. A student confiding in a volunteer should be told of this legal obligation.
11. Catechists are legally responsible for reporting suspected child abuse. Contact the pastor, director of religious education or confirmation coordinator if the need arises.

### **SUPERVISION OF CATECHISTS**

1. The religious education director, confirmation coordinator or building supervisor will visit classes. If you would like them to demonstrate a lesson, listen to prayers, observe the creative efforts of your students, or meet with those who are misbehaving, just ask for help.
2. Interviews of students preparing for confirmation will be scheduled in advance. A special meeting for 9<sup>th</sup> grade parents & students will be held to go over material that will be needed to be handed in at the time of the interview. Group leaders will be responsible for gathering and holding on to required paper work which will then be presented to the interviewer.
3. Students preparing for First Reconciliation will meet individually with a supervisor to evaluate their knowledge of prayers and readiness.
4. The pastor or parish priest may also visit during your lesson. When a priest comes in the room or lesson area, teachers should say, "Welcome Father." Ask your students to stand and say, "Hello Father."

### **PERSONNEL POLICIES**

1. It is important that catechists be persons of good moral character, living a life that is consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church and attending Mass regularly. Religious Education volunteers are asked to complete information forms and authorize a back ground check before beginning their assignment. On that form they are asked to sign a commitment agreement. They should also complete the Protecting God's Children training program.
2. A volunteer catechist must at least be 21 years of age to be responsible for a group of students in an independent setting.
3. Two adults must be present when working with a group of students.
4. If a catechist must be absent he/she should get a substitute and give the substitute her/his lesson plan for that class. If a substitute cannot be obtained, please call the Religious Education Office as soon as possible, (860-644-2549).

### **SAMPLE FORMS**

1. Several forms are included for the awareness of catechists. More may be distributed during the year.