



RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

2023-2024 HANDBOOK

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Welcome

Welcome! Thank you for enrolling your child in St. Mary's Cathedral Religious Education Program. It is a great blessing and privilege to be a part of your child's faith formation and preparation for reception of the sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, Confirmation, and the Eucharist! The following procedures have been designed to offer convenience for the parents and the safety of our children.

Calendar, Class Times and Location

The 2023-2024 Religious Education year begins September 13, 2023 and ends April 10, 2024. A calendar will be provided with dates. Please take note of student masses, parent meetings and retreats.

Classes for grades **Kindergarten through 6th** grade are held at St. Mary's Cathedral Parish Hall from 6:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. Classes for **7th through 12th grade** are held at Grand Island Central Catholic High School from 6:15 p.m. – 7:15 p.m. 1200 N. Ruby Ave, Grand Island, NE.

Arrival and Departure

For the safety of all, parents are asked to park in a parking stall when dropping off and picking up children. Children may arrive **10 minutes prior** to the start of class. Parents of children in grades Kindergarten through 3rd grade are asked to walk their children to their class and pick them up from class. If the teacher is not in the classroom, please wait with your child. *Please make sure your child is able to enter the building safely before driving away!*

Please arrive to pick up your child from their classroom 5 minutes prior to the end of class. Note: Teachers are instructed not to dismiss students early. We ask parents to pick up their children within five minutes of the end of class. *Please advise your children not to leave the building if you are not there to pick them up!*

At Grand Island Central Catholic, students will use the main entrance. Students who drive may park in the parking stalls in front of the school.

Inclement Weather

Classes may be cancelled due to inclement weather. We will automatically cancel classes if Grand Island Public Schools cancels school or dismisses early due to inclement weather. We will inform parents and teachers using the Remind App, Facebook and local news stations.

Attendance

Children enrolled in Religious Education classes are expected to attend weekly. Having regular attendance in Religious Education classes is an important part to your child's religious formation. Absences can have an adverse effect on your child's spiritual growth.

Please notify the Religious Education Office when your child will be absent. Make-up arrangements may be possible. Please do not send your child to class if they are ill. You may notify us through the Remind App.

For Sacramental Prep Students, sacraments may be postponed to the following year for frequent or excessive absences. We highly encourage your commitment to 100% attendance during the program year. If your child misses more than 3 times, they will need to make up the class. This includes attendance at retreats by both parents and students. Postponement of sacraments is determined at the sole discretion of the Director of Religious Education.

Parent-Child Retreats

Attendance at Family Retreats is required for parents and students who wish to receive the sacraments of First Reconciliation, First Holy Communion and Confirmation. These retreats are meant to provide spiritual, catechetical, and personal formation for you as parents and for your children as they prepare for the sacraments. At least one parent must be in attendance. Students and parents must complete the entire retreat. Failure to attend retreats may prevent your child from receiving the sacraments.

We understand that not all parents may be able to attend retreats due to work or other conflicts. There are two options available.

- **Alternate Adult.** A trusted adult, such as a grandparent or aunt/uncle, may attend with your child in your place.
- **Makeup Sessions.** The parent portion may be made up by attending three 2-hour makeup sessions as scheduled by the program director. The student portion may be made up by completing an at-home activity packet. Parents will be responsible for helping their children complete the packet.

We highly encourage parents to make these retreats a priority.

Communication

Please be sure to keep your contact information up to date with the Religious Education Office, especially phone numbers! Teachers need to be able to contact you in the event of an illness or emergency. We use the Remind App as our primary form of communication for relaying information. Signing up for the Remind app is required. If you need another method of communication, please speak with Sr. Jesusmaikelyn. An instruction sheet will be provided with the calendar.

Emergencies

In case of illness or injury, parents will be contacted by phone. Parents must arrange for the child's transportation home. If the parent cannot be reached, emergency phone numbers will be called. Children are not allowed to walk home if sick or injured. In the event of an emergency that requires immediate medical attention, the parents or emergency contact will be notified, and the child will be transported by ambulance, if necessary, to the hospital at the parent's expense.

Student Expectations and Discipline

It is the priority of the teachers to use class time as instructional time and to create a welcoming environment for all. Teachers, parents, and students are to respect one another and themselves while participating in the Religious Education Program. We ask that you as a parent emphasize the

importance of using this short time to learn about our Faith, and we hope that with your support, discipline problems will be nonexistent.

