

# **St. Joseph Catechist Handbook**

**“Tell the children I love them!” ~God**

## **A Catechist’s Prayer**

Lord God, Creator of Heaven and Earth,  
enable me to share the truths of Your Kingdom

with all who share Your gift of life.

Lord God, Son, Redeemer of the World,  
bestow upon me Your saving grace  
and grant me a new life in You.

Lord God, Holy Spirit, Sanctifier of the Universe,  
empower me with Your gifts that I may use them  
To teach those You have entrusted to me.

Lord God, give me the fortitude to live the Gospel  
and inspire me to teach.  
Love in a season of hate;  
Forgiveness in a sinful world;  
Peace in the midst of turmoil;  
Hope in days of despair;  
Justice in a milieu of injustice;  
Acceptance in an era of intolerance;  
and  
Courage in the face of fear.

Lord God, Unity and Love, give me the courage  
to teach by my words and actions  
that 'one nation under God' must become  
an integral part of Your Kingdom on Earth.

May Your Kingdom come, on Earth, as it is in Heaven. Amen.

*We welcome you, and thank you, for sharing in the ministry of Religious Education through the Faith Formation Department of St. Joseph Church. Together with the Holy Spirit we will strive to bring our children and their families closer to God.*

*May this handbook be a resource as you guide our children in our faith.*

### **St. Joseph Parish Mission**

*St. Joseph Parish comes together as a Eucharistic family. We celebrate the sacraments and proclaim the Good News that Jesus Christ is Lord through Christian Formation and Catholic Education. We share our faith through Evangelization and Service to others.*

The religious education programs of the Archdiocese of Detroit participate in the mission of the Catholic Church and endeavor to lead religious education students to a full and ever deepening realization of God's love for them. Programs are to be "*communities of faith in which the Christian message, the experience of community, worship and social concern are integrated in the total experience of students...*" [National Catechetical Directory, 1977, #99]. Formation in the Catholic Faith is characterized by a holistic catechetical approach grounded in scripture, doctrine, and tradition of the Catholic Church.

## CALL TO SERVE

### **Basic Requirements for a Catechist or Catechist Assistant**

It is important to be a practicing Catholic who is faithful to, and living a lifestyle consistent with, the teachings of the Catholic Church. Personal prayer life is fundamentally important in the life of the Catechist. This is fostered through regular Mass attendance, reception of the Sacraments, daily prayer, scripture reading and participation in retreat opportunities. One of the most important aspects is that the person love children and has a desire to share our faith.

*Catechists' tuition for their family's Religious Education is only \$35 as a thank you for their time and devotion to this ministry. Sacramental Preparation Tuition does not apply.*

### **Catechist Responsibilities**

"Tell the children I love them!" ~ God

The role of the Catechist is to be a teacher of the faith, a builder of faith community, an educator for liturgical participation, a former of conscience, a person of prayer who also teaches others to pray and an educator for a missionary sense. [Adapted from *GDC #85-87*]

Catechists will partner with parents, and the St. Joseph Community, in forming the children of our parish in our catholic faith.

Catechists will attend all trainings, retreats, and workshops for the continued development and growth of our Religious Education/Faith Formation Department.

Catechists will be responsible for getting to know the children in their class as well as their families. They will assess the needs of each child and provide the best learning environment and lessons to nurture and meet the needs of each child.

Catechists are responsible to the Evening Coordinator and ultimately the Director of Faith Formation.

All volunteers and catechists will attend a *Protecting God's Children* workshop and complete a Criminal Background check.

All Catechists are encouraged to become fully certified through the Archdiocese of Detroit.

