



# **NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**

**2019-2020  
Faith Formation Program**

## **PARENT HANDBOOK**

**(Please keep this handbook in a convenient location, as it will  
provide useful information throughout the school year.)**

**This Parent handbook contains policies instituted to help coordinate and facilitate the religious education program at Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church. They were drafted by the Director of Faith Formation, Deacon Michael A. Illerbrun and approved by the Pastor, Fr. Nathan Libaire. These policies are very important to our program, as the success of our Catechists, both teacher and aide are dependent on how well these policies are understood and followed, especially by the parents. Please take time to review them. If you have any questions or need clarification please contact us at 340-0421.**

**Deacon Michael A. Illerbrun  
Director, Faith Formation**

**PLEASE NOTE THAT REGISTERING YOUR CHILD IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION DOES NOT REGISTER YOUR FAMILY WITH THE PARISH. CONVERSELY, REGISTERING YOUR FAMILY WITH THE PARISH DOES NOT REGISTER YOUR CHILDREN IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.**

### **NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY CATECHISM PROGRAM**

Nativity Parish Catechism Program includes a Pre-K 4 through 7<sup>th</sup> grade as well as a first and second year Confirmation program. Our curriculum stresses learning about our loving God where your child feels he/she is loved and respected by his/her peers and teachers. All of our texts are approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and are in accordance with the teachings of our Church post Vatican II. At Nativity we attempt to teach your children “as Jesus would have taught them.”

#### Philosophy

Nativity Catholic Parish is dedicated to assisting parents, as the first teachers of their children, with passing on the Catholic faith, morals and values to the children in our catechism program. Our parish is a collection of the many family churches within our parish. Together we strive to emphasize our religious values and truths so that they may be integrated into our daily lives. We strive to provide quality faith instruction in a Christian environment and help each student reach their full faith potential while participating in academics, liturgy, prayer, sacraments and community service.

#### Admission Information

Nativity BVM Parish admits students of any race, color, economic status, and national or ethnic origin and does not discriminate on the above basis in the administration of its educational policies or admissions policies. There is no registration fee associated with Nativity BVM catechism program. Normal registration is open from mid-April until the 1<sup>st</sup> of September. A late fee of \$50 per

child is assessed if registration occurs after 1 September. Normal registration closes on 30 September. Admission after that date will be on a case by case basis. Requirements for admission include: Completed registration application; Birth Certificate (Original) and Baptismal Certificate (If applicable)

### Catechism Hours

Pre-K4 through 1<sup>st</sup> year confirmation classes meet on Sunday from 10:45 – 12:15 and Wednesday from 6 – 7:30 pm. 2<sup>nd</sup> year confirmation meets from 10:45 am – 1:30 pm on SUNDAYS only.

### Faith Formation Office Hours

The Faith Formation Office is normally open from 8 am to 3 pm from Monday through Friday throughout the school year as well as from 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm on Wednesday nights and 10 am to 12:30 pm on Sundays. Contact Francesca at 340-0421 for after-hours appointments. The office is normally open during the summer from 7 – 4 weekdays.

### Ministers and Volunteers

All ministers and volunteers for the faith formation program must attend the Abuse Awareness Training for Adults (VIRTUS) offered through the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, either by attending in person or by completing training online. This training includes a criminal background check. Ministers and volunteers serve at the discretion of the director and/or Pastor.

### Parent's Role

We at Nativity BVM consider it a privilege to work with parents in the faith life of their children. We understand and encourage you as parents to be the primary educators of your children. It is also your right and duty to be the primary role models for the development of your child's faith life. Your choice of Nativity BVM involves a commitment on your part and a responsibility on our part to help your child recognize God as the greatest good in their life.

A good example is the best thing you can provide for your child. Your relationship with God, your family and the Church community will affect the way your child relates to God and others in their life. The lessons we teach them in class will not take root unless they are nurtured and supported at home. Please take the time to discuss your faith life with your children and help them by providing them a good example to follow.

We trust that you will be loyal to the commitment between you and Nativity BVM catechism program. We ask that you support our efforts to educate your children in their faith life. On our part, we pledge to teach them about the Catholic faith and

provide them a good example during their class time and hopefully wherever they may encounter us on the street. Division of authority between home and class will only teach them disrespect. Mutual respect between parents and catechists will model good mature behavior and relationships.

### Reporting Child Abuse

Nativity BVM Parish abides by the child abuse laws of the state of New Mexico (Abuse and Neglect Act: 32A-4-2). This law mandates that all cases of suspected abuse and/or neglect must be reported to Child Protective Service. In the event that we must call the Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) and local law enforcement, the pastor will be immediately notified. Parents will also be informed per New Mexico law.

If an employee or volunteer of the Nativity Catechism Program is suspected or reported as being responsible for the physical injury, abuse or neglect of a student the Director will report the situation to CYFD and the police, as required by law, and will immediately notify the pastor.

