



Family Handbook

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Welcome!

From the Pastor

Dear Parents,

Welcome back to another exciting year of Religious Education and Family Faith Formation! RE is here to assist you in handing on the Holy Faith to your children. I thank you for entrusting your children to our RE program. Our staff and catechists are committed to their ministry, but nothing can take the place of you yourselves as the first teachers of your children in the ways of faith. Your own example and witness are precious and priceless. Thank you! All of us here at St. Mary's look forward to working with you. Together we will make known the love of God and the name of His Son, Jesus.

May God Bless you!
Fr. Del Lape, Pastor

Parent Commitment

Thank you for allowing us to partner with you as you raise your child in the faith. Parents are the first and primary educators of their children: for this reason, we ask that families work together to model Catholic life in their homes. What does this look like? The Church tells us that a

practicing Catholic follows five precepts: we ask that families follow these norms at home, and support their children in this process as well.

1. Attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, and acknowledge Sundays as a day of rest.
2. Confess one's sins in Confession at least once a year.
3. Receive the Eucharist at least once a year during Eastertime.
4. Observe the days of fasting and abstinence as defined by the Church.
5. Help to provide for the needs of the Church through stewardship.

Family Faith Formation Program

At least one parent/guardian of a child enrolled in our Religious Education program is expected to enroll in our Family Faith Formation program. This takes place once a month, typically on the last Wednesday of the month, from 6PM-7:30PM while students are in class. This program includes a teaching provided by Fr. Del designed to equip parents to share the faith at home with their families. Each family will receive one parent book and one activity book, as well as a Bible and a Catechism. All families are welcome to enroll!

Enrollment, Registration, and Tuition

Enrollment Policy

The Religious Education program exists to support families in building up their children in the faith. Any family that does not have their child enrolled in a Catholic school is welcome to enroll their child in our weekly program to supplement their faith learning and formation. We also offer a Family Faith Formation program designed to help parents to share the Faith with their children at home: this involves a monthly course that provides education and resources. Parents with a child enrolled in the Religious Education program are expected to enroll in the Family Faith Formation Program, but this program is also open to any other parents as well.

Families who opt to homeschool their children and do not wish to enroll in a Catholic School or Religious Education program must contact the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization for support and instruction regarding Sacramental preparation.

Registration

Parents must fill out a registration form for their child(ren) enrolled in the weekly Religious Education program. There is a separate registration form for enrollment in the monthly Family Faith Formation Program.

All registration forms are available on our website.

Tuition

There is a separate fee for both the Religious Education and Family of Faith programs. This is to offset the cost of materials through the year. However, no child or family will be denied access to our programs due to inability to pay: financial aid is available!

Religious Education: \$80 for the first child, and \$40 for additional children.

Family of Faith: \$50 per family.

Additional workbooks, Bibles, and Catechisms will be made available at an additional charge.

Tuition may be paid online through Weshare or by check to the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization. Payment plans may be arranged with our office. We do ask that all balances be resolved by April of the current school year.

Volunteers for the Religious Education program may receive discounts on their child's tuition costs.

Special Needs

Please contact the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization if your child has a need for alternative accommodations. We are able to work with all families to find a process of Sacramental preparation and religious education that best works for you.

Classes and Curriculum

The Archdiocese has developed guidelines and suggestions for Religious Education Curriculum. Specifically, they recommend the curriculum "Spirit of Truth" and "Family of Faith" by Sophia Institute Press. In accordance with their recommendations, this is the curriculum we will be utilizing. For more information, visit www.archomaha.org/religious-education

Family Faith Formation

The Family of Faith program was created to help develop strong Catholic families in which children learn the joys of following Jesus Christ and the truths of our Faith through the witness of Christian life given by their parents. Studies tell us that parental involvement in the faith-life of their child is by far the most important element in ensuring that a child develops into a practicing Christian. A Family of Faith provides us with an easy-to-use solution to catechizing the whole family and helping parents lead their children to Heaven.

