

SS. Cosmas & Damian

Religious Education Program

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Dear Parents,

Religious Education for us and for our children has become an increasing priority. The world around us projects a society that has more of an emphasis on self-indulgence and gratification than concern and care for one another. The church stands as a beacon that fosters right living and awareness of others, "To teach as Jesus did..." becomes, then, not simply a "mantra" but a "way of life" for we who believe that there is more to life than just "me" and my wants.

Our children trust us to teach them "to follow the path of righteousness." It is not an option but an obligation. At their baptism you were instructed by the priest to "teach your child(ren) in the way of faith...and to be the best of teachers." Let us help you to do that by making sure your child or children attend regular religious education classes and weekly participation in Sunday Mass. You cannot substitute one for the other. It makes no sense to send your child(ren) to religious education classes and not to Mass on Sunday. To teach a person "to keep holy the Sabbath" and then not attend church is unconscionable.

Always remember we are here to help you fulfill your parental responsibility "to teach the faith" to your child(ren). We take that obligation seriously and we intend to do it to the best of our ability.

May the Lord bless our efforts and guide us with His Holy Spirit.

Sincerely,

Msgr. Joseph J. Riccardo, Pastor

SS. Cosmas & Damian Church

SSCD Religious Education Parent/ Student Handbook

Guided by the principles found in the documents of the Church concerning the ministry of catechesis, the catechetical program 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 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.

Services:

- Participants will be called to service and justice, which is inherent in the message of Jesus and the teachings of the Church.

Mission Statement:

Religious Education makes accessible the tradition of the Church so that, rooted in Jesus Christ, all may find salvation and hope through the gospel message.

Vision Statement:

Religious Education creates a solid faith foundation of Catholic Christianity through dedicated planning for excellence.

PROGRAM GOALS

The Catholic Parish strives to be a Christian community faithful to the Gospel and the Catholic Tradition. The parish is a community united in the endless struggle and search to know, love, and serve God, self, and one another.

The goals of the 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 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.

THE ROLE OF THE PARENTS

It is the role of the parish to assist parents in nurturing the faith of their children. Parents who enroll their children in the parish catechetical program will be assisted and enabled in their role as the primary educators of their children. Parents are encouraged to approach the 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 ensure a quality program.

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

- Must be a registered member of a parish.
- Is responsible for providing the parish with information regarding the child's baptism and other sacraments if applicable.
- Attends Mass weekly with the child.
- Takes responsibility for their role as primary educator.
- 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.
- Teaches the child the traditional prayers of the Church at home.
- Maintains an open line of communication with the child's catechist.
- Brings the child to class at the prescribed time and picks them up promptly at the conclusion of class.
- Makes sure the child enters the building where classes are held and goes to the classroom.
- 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.

- Informs the Religious Education Leader 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 children.
- Informs the Religious Education Leader of any pertinent medical and emergency information.

ADMISSION POLICIES

The Religious Education Program does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, national origin, religion, or physical and mental challenges. Any family that is registered in Saints Cosmas & Damian parish may enroll their children in the catechetical program. Students are typically enrolled in the grade of which they are currently attending in school unless other arrangements are made with the Religious Education Leader. An exception to this may be necessary to meet specific requirements for sacramental preparation.

Registration letters are mailed to families in August. Families who wish to enroll their children at other times during the year may do so by contacting the Religious Education Leader.

BOOK AND MATERIAL FEES

The Pastor, in cooperation with the Financial Advisor, determines the annual fees for the Religious Education Program. The following fee schedule, per family, has been recommended:

Religious Education:

One child.....\$50

Two or more children..... \$70

Confirmation:

Per child.....\$50

No child will be prevented from attending because of parents' inability to pay. An inquiry to either the Pastor or the Religious Education Leader 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. All fees should be paid at the time of registration. All fees are non-refundable after the start of classes.

PARENTS AND CATECHISTS

Catechists that teach the classes in the Religious Education Program are volunteers. The parish has made every effort to screen them to ensure 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 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.

ATTENDANCE

Children who are enrolled in the parish catechetical program are expected to be in attendance for each scheduled class. It is the responsibility of the parent(s) to ensure their presence. If your child is to be absent, you are asked to contact the Religious Education Office in advance. Attendance is taken for every class. A written excuse from the parent(s) is expected upon the return of the child.

MISSED CLASSES

Each class builds on the material covered in the preceding class. Children who are absent miss a great deal and will have to make up the material covered. When a child misses, the parent(s) are asked to please read the current chapter(s) and do the exercises with the child. Excessive absence (more than 5 times a year) will result in the student making up work during the summer or repeating the grade.