### Attendance

A student's absence from class interferes with his/her faith formation. If your child is going to be absent from class, we ask that you call Francesca at 340-0421 to inform her of the absence. Our schedule is developed in parallel with the APS schedule. We will not be conducting class any time APS has vacation days planned. Therefore we encourage parents to schedule trips or family outings during these times to eliminate the need to interrupt your child's faith formation. If your child is going to miss class, we encourage you to make up the class so that your child does not fall behind the rest of the class. The easiest way to make up a missed class is to attend class with the other session. If that is not possible, we encourage the parents to make up the class with their child. We will provide the appropriate lesson for you to teach. Sacramental preparation years have specific attendance requirements that will be covered in separate parent handbooks for the specific sacrament.

### Drop Off and Pick Up

Our parking lots are very dangerous places. Therefore we ask that parents escort their children through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade to and from their classrooms. If you are running late, please don't drop your young children off at the door. Once they reach 4<sup>th</sup> grade you are still welcome to walk your children to class as long as you deem necessary. Please try to have your kids to their classroom at least five minutes prior to the start of class.

## Curriculum

The curriculum that the catechists use is approved by the Director of Faith Formation and the pastor. In selecting appropriate curriculum, we must follow the guidelines from our Archbishop. Standards for curriculum are set by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops with recommendations for approved texts that we must follow. We want to reassure all parents who have children in our Faith Formation program that we are very concerned they are taught the essentials of our Catholic faith and our treasured Traditions as well as the sacramental and spiritual aspects of our faith.

## Classroom Behavior/Dismissal Policy:

Nativity BVM classes maintain an atmosphere that is safe and conducive to learning for all students. Good behavior is a critical requirement for our program. As a faith formation program, children are expected to be respectful to their catechist, their fellow students and the facility. Our children come to us from across the city and from all different economic, educational and faith levels. Everyone is expected to be treated fairly and with respect, as we are all here to learn more about our faith and our love for God and our neighbor. Regardless of how a child comes to us, we will treat them with the respect of a child of God. Any verbal or written threats will be dealt with appropriately. Also, all of our catechists have chosen this ministry to serve God and our community. They are offering their time and talent to our children. They should not have to deal with behavior problems. *Improper behavior will not be tolerated.* However, if the problem occurs, the following consequences will occur.

- 1) The first incident will be addressed by the catechist in the classroom.
- 2) If the disruptive behavior continues, the child will be sent to the office to speak with Deacon Michael and he will speak to the parents.
- 3) If the disruption occurs a third time, the child will be asked to leave the program.

## Promotion Policy

The faith formation program at Nativity parish is part of a larger faith formation program. As such, we understand that it is a *lifelong* process. All children will be advanced to the next class each fall unless they or their parents request that they be retained in their current class. See the appropriate sacramental parent handbook for any additional requirements for sacraments.

### Student Boundaries Policy

Students may not be released from catechism for any reason unless the parent/guardian is informed and the parent/guardian approves of the release. Only persons who have legal custody or who are authorized by the parent/guardian of the student may take students from catechism at the end of the session or when a child is sick. Please notify Francesca at 340-0421 of any intentions to remove your child during class. Students are to report to the office prior to leaving the school building. Students are not allowed outside of the school building without supervision during class time without parental permission. This is a liability issue with our insurance coverage and must be complied with.

### Emergency Drills

We are required to perform at least one fire drill per school year. We will conduct fire drills on an as needed basis during the school year. There will be no prior notification to allow for more realistic response.

### Evacuation

In the event of an emergency or disaster evacuation, the building will be evacuated and students will be moved to the Nativity Parish Hall. If the parish hall is not available, we will move the children to the church building. Parents will be notified of the emergency and pick up instructions via e-mail or through the telephone APP. There will also be a representative at the Pastoral Center who can direct parents as they arrive.

### Missing Children

If a child is missing, the catechist will immediately notify Deacon Michael. A search of the school building will immediately take place. Francesca will also check with the parents to see if another relative may have picked the child up without our knowledge. If the child is not located, the Bernalillo County Sheriff's Office will be notified.

### Medications

We may not administer medications of any kind to any student without appropriate consent forms from the parent/guardian. Such requests must include: the times when the medicine may be administered; instructions as to proper dosage (If appropriate); and the original signature of the child's parent(s). Epi-pens and/or inhalers may be retained by the student with a written request from the parent. Such requests must include the following: a statement that there would be a risk to the student if the student were not able to personally carry the medication and that the student has been instructed on the indications for use of the medication, on the administration of the medicine, on the possible side effects, on the student's

responsibility not to share the medication with anyone and the student's responsibility to notify the catechist of the use immediately after such use. The Faith Formation secretary will otherwise secure the child's Epi-pen and/or inhaler in her office in the event the child needs it during class time. Any time an Epi-pen is administered during class time, emergency medical personnel will be called as well as the parents. The parent(s) must also provide an original signature.

### Food Allergies

Parents - If your child has specific allergies to food or various environmental aspects, please notify Francesca and work with us to develop a plan to accommodate your child's needs, to include written instructions if appropriate. Please provide us with an Epi-pen (if prescribed) for use in the event of an allergic reaction. Please ensure your child understands how to avoid exposure and what they should do if exposed. Finally, please keep your emergency contact information updated.