Our program involves a parent-course once a month, typically taught by Fr. Del on the last Wednesday of the month, covering a particular topic. There is time after the teaching for small group discussion and the opportunity for parents to connect with each other. Each family will receive a parent guide including background essays covering each month's content, notes for conveying this content to children in age-appropriate ways, instructions for activities and craft

projects, stories of the saints and other notable Catholics, and suggestions for living the faith at home through prayer, conversation, and other opportunities. Families will also receive a children's activity book, designed to help children come to know the Catholic Faith through fun games and activities, and aligns with the information in the Parent's Guide.

We will also have several opportunities throughout the year for families to build relationships with each other through community gatherings.

Religious Education

Our classroom program typically meets once a week on Wednesday evenings. Each classroom will utilize age-appropriate curriculum from the Spirit of Truth materials, with supplemental activities and lessons provided by the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization. Below, we list the focus of each year:

Pre-K – Kindergarten:

Students are introduced to the loving goodness of Jesus Christ, they meet the members of the Holy Family, and they learn who the Saints are and what they teach us.

- They begin to explore why virtue is good and sin is bad, and the importance of developing good habits
- Students learn that they can speak to God in prayer

First Grade:

Students begin to develop an awareness of God as our Father in Heaven, the Creator of Heaven and earth, Who is all good, Who created them in His image and likeness, and Who loves them unconditionally.

Second Grade:

This year focuses on how much children are loved by Jesus Christ, and how His death and Resurrection has opened the way to Heaven. Special focus is placed on the Sacraments of Confession and Eucharist in this year.

Third Grade:

Students learn what the Catholic Church is, Who the Holy Spirit is, and how He guides Her, and what it means that Jesus continues His mission through Her. Students will study all seven Sacraments.

Fourth Grade:

Most of this year focuses on the moral life, our loving response to God's great gift to us, and students explore more deeply what it means to be created in the image and likeness of God. Students will explore the Ten Commandments and how to follow them.

Fifth Grade:

This year provides an in-depth exploration of God's grace in the Sacraments, with a focus on what a Sacrament is and why Jesus instituted them.

Sixth Grade:

Students spend this year immersed in God's Word in the Sacred Scriptures, and explore how the Bible communicates God's plan of salvation to us. Students will receive an age-appropriate Bible during this year.

Seventh Grade:

This year takes students on a deeper dive into the seven Sacraments and prayer, beginning the preparation process for Confirmation.

Eighth Grade:

Students in eighth grade are preparing to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation in May. We will be utilizing the program called "Chosen" from Ascension press to help students have an authentic encounter with Christ and learn how to truly incorporate their faith into daily life.

Attendance

Class Hours

Classes meet on Wednesday evenings from 6PM – 7:30PM. This applies to both student classes and the Family Faith Formation classes. Please see the RE calendar for specific dates.

Arrival and Dismissal:

Students may be dropped off at the gym up to 15 minutes before class begins, and picked up at the gym at the close of class. Please plan to pick up your student no later than 15 minutes after class has ended. We ask that parents come into the gym to pick up their student.

On Family Faith Formation nights, parents are asked to drop off their student at the gym and head over to the parent session in the Parish Center. Parents will be dismissed from the Church/Parish Center at the close of the session and may pick up their students from the gym.

Note: No student will be released from the school until a parent/guardian picks them up. If you are arranging for someone else to pick up your student, you must contact our office in advance to let us know. Students may only be picked up and dropped off through the gym. We cannot allow a student to leave without verifying that they are leaving with their parent/guardian. Please contact our office if your student needs to leave RE early for any reason and we will make arrangements.

Attendance Policy

All families are expected to attend sessions on time and on their scheduled date. Attendance is recorded at each session. Consistent attendance is an important element of our program. If you/your child will be absent, please call 402-506-6485 and leave a message or email us at OCE@stmarysbellevue.com. We are more than willing to make arrangements to support parents in getting their students caught up from missed sessions, so please just stay in contact with us regarding your needs.

Cancellation (Weather Related)

If Bellevue Public Schools cancel classes or evening activities due to weather, we will not have classes that evening, either for adults or children.