Completion of the 6th-8th grade religion courses are a requirement for preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation. For these grades, it is especially important to make up any missed religious education material.

ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL

Classes are held in the Parish School. Parents/guardians are asked to not bring their children more than 15 minutes before the start of class. Children are to be dropped off at the auditorium and wait for their teacher. No child will be allowed in a classroom without the teacher present. 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. Families are also asked to pick up their children promptly at the end of class. Children are to be picked up only by parents or their designee. Parents/guardians are to notify the religious Education Leader if someone other than the parent or designee is to pick up their children. While all reasonable attention will be given to carpools and the like, the police will be notified immediately if a child is seen leaving in a car not recognized by the Religious Education Leader or catechist.

CLASS TIME

Classes for grades Kindergarten – 8th grade are held on Sunday mornings from 9:15am – 10:45am. The calendar of classes gives the starting and ending dates, along with all breaks and special events. It can be found at the back of this handbook.

CANCELLATION OF CLASSES

Classes may be canceled from time to time because of inclement weather. To find out if classes are canceled parents will be notified via phone call/email/text/Band App.

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 period.

PROGRESS REPORTS

Progress reports are given at the beginning of January and at the end of the year.

CONFERENCES

Parents are invited to speak with their child's teacher in January. A conference may be requested at any time by contacting the Religious Education Leader.

STUDENT RECORDS

The Religious Education Leader will maintain a file for each student/family. Permanent record cards are also kept on each student showing attendance and student performance. These records are the property of the Religious Education Program 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 parent(s).

CURRICULUM

Our program follows the Diocese of Erie Curriculum Guidelines issued by the Bishop in January of 1993, updated 2023. Textbooks and other materials used in the classrooms 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.

Presently the curriculum materials are:

Elementary (grades K-5) ***We Believe*** textbooks published by Sadlier

Grades 6-8 ***Edge*** by LifeTeen (online and print materials)

HOME-SCHOOLING

Some parents, especially those who home-school their children for regular education, may choose to offer catechetical instruction to their children as well. It is the parent's responsibility to communicate to the Pastor that they wish to offer catechesis to their children at home. This must take place within the first three weeks of classes. The Diocese of Erie has specific requirements concerning home-schooling. If you choose to home school your child, you are required to use the textbooks provided by the Diocese of Erie (Sadlier). It is also the policy of the parish that your child be examined during a brief meeting every other month by the R.E. leader, parochial vicar, or pastor, to ascertain that the material has been taught. Homeschooling will not be an option for your child if he/she fails to comply with these requirements. Remember, you must contact the Pastor with your intentions concerning home-schooling.

**** Home-schooling is not permitted in a sacrament preparation year.**

DISCIPLINE

Everyone involved in the program is challenged by the words and example of Jesus to respect each person's rights 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 all can learn to follow Jesus' call to love, some rules for behavior are necessary. Students are expected by their behavior to make the class a safe and positive experience for themselves and their classmates.

The program exists for student growth and in turn students are expected to carry out the following responsibilities:

- Show respect to catechists, other students, and program personnel.
- Treat the property, good name, and physical safety of others with respect.
- Be present only in the areas of the building for which they have permission at a specific time.
- Act in a safe manner in and around the building.
- Use voice and display actions in a manner appropriate for a classroom.
- Be respectful of the study time of others.
- Will not use or have possession of illegal drugs, alcohol, or tobacco. Such items will be seized, and parents will be notified immediately. The child will be removed immediately from the environment.

- Will not use cell phones or other devices in class unless directed to do so.

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 the demeaning or intimidation of children in the name of discipline be accepted.

Disciplinary Process:

- **First offense:** Student will be warned
- **Second offense:** Student will be sent out of class to the Religious Education Leader. Parent(s) will be contacted by phone, in person, or in writing.
- **Third offense:** The student will be removed from class and the parent(s) will be contacted again. The student and parent(s) will meet with the catechist and Religious Education Leader to resolve the issues before returning to the classroom. At this time the parent(s) may be asked to sit in on the class. 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. The child will be treated as one who is being home-schooled and the parish will follow the Diocesan guidelines concerning homeschooling. The child will be admitted into the program in the next calendar year with no prejudice.