## **Qualities of a Catechist**

The National Catechetical Directory has established the ideal qualities for a catechist:

- **RESPONSE TO CALL** Catechists are called by God through the Church to the ministry of catechesis, not only to give time and talent for re-echoing the faith, but to be open to one's own deepening, understanding, and living of the Catholic faith.
- **WITNESS TO THE GOSPEL** Catechists are called to believe and witness the gospel and its power to transform life. Catechists are persons with an ongoing commitment to God's Word, in their mind, in their hearts and in their lives.
- **COMMITMENT TO THE CHURCH** Catechists are called to be ministers of the Word and representatives of the Church. They are called to teach what the teaching authority of the Church proclaims, regardless of personal beliefs or opinions.
- **SHARES IN COMMUNITY** Our God is a community of persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Made in the image and likeness of God, we are called to be God's people, a community of faith. Catechists are therefore called to foster and build a faith community in their classrooms and in all aspects of the parish.
- **SERVANT OF THE COMMUNITY** Catechists are called to serve the Christian community in the spirit of Jesus and the prophets. This service means not only seeking to meet the needs of individuals within the parish, but also in the larger local and global community. This challenges the Catechist to be aware of Church teaching and actions in terms of peace and justice. Catechists need to be open to receiving the service and care of others in order to truly be of service to others.
- **KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS** Catechists are called to prepare for this important ministry by acquiring the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to communicate gospel values and Church teachings effectively for different age groups.

## **ROLE OF THE CATECHIST**

### **Preparation for Class**

The Catechist will be responsible for facilitating a one hour and fifteen minute session of religious education for children in specific grade levels each week, using a textbook guide and written lesson plans that accompany the text.

Catechists are expected to spend time each week prior to class to prepare them for the weekly session. Read the chapter in the text, look over all lesson plans, make necessary changes, visit web sites to enrich the lesson, and reserve materials needed.

Catechists are expected to have read all information regarding students in their class, making note of allergies, special needs and circumstances.

Catechists will arrive at least twenty minutes before class to pick up mail from mailbox in the RE office, set up their room, and talk with Coordinator or Secretary if needed.

It is our goal to always have two Catechists who work as a team in each classroom; this is a preferred approach for proactive safety measures, behavioral management, as well as support for all Catechists.

Catechists are expected to greet students and parents at the door as they arrive and have a planned assignment for students on their desk, or journaling opportunity written out on the board.

Catechists will work with the Evening Coordinator to establish classroom routines/procedures, which are developmentally appropriate, for their students. Examples of areas where routines should be established are: arrival and dismissal, class beginning and end, transitions, restroom usage, cleanup, etc.

**Any catechist suspected of being under the influence of drugs or alcohol will be asked to leave the St. Joseph campus immediately.**

### Supervision of Students

Within the classroom/instructional setting the Catechist must be both mentally (i.e., be paying attention to the students) and physically (i.e., be bodily in the instructional space) present. [*Shaughnessy, M.A. (1996) Religious Education and the Law: A Handbook for Parish Catechetical Leaders, NCEA, WA. DC, P. 83*].

All Catechists should keep the health and safety of the children in mind at all times. Children should always be under adult supervision. No child should ever be left unsupervised. Children should never be asked to do anything that would place themselves or others in a position of personal injury. Children should always feel and be emotionally and physically safe while in the care of our Religious Education catechists.

Catechists are expected to be fully present and aware when their students are in the room. Catechists will refrain from cell phone usage and holding conversations with others while students are in their care. If there are two Catechists in the room and a parent would like to speak to one of the Catechists, they may do so as long as the other Catechist is attending to the class. Otherwise Catechists will set time aside either before or after class, or another time to address parents' needs and concerns.

- **Record Keeping:** Catechists will use the given attendance sheet to record children's attendance and absences. **If a child misses two sessions in a row the catechist will call the family to inquire about the child and give missed assignments.** Catechists will notify RE office of consistent absences and students that may drop out of the program due to a move, etc.
- **Discipline:** Discipline in all St. Joseph Parish programs is expected to be guiding and teaching in nature, always trying to set children up for success with a sense of security and peace in the classroom. Catechists will follow a predictable routine providing children smooth transitions, preceded by a warning when a change in activity is near. Catechists will discipline with compassion and fairness as well as an understanding that an allowance for developmental stage/age should be permitted. Corporal punishment is never permitted.

