

Parent/Student Handbook

St. Thomas Aquinas Religious Education

Introduction

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 provides a framework for our 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 this parish.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* quotes Pope 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 quality 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

Guided by the principles found in the documents of the Church concerning 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.

Religious Education Program

Mission Statement

The catechetical program of St. Thomas Aquinas forms parishioners in the faith of the Catholic Tradition so that both they and the world may be transformed into the living Reign of God.

Vision Statement

So all will grow in the awareness, knowledge and practice of faith.

Program Goals

St. Tom's strives to be a Christian community faithful to the Gospel and the Catholic Tradition. The parish is, in reality, a community of communities: Purdue students, faculty, and resident parishioners, 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. Tom'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.
- To make programs that meet diverse spiritual needs available to the youth of the parish.

The Role of the Parent(s)

It is the role of the parish to assist parents in nurturing the faith of their children. Parent(s) who enroll their children in the parish catechetical program will be assisted and enabled in their role as the primary educators of their children. Parent(s) are encouraged to approach the religious education staff with ideas to meet specific needs in raising healthy and holy Catholic children and youth.

At the same time, it is essential that parents cooperate with the parish and work with those who are the designated leaders of the parish program. Parents are asked to fulfill the following expectations in order to promote the faith growth of the children and youth and to insure a quality program.

A parent(s) who would like their child to attend the program:

1. Should be a registered member of a parish.
2. Is responsible for providing the parish with information regarding the child's baptism and other sacraments if applicable.
3. Attends Mass weekly with the child.
4. Takes responsibility for their role as primary educator.
5. Collaborates with the catechists in the program by sharing faith with the child at home and by making sure the child does any required follow-up to the lessons taught in class.
6. Teaches the child the traditional prayers of the Church at home.
7. Maintains an open line of communication with the child's catechist.
8. Brings the child to class at the prescribed time and picks them up promptly at the conclusion of class.
9. Makes sure the child enters the building where classes are held and goes to the classroom.
10. Brings his/her child to class dressed appropriately, ready to participate.
11. Attends parent meetings when requested.
12. Is supportive of the catechist, especially in the area of discipline.
13. Reads this handbook, completes and turns in the forms necessary for registration.
14. Informs the director of religious education (DRE) of the rights of the non-custodial parent in the case of divorce. This is essential to ensure that the program acts in the best interest and safety of the child.
15. Informs the DRE of any pertinent medical and emergency information.

Admission Policies

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

Any family that is registered in St. Tom's (or a parish with whom St. Tom's has a formal relationship for religious education) 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 church office and online at <http://www.boilercatholics.org>

Parents are also required to provide complete health information on each of the children they seek to enroll in the program.

Students are typically enrolled in the grade in which they are currently attending in school, unless other arrangements are made with the DRE. An exception to this may be necessary to meet specific requirements for sacramental preparation.

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

Book, Material, and Activity Fees

The DRE, in cooperation with the pastor, determines the annual fees for the Religious Education Program. The following fee schedule has been approved:

Registration fee per child	\$50
Sacramental Class (2 nd , 9 th /10 th).....	\$75

No student will be prevented from attending because of his/her parents' inability to pay. An inquiry to the DRE is all that is necessary to have fees excused. Please know that this is offered in the spirit of a community called to assist one another in love. Book, material, and activity fees are non-refundable after the start of classes.

Baptismal Certificates

Families with children who were not baptized at this parish are requested to bring a copy of the baptismal certificate, along with any other sacramental records, when they initially enroll their child in the program. This is especially important during 1st Communion and Confirmation years! Children who have not been baptized will be accepted into the program provided the family intends to have them baptized and is willing to enroll them in the children's initiation program.

Parents & Catechists

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 DRE 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 DRE. 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 for each scheduled class session. It is the responsibility of parent(s) to insure their presence. If your child is to be absent, you are asked to contact the religious education office in advance. Attendance will be taken weekly and the parent(s) will be called by an intern if the child is absent and we have not received prior notification.

Arrival and Dismissal

Classes are held in the Parish Center. Parent(s) are asked to bring their children before the start of classes. 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. Please do not drop off children more than 15 minutes before classes are scheduled to begin, and please pick up your child promptly at the end of class. Children are to be picked up only by parent(s) or their designee. Parent(s) are to notify the DRE if someone other than the parent or designee is to pick up their children. As a general rule, students in Pre-K through 2 will only be released from class to the parent or parent's designee (sibling, other adult identified as acceptable by the parent, etc.) In grades 3 through 5 the previous rule applies but we give the parents the option of allowing the release of the child from the class so that the child may meet the parents somewhere in the church (join them at Mass, meet in the Newman Hall or gathering space, etc.). From grade 6 on, we will release students at the end of class unless the parent requests otherwise.

Class Schedule

Religious education classes are held on Sunday mornings from 9:00 – 10:00 for PreK through 1st grade, and 10:30 – 11:30 for 2nd through 10th grade. Youth Group will meet on alternating Wednesday evenings from 5:30 – 6:45. The calendar of classes gives the starting and ending dates, along with all breaks.

Classroom Visits

Parent(s) are permitted and encouraged to visit their children's classroom at any time. They are required to sign in with the interns at the front office before entering the classroom.

Curriculum

Textbooks and other materials used in the classrooms of St. Tom's'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 also 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 from the *Finding God* series published by Loyola 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. Parents who would like to examine the text material should contact the DRE.

Celebration of Liturgy and 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. In order to provide students with a well-formed catechetical experience and encourage ongoing participation in liturgy, students in grades 4, 5, and 6 are offered an opportunity to participate as a group in Eucharistic liturgies during the course of the year.