Individual classrooms will have a set of guidelines as set forth by the teacher. Students are expected to learn them and abide by them. Teachers may use verbal warnings or in-class consequences (such as moving seats) to address behavior. If a student is disorderly to the point of disrupting the class, the student may be removed from the classroom. If behavior problems are persistent, a conference between the Director, teacher, parents, and student may be held.

Cell Phone & Toys

It is recommended that students leave cell phones and toys at home during religious education class. If a student brings a cell phone or toys, they must be turned off. They will be set aside by the teacher for the duration of the class and returned after class. St. Mary's Cathedral is not responsible for lost, stolen or broken cell phones, electronics, or other personal items.

Restroom Policy

We encourage you to have your child visit the restroom prior to the start of class. It is difficult to take children to the restroom during class due to the number of students. Restrooms are located on the west end of the building.

Parental Responsibility

Parents are the first educators in their children's faith. Home is where children learn to pray, practice their faith, and what it means to be Catholic. The religious education program is designed to assist parents in fulfilling this responsibility and should not be considered a replacement for the faith formation which should take place daily within the home.

We offer these suggestions for preparing your child for the Sacraments and life as a Catholic:

- Attend weekly Mass on Saturday evening or Sunday morning.
- Speak with your child about God and pray with them daily.
- Support the teachings of the Catholic faith.
- Teach your child by word and example to have love and concern for the needs of others.
- Take your child to Church to visit Jesus in the most Blessed Sacrament.
- Participate in the religious education and sacramental preparation of your child.
- Assist your child in learning required prayers.
- Attend parent meetings.

Safe Environment Training

The Roman Catholic Church and the Diocese of Grand Island have strict rules regarding teachers, volunteers, and safety protocols. All parish staff and volunteers who work with youth are required to submit to a background check and complete diocesan training focused on creating and maintaining a safe environment for all children. Detailed information may be found on the Diocese of Grand Island website.

The Diocese of Grand Island requires that we provide Safe Environment Training to parents and children each year. Parents will be educated about safe environments during the first parent meeting of the year. Children will be educated about safe environments within the first few weeks

of class. You may choose to not allow your child to participate in this training by indicating this on your registration form.

If issues arise with a child, volunteer, or staff member, please inform the Director of Religious Education and/or the Pastor immediately. Safety and proper reporting of all issues are of the upmost importance, and we appreciate your cooperation as we strive to maintain an environment that is safe, conducive to prayer and learning about our faith.

Curriculum

For the 2023-2024 school year, the curriculum used will be:

Kindergarten – Stories of God’s Love from RCL Benziger

Reconciliation/First Communion – Signs of Grace from Augustine Institute

1st, 3rd - 6th Grades – Word of Life from Augustine Institute

7th Grade – Be My Disciple from RCL Benziger

8th Grade – Blest Are We from RCL Benziger

9th Grade – Following Jesus from Loyola Press

10th, 11th and 12th Grade – Chosen from Ascension Press

Teachers may also introduce other materials which support your child’s education and learning experience such as movies, music and other resources.

Family Participation

Students may bring home parent pages that provide a summary of what the child learned in class. These offer a variety of ways to live the faith in daily life. Parents are encouraged to review the lesson with their child and implement the suggestions. Some curriculum offers videos and additional activities for use at home. These offer a great opportunity to engage with your child and to continue the faith conversation at home.

Word of Life, Decision Point and Chosen offer online portals for both parents and students. Parents may request access to the portal from the Religious Education office.

Prayers to be Learned

Students are expected to learn prayers throughout the years by grade. Your role as parents is to teach these prayers to your children and incorporate them into your daily prayer life as a family. We will assist you by reviewing and reciting the prayers in class.

Students will be asked to recite these prayers to a teacher to show they know the prayer. Prayers may be recited in English or Spanish. We encourage you to use the language you use when praying as a family. This way the prayers are more meaningful and familiar to the child.

Here is a list of prayers by grade.