**Keep these in mind:**

- A well planned session keeps children engaged and busy and often prevents behavioral problems.
- Catechists are encouraged to walk around the class. Many times standing by a disruptive child, without bringing attention to them while continuing to teach, will help them to regain control.
- Catechists will never belittle a child and will never put the child in an embarrassing spotlight.
- When possible, Catechists will pull children aside to try to work out the disruptive situation.
- Catechists should remember to listen and try to see the point of view of the child (this many times defuses a reactive child)
- Catechists should make a point to talk to parents often and share positive comments regarding the child. Mention small conflicts when they occur so if bigger situations happen you already have parents working with you.
- Remember the child's parent is your partner!

**Catechists will follow these steps when further discipline is needed**

- Give the child a warning
  - Set a consequence of talking to the child's parent when the class is over and/or being sent to the RE office
  - Send for assistance from the RE office
  - At the end of class talk to the parent and explain your concern regarding the child's behavior
  - In a pastoral way, let the parent know that if the disruptive behavior continues they (parents) may be asked to join the class for the next session.
  - Write up a report of discipline actions to be put in the child's folder (see Coordinator for form)
  - If problem persists, ask for further assistance from the Evening Coordinator and/or Director of Faith Formation.
  
- **Restroom Procedure** In grades 3 - 8, each classroom will have a Restroom Log to record students leaving the classroom to use the restroom. If a problem occurs in the restroom, names of students out of the classroom during the specific time period will be requested.
  
- **Non-Instructional Duties** The duties of the Catechist do not begin and end in the classroom. Students need supervision in hallways and in classrooms before instruction formally begins. No child is permitted in a classroom without the supervision of the catechist. Students are not permitted to sit at the school teacher's desk or to use the computers without the permission of the RE office.
  
- **Child Abuse** According to Archdiocesan Policy and Civil Law, if a catechist suspects child abuse, it must be reported to Child Protective Services within 48 hours. Inform the Coordinator and Director of Faith Formation of your concern.
  
- **Harassment/Sexual Abuse/Sexual Misconduct** Any persons who will have unsupervised access to children, vulnerable adults, or developmentally disabled persons, are required to complete a Criminal Background Check and must attend a *Protecting God's Children* workshop.

### Supervision of Catechists

The Evening Coordinator will routinely visit and observe classroom lessons. It is the responsibility of the Coordinator and Director of Faith Formation to ensure the best learning environment for the children of St. Joseph Parish. Visiting the classrooms will help catechists feel supported, develop a stronger relationship between Catechist and Coordinator, as well as allow the Coordinator the opportunity to get a full picture of the entire program. Classroom visits will always be supportive in nature.

All Catechists are asked to complete an EMERGENCY MEDICAL INFORMATION form at the beginning of the year. This is kept on file in the office. Information should be updated as needed throughout the year.

### Curriculum

- **Grade Level Benchmarks/Assessments and Homework:** Each grade level is assigned benchmarks that are derived from the curriculum and teachings of the church. Catechists will encourage parents to work with their child to master these important teachings. Children will be assessed at the beginning and end of the year. Every child will be promoted to the next grade level regardless of the assessment outcome. Catechists will notify parents of concerns of growth in the class but never refer to a child failing.
- **Curriculum and Text** St. Joseph Religious Education program has a written curriculum that strives to meet the needs of all children ages preschool through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Our department currently uses *RCL Faith First Legacy* texts.
- **Website(s)** Our parish website is [www.stjosephlakeorion.org](http://www.stjosephlakeorion.org). You may visit our publisher's website [www.faithfirst.com](http://www.faithfirst.com) as well as [www.blestarewe.com](http://www.blestarewe.com). Please share new sites that you find that would benefit our team.
- **Library** The RE department has a library of resources inside the RE office. Our office will provide you an updated inventory of books and videos/DVDs. You are welcomed and encouraged to browse through the shelves (and list) to see what you may want to enrich your lesson. Catechists must sign out all materials that is borrowed. The sign out sheet is next to the bookshelves.
  - **Videos/DVDs**  
All video/DVDs shown to students must be previewed by the Catechist and be suitable and appropriate for the grade level. Any videos shown must be incorporated into the lesson plan. Videos/DVDs rated PG need written permission from parents prior to viewing.