There may be times we need to cancel RE for the evening even if BPS stays open. We will communicate cancellations through our flocknote system, using your email listed on your registration form.

Offsite and Field Trips

Occasionally, classes may make a visit to the Church or travel offsite for a field trip. This will be communicated with parents in advance, accompanied by permission forms and details.

Grounds

Building Security

The gym lobby door will serve as our only point of entry and exit for students, parents, volunteers, and catechists. A volunteer will be present during RE hours to assist anyone who arrives and provide them direction. We cannot allow entry or exit through any other door, including the Dominican Center door, while students are in the building.

Parents are welcome to visit or sit in for their child's classes. We ask that parents make arrangements with the OCE staff in advance, and check in with the door monitor to receive a visitor badge, and check out when they leave.

No students or adults (except catechists) may be allowed in the classrooms before class begins. Students will gather and wait in the gym to be dismissed to their classrooms with their catechists. Students may not be in classrooms without adult supervision.

Playground

The playground will not have a designated supervisor outside, so we are unable to allow children to play on the equipment unattended. Please do not bring in outside sports equipment to RE, even for use on the playground.

Parking

All vehicles must enter the school parking lot on the Calhoun Street entrance and exit by following the parking lot in a south bound loop and exit to Calhoun Street. The parking lot is considered "One Way". Parents and Catechists will park along the fence and in designated parking stalls. If parents are dropping students off, we ask that they form a line near the back of the gym, creating one lane of traffic for drop off.

Care and Use of Property

We are grateful to the school community for sharing their spaces with us. We ask that all children and visitors to the grounds please respect the space and keep it clean. We do not allow gum or smoking on our premises.

Health and Medical Policies

Illness

We ask that anyone who is not feeling well to stay home. Please contact our office to inform us of an absence, and we will be in contact to provide families with materials that were missed in that week's lesson to be covered at home. Even if the student is feeling better, we ask that the following general guidelines be followed before they are allowed to come to class:

- COVID-19: Students may return with a doctor's note
- Chicken Pox: Students may return after pox has scabbed
- Fever: Students may return 24 hours after the fever has broken
- Infections: Students may return 24 hours after starting antibiotics
- Head Lice: Students may return after treatment with lice shampoo
- Vomiting/Diarrhea: Students may return 24 hours after their last episode, provided nausea and other symptoms have passed.

Please contact our office with any questions. We maintain emergency information in our office for each family and student. In case of illness or injury that occurs during an RE session, we will call a parent/guardian or designated emergency contact. Our office reserves the right to call emergency services as needed.

Disclosure of Ongoing Medical Conditions

We ask that you inform our office of any illness, allergy, or condition that might affect your child's performance during class or that you think we should be made aware of. Catechists will be provided with guidance/instructions provided by the parent/guardian and will work to accommodate all needs.

Medications

St. Mary's Office of Catechesis and Evangelization and Religious Education program does not purchase, prescribe, or provide any medication (including aspirin, cough medicine, or other over the counter medication) to any student. Parents/guardians who wish students to receive prescribed medications during RE hours must consult with the Director of the OCE to make necessary provisions. St. Mary's reserves the right to refuse to administer medication to a student. Should this situation occur, a parent/guardian will be informed.

Emergencies

Emergency Contact

Each family's emergency information is on file in the OCE. The information must be kept current at all times: please let us know of any changes of phone number or address. In case of illness or injury, parents will be contacted by phone.

Emergency Procedures

Emergency exit routes are posted in all buildings.

Fire: During a fire alarm, catechists and students will immediately leave their classroom and go to their designated exit. Catechists will follow students out of the building, leading them to the far south end of the playground, and make sure all students are present.

Tornado: When a tornado alert is given, catechists will guide students to a designated interior location to shelter and ensure all students are accounted for. Children will not be dismissed until an all clear is sounded.

Intruder: Students will be kept in the secured classroom and released only by a St. Mary's staff person.