Kindergarten

Sign of the Cross
Glory Be

1st Grade

All of the above
Hail Mary
Our Father

2nd and 3rd Grade

All of the above
Act of Contrition
Understanding of Genuflection
Prayer Before Meals

4th, 5th, 6th Grade

All of the above
Apostles Creed
Hail Holy Queen
Prayer After Meals

7th Grade

All of the above
Rosary
Mysteries of the Rosary

8th Grade and Older

All of the above
Acts of Faith, Hope & Love
Prayer to the Holy Spirit

*Note – those receiving Confirmation MUST know the Glory Be, Hail Mary, and Our Father, at minimum, in order to receive the sacrament.

Registration

Registration for the 2023-2024 Religious Education year begins in April and **ends September 7th**.

No registrations will be accepted after this date. A separate registration form is required for each child and children must be registered each year. Birth certificate, baptism certificate and first communion certificate must be provided at the time of registration unless previously provided.

Registration and payment of fees is done solely through the Religious Education Office, during their normal business hours. Registrations will be taken during religious education classes during the month of April in the parish hall basement. Also, on select Sundays leading up to the beginning of the Religious Education school year, registration will be available after mass. The Religious Education Office Hours are Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 2pm – 7pm. Please check the bulletin for updates.

Registration Fees

Registration fees help cover the cost of books, supplies, retreats and administrative fees. Additional fees may be required for special events or other activities for a class or sacrament.

The fee for Religious Education is \$40.00 per child, with a maximum of \$100.00 per family.

A financial concern should not prevent you from registering your child in our program. If you cannot afford the fee, please contact Sr. Jesusmaikelyn to discuss options.

Certificates

When providing copies of baptism, first communion or confirmation certificates from parishes outside the Grand Island area, please make sure to include the full name of the parish along with the complete mailing address and phone number. **This is especially important for parishes outside**

the United States. St. Mary's is required to send documentation to these parishes when a sacrament is completed, and it is often difficult to find the correct information. Also – please check the certificate to make sure all dates and names can be read. Thank you for your help with this!

First Communion in Another Parish or Outside of the United States

If you are planning to have your child complete their first communion in another parish or outside of the United States, please let us know. You will be required to provide a certified letter from us. We will need time to prepare this. Your child must complete all of our requirements in order to receive a certified letter from St. Mary's Cathedral.

Volunteers

Your child's catechist is a volunteer, and we are blessed to have a team that cares deeply about our parish children. Parents are highly encouraged to volunteer to assist in your child's classroom. Please keep all our volunteers and catechists in your prayers and pray that the Holy Spirit may guide their words and actions. If you have any concerns about a catechist do not hesitate to speak with Sr. Jesusmaikelyn.

Sacraments

The Catholic Church is a sacramental church, meaning the church celebrates the sacraments instituted by Jesus Christ. Sacraments are visible signs of Christ's presence. It is through the sacraments that we grow closer to Christ and receive grace.

BAPTISM

Baptism is the first sacrament of initiation and is required to receive all other sacraments. If your child has been baptized in the Catholic tradition, please provide a copy of their baptism certificate.

IF YOUR CHILD IS BAPTIZED IN ANOTHER CHRISTIAN TRADITION:

Baptism is the only sacrament that all Christian denominations share. The Catholic Church recognizes baptisms performed by other Christian traditions (for example, Lutheran) as valid. A person can only be baptized once; therefore, your child will not be re-baptized. Please provide a copy of the baptism certificate.

IF YOUR CHILD IS NOT BAPTIZED:

For those children who have not been baptized, and are **age 7 or below**, parents should arrange for baptism and attend pre-baptism classes through the parish office.

For those children who have not been baptized and are beyond the age of discretion as identified by the Church (**older than age 7**), they will be required to complete a baptism class before receiving baptism.

It is preferred that baptism be completed prior to starting religious education.

FIRST RECONCILIATION AND FIRST EUCHARIST

The sacraments of Reconciliation (Confession) and Eucharist (Communion) are traditionally received in 2nd Grade. For those children who did not receive these sacraments at the customary age, the Religious Education Program offers preparatory classes by grade level. These classes will be required for those seeking the sacraments.

We highly encourage your commitment to 100% attendance during the program year. Sacraments may be postponed to the following year for frequent or excessive absences. If your child misses more than 3 times, they will need to make up the class. This includes attendance at retreats by both parents and students. Postponement of sacraments is determined at the sole discretion of the Director of Religious Education.