### Communication

- **Parent Communication** St Joseph Parish recognizes that parents are the primary teacher in their child's life. Parents will receive monthly newsletters with regular calendar updates, religious education content and activities. All written communication with parents and families must be approved in advance by the Coordinator and Director of Faith Formation.
  - **Emailing parents** Catechists will receive a class list that contains your children's addresses, phone numbers, and emails...please use email as much as you can, we are trying to get everyone used to communicating in this manner.

- **Phone numbers** Stay in good communication with families and feel free to call them to stay in touch if you miss talking to them before or after class. Even though we want to use email it is important to talk to parents often.
- **Coordinator and Director of Faith Formation/Religious Education (DRE)** *The Evening Coordinator* is the supervisor for the session. *Colleen Heacock* and *Lisa Stockard* will coordinate our Monday and Tuesdays programs. They will assist you, provide resources and support, and supervise the session. *Kim Myers* is the *Director of Faith Formation (DRE)* oversees all the ministries in our Faith Formation Department including Religious Education. She assists the coordinators and will visit sessions from time to time. You will see Kim especially during parent meetings and sacramental preparation sessions. You are welcomed and encouraged to call on her at any time.
- **Catechist Team** You will be encouraged to exchange phone numbers and emails with other catechists who will be teaching your same grade level, as well as other catechists on our team. The only way we can truly be a team is if we work together. We will gather at different times of the year for workshops and trainings which will allow time for formation and networking.
- **Mailboxes** Each Catechist will have a mailbox in the Religious Education (RE) Office. Catechists must stop in the office to pick up important messages and materials before going to class. *Any messages on red paper* indicate high priority and must be read first.
- **Reserving Supplies** In the RE Office there is a bulletin board next to the mailboxes. You are asked to fill out a request form at least one week prior to your need of supplies, and pin it to the board. The forms are color coded, according to session, in envelopes on the board.
- **Emergency Closings** In the event that we would need to cancel a session, our secretary, your coordinator, or DRE, will send an email or call you. You will then be expected to get the word out to your families if time permits. If the call comes close to a session time and the office cannot reach you, we will contact your children's families. *We will immediately post closings on our website.*

### **Sharing Our Space**

While we share the classrooms in our Parish School, our desire is to maintain good and friendly relationships with the families who attend. Please remind students that no materials from the classroom will be used. All supplies (paper, pencils, markers, etc.) will be obtained from the RE bin (stored in the classroom) or from the Religious Education office.

RE Bin: In the classroom will be a plastic container referred to as the “bin.” Inside you will have most of what you need for simple projects, scissors, crayons, tape, glue sticks, CDs, etc)...be sure to look in it to familiarize yourself with the contents.

SMART Boards: Use of a SMART Board is only permitted after attending training. SMART Board pens are to be used only on these special boards!

If there is a white board in the room...only white board markers may be used on the boards (permanent markers will ruin the board!). All children will be supervised.

Please note the setup of the room when you arrive. If you desire a different set up, feel free to make changes, however, before you leave be courteous and move the room to its prior set up. If you are the first session (4:30pm on Mondays you must also reset up the room).

Before you leave, please enlist the help of your students to pick up trash and even small pieces of paper on the floor. Due to the nature of our custodial schedule your classroom may not get vacuumed before the morning class arrives so please take pride and clean up. Thank you.

If the blinds are open when you arrive please make sure they are open as you leave ☺

Be encouraged to email or leave notes to the School teacher and her/his class, we are all a team together and it is nice to get to know one another even if it's just through a note.

### **Cell Phone Policy**

Catechists are not permitted to talk on cell phones during class. Student cell phones are permitted on school grounds under the following conditions.

- Student cell phones are in the OFF position during class. Other students are not to be made aware that the cell phone is present.
- Cell phones are not to be used for picture taking.
- No harassment or threatening of persons via the call phone is permitted.