SPECIAL DISCIPLINE SITUATIONS

Weapons Policy

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. 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 a child has used a weapon against another person or will not surrender it (the weapon) willingly, the local police will be called first, followed by notification of the parent(s). This is a zero-tolerance policy. The child 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 Violence:

Threats of harm against individuals or groups will not be tolerated. Cursing, pushing, and fighting will not be tolerated. If the catechist regards any disagreement between students as serious (meaning that the conflict will lead to physical harm), the students will be separated immediately,

the Religious Education Leader and the parent(s) notified. Students and catechists are expected to immediately report to the Religious Education Leader any threat made by a student.

Harassment:

Respect for the dignity and worth of each individual is a basic precept of Catholic doctrine. Harassment of all forms is illegal as well as immoral. 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 their race, sex, creed, color, age, or disability. It may take the form of discrimination, unwelcome or critical comments or action. Harassment includes, but not limited to, the following: verbal conduct: derogatory jokes or comments, slurs; visual contact: derogatory posters, cartoons, drawings, or gestures; physical contact: such as assault, unwanted touching, blocking normal movements, or interfering with work, study or play; and retaliations for having reported or threatened to report such harassment. Such behavior will not be tolerated and if persistent harassment is proven, the offender will be dismissed when this is appropriate.

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Saints Cosmas & Damian’s Pastor and Religious Education Leader are, by the Pennsylvania Revised Code and Diocesan Policy on Child Protection, required to report suspected or actual child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. All other staff members, 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 (Act 34) and the Department of Human Services (Act 151). All staff, paid and volunteer, participates in an in-service training on child protection, identification of child abuse and reporting procedures. Creating a safe environment for children is a requirement of the Gospel since Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” (Matthew 19: 14)

CODE OF CONDUCT

To share in the ministry of Christ is a great privilege as well as a tremendous responsibility. As is evident in the Gospel, Jesus had a deep, abiding respect for each human being and never did anything that harmed or misled people in their personal or spiritual life. The public needs to know that the Church is committed to protecting the children/youth entrusted to its care and to ensuring that those offering services are in right relationship with the children/youth receiving services. There is a challenge in the Scriptures to “live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:1-3).

In this spirit, Personnel

- are expected to represent the Church in a faithful, authentic and loving way, supporting the teachings, disciplines and tradition of the Catholic Church;
- will exhibit the highest Catholic ethical standards and personal integrity in their day-to-day work and personal lives;
- will conduct themselves in a professional manner in both church and work environments, avoiding any flagrant or public misconduct;
- will hold one another accountable to conduct and standards appropriate to their respective roles;
- will foster the dignity of each person and be committed to the best interests of others;
- will respect the integrity of all individuals and protect the confidentiality of all information to which they have access;
- will not take advantage of any relationship with a child/youth for their own benefit;
- will not physically, sexually or emotionally abuse anyone;
- will not neglect a child who is in their care.

SAFETY PROCEDURES FOR FIRES

There are safety procedures posted in each room for fire emergencies. Catechists will instruct the students in these procedures the first week of class. In case of a fire, 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 Religious Education Leader before leaving with their child to avoid unnecessary search and rescue operations.

SICKNESS AND INJURY

Sickness: Should a child become ill while in class, parent(s) will be contacted according to the information provided on the student registration/information 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, in writing, to the Religious Education Leader.

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 parent(s) 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 parent(s). A first aid kit is available in the Religious Education Office and in each catechist's classroom.

FIELD TRIPS

If a field trip is planned, parents will be notified at least two weeks prior to the event. All activities or field trips will have a catechetical purpose. Each scheduled "off campus" field trip requires a permission slip signed by the parent and a completed confidential/release form. If such a permission form is not in the possession of the Religious Education Leader, the child will not be able to participate in the scheduled event. This applies to retreats, service projects, and entertainment activities, etc.

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

It is a policy within our parish that all parents/guardians who have a child preparing to receive any of the sacraments be directly involved in their preparation and attend all meetings discussing the sacrament(s). These meetings are important, and your presence will affect your child's readiness for the sacrament. The preparation involves a parent meeting, a parent/child retreat day, catechesis at home, along with regular classroom instruction.

It is also expected of you to attend weekly Sunday Mass so that your child can witness you receiving Communion. Your child also needs to see you and your family celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation on a regular basis. For your child to enter the sacramental program for the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist they must have completed the previous year.

Children are prepared for the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the second grade and the Sacrament of First Eucharist in the third grade. Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation takes place in the 9th grade. Preparation for Confirmation involves two monthly meetings with the youth, one retreat, a parent meeting as well as thirty hours of service to the parish and/or community. Completion of the 6th-8th grade religion courses are a requirement for preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation. Confirmation is celebrated during the Easter Season on a date set by the Bishop.