Homeschooling

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. Because the pastor is responsible for all forms of catechesis in the parish, and has delegated this task to the DRE, it is the parent's responsibility to communicate to the DRE that they wish to offer catechesis to their children at home. If you are interested in homeschooling, please contact the DRE for textbooks, assistance, and access to resources. Once you decide that you would like to undertake this project, please contact the DRE as he has been delegated to oversee this process in the name of the pastor (except for interviews prior to the reception of sacraments.)

Sacraments/Liturgy

The parish follows the diocesan policies for sacrament preparation.

- Children are prepared for the **Sacrament of Reconciliation** during second grade. The preparation involves a retreat day, catechesis at home, along with classroom preparation as found in the regular classroom text. First Reconciliation will be held during a Family/Communal Reconciliation Service.
 - Parents are encouraged to bring their child to the Sacrament of Penance at other times and the Sacrament is offered every Sunday morning from 8:15-8:45am and 10:15-10:45.
- Students are prepared for **First Holy Communion** in the second grade. The preparation involves a retreat day, catechesis at home, along with regular classroom instruction. First Holy Communion is celebrated during 11am Sunday Mass in late April or the first weekend of May.
- **Confirmation** is celebrated for students in the 9th grade at St. Tom's. The preparation involves weekly meetings with the youth, which can include their sponsor or an adult mentor, one overnight retreat, and two parent meetings as well as 10 hours of service to the parish and/or community. Confirmation is celebrated during an 11am Sunday Mass in April or May during the Easter Season on a date set by the Bishop.

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 appropriate for a classroom.
6. Be respectful of the study time of others.

7. The use or possession of illegal drugs, alcohol, or tobacco is strictly prohibited. Such items will be seized and parents notified immediately. The child will be immediately removed from the environment.

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 in a positive manner. These corrections will always be done with the best interest of the child in mind and at no time will St. Tom's accept the demeaning or intimidation of children in the name of discipline.

Disciplinary Process

- 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 DRE. Anytime a student is sent from class for disciplinary reasons their parent(s) 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 parent(s) will be contacted again. In order to return to the classroom, the student and parent(s) will meet with the catechist and DRE to resolve the issues. At this time the parent(s) 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 parent(s) will be asked to finish the year at home with the child. The child will be treated, as one who is being homeschooled and the parish will follow the guidelines concerning homeschooling.
- The child will be admitted into the program in the next calendar year with no prejudice.

Child Abuse

St. Tom's pastor and DRE are required by the Indiana Legal Code and Diocesan Policy on Child Abuse to report suspected or actual child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. In addition, all other staff members of St. Tom's, both paid and volunteer, are bound by Christian conscience and the law to report suspected or actual child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. The Diocese of Lafayette in Indiana has written a policy on child abuse, which is available through the DRE. All parish staff and volunteers have participated in an in-service training on child abuse identification and reporting procedures.

Weapons 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. Tom'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.

Weapons or potential weapons will be confiscated by the DRE when this action does not place the DRE 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 parent(s). 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 parent(s) 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.

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 DRE 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 DRE will be notified, and the parent(s) of the students will be called. The DRE 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 DRE any threat made by a student that mentions the killing of any person. Such threats will be immediately reported to the police for investigation. 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. In such cases, 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. Thomas Aquinas 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 his or 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 contacts such as assault, unwanted touching, blocking normal movements, or interfering with work, study or play because of gender.
- 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. Parent(s) who become aware of incidents of sexual harassment should report them immediately to the pastor or to the DRE.

Weather and Other Emergency Situations

Cancellation of Classes

Classes may be canceled from time to time because of inclement weather. For Sunday morning religious education, If Tippecanoe County has issued a level 1 or 2 travel advisory, classes will be cancelled. Classes may be cancelled on a level 3 travel advisory at the discretion of the pastor. If school is cancelled on a weekday and an event is scheduled, it will be cancelled.

To find out if classes are canceled, listen for reports on WLFI TV and check email for direct communication from DRE.

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 their parent or guardian. Parent(s) must check with the DRE before leaving with their child to avoid unnecessary search and rescue operations.

Sickness and Injury

Sickness

Should a student become ill while in class, parent(s) will be contacted according to the information provided on the student medical form. If the parent is unavailable, attempts will be made to reach the backup person listed. The DRE will make every effort to keep the child comfortable until he/she is picked up. Medications will not be administered to the child unless it is part of a care plan developed with the DRE.

Medications

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

Injury

Catechists are asked to report any injury to the DRE immediately. If an injury occurs, first aid will be administered as appropriate and the parent(s) will be contacted. If the injury requires immediate medical attention, the DRE will call the appropriate emergency services, followed by a call to the parent(s). First aid kits are available in each classroom's closet.

Field Trips - Youth Activities

When St. Tom's conducts youth activities which are approved by the DRE and pastor, parents will be notified and the following is required for student participation.

- A permission slip signed by the parent which releases the parish from liability.
- A Medical Release Form must be signed by the parent for each student attending the event.
- Parents may be asked to chaperone and the guideline used at St. Tom's requires at least one adult chaperone for every 10 children in fifth grade and above, and one adult for every 5 children, fourth grade or younger.
- Parents who chaperone field trips must submit to a background check and complete the child safety protocol training prior to the event.
- If cars are used, drivers must be over 25 years of age. A copy of the driver's license and registration must be obtained and certified to be current. They must show proof of current insurance, and they must be informed that their insurance is the primary insurance in the event of an accident. They must be informed of the route to be taken, and follow that route.

No field trips or special events are considered sponsored by the parish unless the permission of the DRE and approval of pastor is granted in advance.