Those who violate any of the rules regarding cell phones may forfeit their privileges of bringing them to the program.

## **PROFESSIONAL ETHICS**

When a problem arises, the Coordinator and Director of Religious Education (DRE) must be advised immediately and the situation resolved.

Discussions with parents must focus only on *their own* child. Discussions regarding the behavior and attitude of every child should be objective and framed in positive language. Mutual respect,

loyalty and support between the administration and the team are required for a good working relationship. Communication must be honest and direct. Catechists are asked to support the decisions of the administration and refrain from discussing professional differences with students or parents.

### **Confidentiality**

Catechists are expected to be professional and discreet with information they may gather while teaching. If it is a secret, keep it to yourself. Some students may confide things they have seen or heard (and maybe some things they have made up). Anything heard in class should stay in class. Your feelings about certain students, parents, teachers, and other catechists/volunteers should not be discussed with anyone other than the Coordinator or Director of Faith Formation.

### **Release of Student Data/Information**

Names and addresses of students and their parents may not be released to any person or agency without the expressed permission of the parents or the DRE. Unlisted phone numbers cannot be released. Some students have legal issues surrounding the use of the name or picture. Be sure to check the media listing to see if the student's name or picture can be used.

### **Sensitive Issues and Topics**

Please use discretion when talking to the children about sensitive issues. Remember that the parent is the primary teacher. The parent should feel confident that the Catechist will use age appropriate language and discretion when presenting lessons. Never should a Catechist teach with his/her own agenda or with biases on topics that may be sensitive to our children. Catechists must also discern, prior to class, how to talk appropriately about the following topics, should they come up in class. (Here are just a couple examples of topics and appropriate responses)

- Adultery Commandment
  - Faithfulness to ones partner is sacred in God's eyes. Those who are devoted to one another should remain faithful to their relationship. Desiring someone else is hurtful and a sin in God's eyes. A sexual relationship is a gift from God to be shared in marriage only.
- Abortion
  - Catholics support God's desire for life. Should a woman feel that she cannot raise the child she is blessed with, she has the option of adopting it to a family who can. Abortion is truly taking the life of someone God created...period...nothing else needs to be said.
- Divorce
  - We believe that in any sacrament the one celebrating has an encounter with God. So it is in Marriage...and the three become *one*. We support God's desire of oneness *forever*, for those that have entered into the sacrament of Matrimony. If for some reason a married couple separates and chooses divorce we pray for them but never judge.
  - The church requires a couple to go through quite an extensive pre-marriage preparation (just like prep for any sacrament) to assure that they understand the sacrament and desire being one with God and their partner forever. Many times when a couple does not fully go through the preparation of understanding, the marriage fails...they may not have understood what the requirements of God and their partner where and unfortunately they desire separation. The church does not agree with this separation because the couple should not have entered into this sacred bond to begin with...but again it is not

for us to judge, but for our own faith growth and development we need to understand it.

- War and Tragedy
  - Be sensitive to the fact that many children may not be aware of current events in world news and that parents may want discretion used when talking about what is happening in our world.
  - We continue to pray and strive for peace and understanding among all nations of our world!

*To protect yourself and the sensitivity of our children please always check with the Coordinator or DRE before you plan to talk about such subjects (and others) in class.*

## EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

### First Aid

While every precaution is taken to prevent accidents, it is good to have a plan of action when accidents occur. Every volunteer is expected to be sufficiently informed about and capable of rendering common-sense first aid.

- All accidents, volunteer or student, are to be reported to the office immediately. Send another adult or student for assistance if needed. Staff persons designated to handle first aid situations will be located immediately. *All RE staff are current certified in First aid and CPR*
- If the student can be moved safely, take him/her to the office.
- If there is a possibility of a broken neck, limbs, or of a back or head injuries, DO NOT move the student. Do not leave the child; send a student or another adult, if available, to the office for assistance. If professional emergency care is needed, 911 will be called.
- Clear all students from around the injured student. Protect the student from the outside elements by using a blanket or piece of clothing.
- Have the first-aid trained individual assess the extent of the injury to help in determining action beyond immediate first aid.
- Office personnel will do all the calling related to injuries. Your assistance will be requested if needed. Persons listed on the emergency form will be contacted for directions in handling the injured student.
- Remember to use rubber gloves if dealing with any bleeding or body fluids. (Gloves are in your RE bin) If for some reason gloves are not available, have the student hold tissue or a paper towel over the area until first aid supplies are obtained.