Nativity – We will ensure the catechists and the children in the class are aware of and understand the allergies your child has as well as how to recognize symptoms and what to do in the case of exposure. We will work to ensure catechists and children avoid bringing the appropriate allergens into the classroom. We will store any provided Epi-pens in the Faith Formation office unless the child needs to keep the Epi-pen with him/her. In the event of an allergic emergency, we will immediately contact emergency medical personnel and contact parents/guardians.

### Accidents or Illness

When a child becomes ill or is involved in an accident, we will immediately contact the parents/guardians or the emergency contacts to notify them of their child's condition. Minor cuts and bruises will be handled in the Faith Formation office. In the event of serious injury or illness the Director will contact emergency medical personnel and notify parents/guardians.

### Release of Student Information

Nativity BVM Catechism Program will not publish or use a student's name, picture, voice or likeness in any form of publication or media unless a signed photo/publicity release is obtained from the student's parents or legal guardians. The signed release will be kept on file in the child's file throughout the year.

### Student Harassment

Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary opposes and prohibits all forms of harassment based on race, color, age, religion, sex, marital or veteran status, sexual orientation, national origin, ancestry or disability, whether verbal, physical, visual or environmental. Any student who violates this policy will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal from the Nativity BVM catechism program.

### Weather Emergencies

Any time school is cancelled by the Albuquerque Public Schools, our catechism classes will automatically be cancelled. Additionally, anytime inclement weather would preclude the safe transport of our children or catechists, classes will be canceled. Because of the limited means of communication between our staff and the parents, the following methods of notification will be utilized. The director will send a mass e-mail to all parents who have provided an e-mail address. Additionally, we will push a cancellation message to everyone who has downloaded our parish APP to their smartphone. We will also post the cancellation on the parish webpage at [www.n-bvm.org](http://www.n-bvm.org) . Finally, we will institute a phone message to any parents not in one of the above groups as time allows, notifying as many as possible of the cancellation. At all times the safety of your children is paramount. If you feel it is too dangerous to transport your children to class, by all means, keep them home. We can always make up the classwork.

### Special Activities

If a Holy Day of Obligation falls on a day when religious education classes are scheduled, attendance at Mass during class time will count for the class time for that day. Many of the teachers will choose to take their entire class to Mass. Please take this opportunity to attend Mass with your children. There may be times when special activities or parties are planned for our students. You will be notified of these activities well in advance. Many of our Wednesday catechists will take their classes to the Ash Wednesday service on 26 February 2020.

### Dress Code

Please ensure your children are modestly dressed and avoid “fad” styles when attending religious education classes. Please ensure your children do not wear halter tops, strapless tops or inappropriate tank tops. This includes, but is not limited to, inappropriate messages or designs on clothing. T-shirts will be provided as necessary for any inappropriately dressed student to use during class. If dress, shorts or skirt lengths for our females is inappropriate or inappropriate crotch or shorts/inseam lengths for males is an issue, parents will be called to bring appropriate attire for the student to change into prior to attending class. Dress code for ceremonies will be provided in a separate update letter.

### Electronic Device Policy

Many children have their own cell phone, iPads, computers, portable games etc.. The use of these devices during class is not allowed. This kind of distraction is not conducive to learning. Please do not allow your child to bring any of these items to class. Cell phones that are brought to class will be turned off during class. Any electronic devices used during class (including talking, text, games, social media, MP3s or web surfing) will be confiscated and returned after class. If a child needs



to use a phone, he/she must obtain the permission of their catechist. The office phone is always available for their use.

### Supply Requirements

Books and supplies are required for each class. The catechist will provide the book, or appropriate section of the book. Supplies include pen or pencil, paper or notebook and any other supplies requested by your catechist for the particular class. If the student forgets any of his/her supplies, have them notify the Catechist. We will attempt to provide appropriate replacements as necessary. Please remember to bring any required materials each week.

### Newsletters

We provide a newsletter each week to give you the latest information about the faith formation program. Critical information for the program and general information of importance to parents is often included in the Newsletter. The primary way for us to provide you the newsletter is via e-mail. We also post it on the parish website and provide paper copies to those without computers. Please provide us your e-mail address or ask your child for the paper copy each week.

### Church Bulletin

We also provide critical information such as events, times and dates in the Parish Bulletin each week. Please keep an eye out for this information as you attend Mass.

### Parish Website

We put as much information as possible regarding the faith formation program on the parish website. We incorporate registration materials and any other critical information on the website. Please check the parish website at [www.n-bvm.org](http://www.n-bvm.org) for more information and ongoing updates.

### Parish Telephone App

We have a smart phone App for I-Phones and Androids. This App provides up to date information about the faith formation program. Please download the APP to your smartphone so we can begin to use it to communicate with you.

**IF AT ANY TIME YOU HAVE QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUR CHILD, THEIR CLASS OR THE PROGRAM IN GENERAL PLEASE CALL FRANCESCA AT 340-0421. DEACON MICHAEL IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE TO DISCUSS ANY ISSUES OF FAITH WITH YOU. HE CAN BE REACHED AT THE SAME NUMBER.**