We will practice drills periodically during the year to keep catechists and students familiar with the processes. In an emergency situation, only a St. Mary's staff person may release a student from the premises to their parent/guardian, in order to maintain everyone's safety.

Conduct and Dress Code

Conduct

Students are expected to behave in a manner that is appropriate, respectful, and that reflects Christian values. We ask that they treat their classmates, catechists, and others with dignity and respect, and follow the directions they are given. Any disciplinary concerns will be discussed between the catechist, student, OCE staff, and parents.

Dress Code

We follow the dress code regulations of Bellevue Public Schools. This includes the following:

- Strapless or thin-strapped tops, halter tops, midriff tops, cut off shirts, and clothing with revealing rips or holes are prohibited.
- Skirts, dresses, and shorts are required to be an appropriate length (reaches fingertips when the arms are down).
- Clothing with vulgar and offensive words, sexually explicit or lewd, illegal drugs or tobacco products are not acceptable.
- Oversized baggy pants may be worn only with a belt that secures the waistline above the hips.
- Hats, caps, or scarves (for males, worn on the head) are not permitted indoors.
- Shoes are required at all times.

Sacrament Preparation

The Office of Catechesis and Evangelization is responsible for Sacrament preparation for all students, in public schools, St. Mary's school, and homeschooled. This preparation is done in cooperation with the student's parent/guardian. All parents are encouraged to enroll in our Family Faith Formation program to obtain additional support in sharing their faith at home with their students. . Parents of students preparing for Sacraments will receive a folder with additional resources and information specific to their child.

The Sacraments of Reconciliation and Communion are typically received for the first time in the second grade. This is the grade level where we will focus our preparation. First Reconciliation will take place following a parent/child workshop on Saturday, February 3. First Communion will take place at the 12PM Mass on Sunday, April 7.

Confirmation preparation typically takes place over a two-year process, normally running from 7th – 8th grade. This preparation includes catechesis, service opportunities, and an 8th grade retreat. All candidates for Confirmation will be interviewed by one of our parish priests to assess their readiness to receive the Sacrament. The date for Confirmation has not been set yet, but will likely take place in late April or early May.

All candidates for Sacraments must provide a copy of their Baptismal Certificates to the school, Office of Catechesis and Evangelization in advance. We ask that these be made available by the end of December.

Children who have not received the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Reconciliation, or Confirmation) and are in the third grade or above may contact our office for options about Sacrament preparation. They may be enrolled in the Rite of Christian Initiation for Children, or an alternative option may be available.

Students who are receiving Sacrament preparation from their parents must utilize a curriculum approved by the Pastor, and must still participate in certain parish activities (retreat, workshop, etc). Please contact our office so we may best support your family in this exciting journey of faith.

Additional Information

Catechists

All of our catechists are volunteers or staff who have responded to a call to transmit the Catholic Faith to our young people. Each catechist will be certified through the Catechetical Institute, and will be asked to participate in that training process either through monthly workshops or by working through the workshops on their own online. Catechists are all safe-environment certified, which includes a successful background check, and are expected to exhibit a lifestyle in keeping with Gospel values and Catholic tradition. The Office of Catechesis and Evangelization is available at any time to support catechists in their work and walk with them.

Special Awards

Our Religious Education program desires to recognize and encourage outstanding Christian behavior in our students. To support this process, we will be handing out awards during different times in the year. Students are nominated for these awards by their catechists.

Disciple of Christ Award: Given twice a semester to one student per class. Recipients of this award will have modeled the attributes of a disciple of Christ: respect to teachers and others, class participation, knowing prayers, and helpfulness.

Spirit of Mary Award: Awarded each semester to one student per class. Recipients of this award will have modeled the attributes of Mary in their class: patience, kindness, friendship, and good listening.

Communication

Most of our communication will regularly take place via email. Each family will be signed up to receive Religious Education emails through the Flocknote email system. We will send out reminders, updates, and occasionally send out class-specific information. This will also be the way we communicate any closures or cancellations due to weather, so please make sure to check your email on days when that is a possibility.

We will also regularly update our column in the parish bulletin with information specific to RE.