### Emergency Lockdown Procedure

Under certain conditions it may be necessary to declare an *emergency lock-down* for the campus

- A lock-down procedure requires everyone to remain inside the building. If you are in a room other than your classroom, remain in that room.
- If you are in transit, proceed immediately to the nearest classroom or building.
- The signal for declaring a lock-down is the following statement:
- ***“Teachers, please activate lock-down procedures.”***
- ***CAMPUS LOCK-DOWN:*** In the event that there is a dangerous situation in the external school campus area, all external doors to the school will be locked. Teachers will be notified by announcement that there is a *campus lock-down*. Teachers and students should continue with normal routines.

- **YELLOW LEVEL (Caution):** Emergency situation in the school building that warrants confidentiality or has the potential to turn hazardous or threatening. All classroom doors are to be locked. Students should be accounted for and card should be slipped under door. Teachers should continue teaching as planned. Students may not leave the classroom.
- **RED LEVEL (Dangerous):** Immediate dangerous situation in the building. All classroom doors are to be immediately locked and students are to move to protected corner of the room, away from door and windows. Students should be accounted for and card should be slipped under door.
- **GREEN LEVEL (Evacuate):** Evacuation of building is necessary. Students and teachers should exit the building following procedures for fire drill avoiding the administration area. Once outside, assemble by class and wait for further direction. In the event of extreme weather, students should gather in the church until further notice.
- The following statement will be made to cancel emergency:
- ***“All classes may resume normal activity.”***

### Fire Emergency

In the event that it becomes necessary to evacuate the building to ensure the safety of our students, the following procedures should be followed:

- The prime responsibility is the safety of students.
- Catechists will instruct students in these procedures.
- The signal to evacuate the buildings will be a loud buzzer.
- Catechists will direct the orderly evacuation of their classroom.
  - Orderly behavior is mandatory.
  - Children will remain quiet during evacuation so that verbal instructions can be heard.
  - All doors should be closed.
- Follow evacuation route posted in room.
- Catechists need to take the red folder and red/green laminated card (hanging by the door). *Catechists will take class roster with them and take attendance when they reach their safe destination!*
- Catechists will be the last persons out of their room. Catechists should first ascertain that the emergency is not in their path before allowing children to exit the room. Make sure that all students leave.
- When all students are accounted for, the Catechist will hold up the green card. Should a student be unaccounted for, raise the red card over the teacher’s head.
- Restrooms will be checked by designated Catechists/staff closest to restroom.
- Office personnel will notify the fire department of the nature of the emergency. Dial 911!
- When the building is to be reoccupied, the Coordinator will signal the teachers and they are to walk the children back to the classroom to resume classes.

### Disaster (Tornado) Emergency

Disaster alarm (horn) will sound.

- Turn off lights, ceiling fans, VCRs, CD players, or anything USING ELECTRICITY.
- Proceed to hallway quietly and in single file line walk down to Myrick Hall. Sit facing the BACK wall with heads down. Remain quiet, and still, until drill/emergency is over.
- No students are permitted to leave during a Disaster Drill/Emergency...parents will need to comply with School/Parish drill and emergency policies.
- HAVE ATTENDANCE ROSTER IN HAND. Take attendance immediately.
- Alert Coordinator of any missing children

NOTE: Windows and doors DO NOT need to be closed.

PLEASE REMEMBER THAT FOR THE SAFETY OF EVERYONE IN THE BUILDING  
YOU MUST REMAIN CALM, QUIET, AND HELP YOUR STUDENTS TO BE ORDERLY.

*“The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ.” [General Directory for Catechesis, 1998, #80]*