Requirements

Children preparing for First Reconciliation and First Communion are required to:

- Be baptized.
- Participate regularly in Sunday Mass with their families.
- Participate regularly in preparation classes and attend all retreats.
- Have a satisfactory attendance record.
- Have an appreciation and understanding of the sacrament appropriate for the age level and ability.
- Be able to answer the questions and complete the tasks listed on the **I am ready for First Reconciliation** and **I am ready for First Communion** preparation checklists.

Parents of children preparing for First Reconciliation and First Communion are required to:

- Be registered in the parish.
- Know and support the teaching of the church.
- Be personally involved in your child's preparation by attending parent meetings and retreats.
- Pray at home with your child, supporting their relationship with God through prayer.
- Assist children in learning the requirements listed on the **I am Ready for First Reconciliation** and **I am ready for First Communion** preparation checklists.

Children will receive their First Reconciliation after completion of the reconciliation portion of preparation classes and attendance at the Family Reconciliation retreat. Reconciliation will be offered during class on January 17th. If your child is not able to complete their reconciliation at that time, parents should make arrangements with a priest and inform the religious education director.

First Communion will occur on April 14th at 7:00am or 10:30 am (English) and 8:30am or 12:30 pm (Spanish). Children must complete the communion portion of preparation classes and attend the Family Communion retreat. Practice for First Communion will be held during the retreat. Parents

are required to attend retreats with their children. See Parent-Child Retreats on page 3 for more information.

Dress Code

First communion is a special time in a child's life. They are receiving Jesus in the Eucharist for the first time. As such, we ask that children dress in a special way. Clothing must be respectful and modest. **At Mass, please DO NOT send items with your child, such as purses, bibles or rosaries.**

Girls are asked to wear all white dresses with white shoes. Veil optional. No gloves during the mass, however, can be worn for picture.

- Dresses or skirts should not be any shorter than 1" above the knee.
- Spaghetti straps, sleeveless or strapless dresses MUST be covered by a sweater, scarf or jacket.
- No plunging neck lines or overly tight clothing. All undergarments must be covered.
- No flip-flops, tennis shoes or spiked-heel shoes.
- Modest jewelry only.

Boys must wear dress pants or khakis with a white button-up shirt. Ties are optional but encouraged.

- Pants should fit well and not sag. All undergarments must be covered, and shirts tucked in.
- No jeans, shorts, cargo pants or athletic apparel.
- No t-shirts. No pictures or words on clothing.
- Jackets are optional.
- No flip-flops or tennis shoes.
- No piercings.

On the day of First Communion, parents are asked to have their children at the church at least 20 minutes prior to the beginning of mass. Parents should check in their children with the designated person, so we know they are present, then escort them to their seat. Parents will receive a copy of the First Communion certificate at check in. There will be an area reserved for those receiving First Communion toward the altar.

Photos

Photos are not permitted during mass. Parents should not come up to the altar during mass to try to take pictures. We will attempt to get pictures of your child as they receive their First Communion. Please understand we rely on volunteers to take pictures and it is difficult to guarantee pictures for every child. There will be a group picture after the end of the mass. PLEASE GIVE THE PHOTOGRAPHER SPACE TO GET THE PICTURE!!! Do not try to take pictures until the photographer is done! Individual pictures may be taken after mass. Photos will be posted on Facebook within 2 weeks of First Communion.

CONFIRMATION

The sacrament of Confirmation is traditionally received in 10th, 11th or 12th Grade. For youth who did not complete the sacraments of Baptism or First Communion at the customary age, please refer to those sections for requirements.

We highly encourage your commitment to 100% attendance during the program year. Sacraments may be postponed to the following year for frequent or excessive absences. If your child misses more than 3 times, they will need to make up the class. This includes attendance at retreats by both parents and students. Postponement of sacraments is determined at the sole discretion of the Director of Religious Education.

Requirements

Youth preparing for Confirmation are required to:

- Be baptized and have received 1st Reconciliation and 1st Communion.
- Participate regularly in Sunday Mass with their families.
- Participate regularly in preparation classes and attend all retreats.
- Have a satisfactory attendance record.
- Have an appreciation and understanding of the sacrament appropriate for the age level and ability.
- Complete and turn in all materials in the confirmation packet provided by the program prior to the last day of class.
- Complete 10 hours of service to the parish and/or community.
- Complete 15 hours toward their individual spiritual growth, including one retreat, and work closely with their sponsor.

Parents of youth preparing for Confirmation are required to:

- Be registered in the parish.
- Participate weekly in Sunday Mass.
- Know and support the teachings of the Church.
- Be personally involved in the preparation through attendance at parent meetings and retreats.
- Guide the candidate in the selection of a sponsor.
- Oversee the candidate's fulfillment of program requirements.
- Complete documentation as required. Packets must be turned in before the last day of class.
 - Saint Name
 - Sponsor Form
 - Bishop Letter
 - Service and Spiritual Hours

Community Service and Spiritual Development Hours

Each youth will be required to volunteer in the parish or the community for at least 10 hours. The purpose of these hours is to give youth the opportunity to grow as a disciple of Christ. Jesus tells us time and time again how important it is to serve others as a part of leading a Christian life. A genuine commitment to others is ultimately a commitment to Christ.

Youth will also be required to complete 15 hours toward their spiritual development, including at least one retreat. The purpose of spiritual development is to grow deeper in relationship with Christ. There are many ways that youth may complete these hours. Approved retreats are Totus Tuus, Higher Ground and Steubenville. Other retreats offered in the area will be considered. *Attendance at Totus Tuus, Higher Ground and Steubenville may be completed the summer before their confirmation year.* Approved activities include attendance of rosaries, adoration or holy hour, participation in St. Mary's Youth Group, and other approved activities. Programs offered at other parishes in the area are accepted.

For both community service and spiritual growth hours, youth must provide documentation of their attendance. Each youth will be given a form to document their time. They will need to ask the leader of the group or activity to sign the form saying they attended. Parent signatures will not be accepted.

Sponsors

Each candidate for Confirmation must have a sponsor. The role of the sponsor is to help the candidate throughout their life to fulfill their baptismal promises. The sponsor should be someone whose positive influence on the candidate is permanent and strong. Being a sponsor is not just an honorary title, it is a responsibility to set a good Catholic example. In conformity with the Code of Canon Law, parents may not be sponsors.

Sponsor Requirements

- Sponsors must be at least 16 years old.
- Sponsors must be Catholics who have been confirmed, received Eucharist and practice the Faith. "Practicing" means, in the case of an adult, registered in a parish, frequenting the Sacraments, regularly attending Mass and in a valid marriage (if applicable).
- Encourage a sharing of faith between sponsor and candidate.
- Sponsors must submit a completed Confirmation Sponsor Recommendation Form from the pastor of their present parish.

The form is included in the Confirmation Packet.

Confirmation Retreat

All confirmation students who will be receiving the sacrament of confirmation on June 9th will be required to attend the confirmation retreat. The confirmation retreat will be June 8th. Practice for Confirmation will happen during the retreat.

Dress Code

Youth receiving the sacrament of Confirmation will become fully initiated in the Catholic Church and become an adult in the Church. As such, we ask that youth dress in a special way. Clothing must be respectful and modest.

Girls must wear a dress or skirt.

- Dresses or skirts should not be any shorter than 1" above the knee.
- Spaghetti straps, sleeveless or strapless dresses MUST be covered by a sweater, scarf or jacket.
- No plunging neck lines or overly tight clothing. All undergarments must be covered.
- No flip-flops, tennis shoes or spiked-heel shoes.
- Modest jewelry only.

Boys must wear dress pants or khakis with a button-up shirt. Ties are optional but encouraged.

- Pants should fit well and not sag. All undergarments must be covered, and shirts tucked in.
- No jeans, shorts, cargo pants or athletic apparel.
- No t-shirts. No pictures or words on clothing.
- Jackets are optional.
- No flip-flops or tennis shoes.
- No piercings

On the day of Confirmation, youth and their sponsors should arrive at the church at least 40 minutes prior to the beginning of mass. Youth and their sponsors should go to the Parish Hall. The Bishop will be talking with all those receiving Confirmation prior to going to the church. Youth should be sure to check in with the designated person so we know they are present. There will be an area reserved for those receiving Confirmation and their sponsors.

Photos

Photos are not permitted during mass. Parents should not come up to the altar during mass to try to take pictures. There will be a group picture after the end of the mass. Individual pictures may be taken after mass as well. Photos will be posted on Facebook.