



*"Teach your children right from wrong, and when they are grown they will still do right."*

Proverbs 22:6

# St. Malachy Parish Religious Education Family Handbook

Faith Formation Office Staff

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Dear Parents,

We thank you for leading your child on his/her faith journey. The St. Malachy Religious Education Program, for children in grades one through six, provides part of your child's faith formation. You, as parents, are the primary teachers of your child in their learning the Catholic faith and living out the Gospel. As explained in the *Catechism*, no. 2252:

*Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children in the faith, prayer, and all the virtues. They have the duty to provide as far as possible for the physical and spiritual needs of their children.*

We thank you and support your efforts in providing for the spiritual needs of your child. The Faith Formation Staff members are here to help you in any way that we can. We have catechists who love God and want to share their faith with your children. The catechists, who are volunteers, are answering God's call to share their gifts and faith. We thank each of them as they prayerfully prepare, present and participate in the lessons of faith they are teaching your children. Please read this Handbook and let us know if you have any questions.

God bless you and yours,

Marian Kneeven  
Faith Formation Director

Dear Parents,

One of the greatest opportunities of evangelization (spreading the Catholic faith) is the teaching of your children. It is a promise you made at your child's baptism: "You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring them up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?"

This promise is made as the sacrament of baptism is the first sacrament of initiation into Christ's church. By teaching the faith, you are first of all explaining the wonderful gift God gave your child at his or her baptism and teaching them to respond to that gift given out of love. Secondly, teaching your child the faith prepares them to be good Christian adults.

Thank you for being part of our Religious Education Ministry here at St. Malachy. I encourage you to teach the faith not only by ensuring your child attends all the classes, but also by your example of being a faith-filled member of the Catholic Church through your regular attendance at Sunday Mass. It is the Eucharist that feeds us and nourishes us for life's journey. Please know of my prayers for you and your family.

God Bless,

Fr. Joe Feltz,  
Pastor, St. Malachy

**St. Malachy Faith Formation Mission Statement:**

We commit ourselves to proclaim the Gospel by bringing people to know and love Jesus through lifelong Catholic Faith Formation.

**Introduction****Faith Formation: A Lifelong Journey Toward Relationship With God**

Faith formation is a lifelong process; Grades 1-6 Religious Education is the beginning, not the end, of a child's faith development.

The St. Malachy Grades 1-6 Religious Education program has two major goals: educating in faith and fostering life-long relationships with God. Parents and catechists work together to meet these goals. Information about the faith, such as learning doctrine, memorizing prayers, or understanding Church teaching, must be connected with formation in the faith. Formation in the faith requires building a relationship with God and the community rather than simply absorbing information. We strive to integrate information and formation in our programs.

Any parish faith formation program for children is meant to supplement, not replace, the faith formation that is ongoing in each family recognized as "the domestic Church":

*The Christian home is the place where the children receive the first proclamation of the faith. For this reason the family is rightly called "the domestic church," a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity (Catechism, no. 1666).*

**Faith Formation: Celebrating the Mass is Essential**

Formal religious instruction is meant to complement participation in the Sunday Mass; like adults, children need to participate in Mass each week. This is true even for younger children, but it is particularly important that children attend Mass each Sunday by the time they are in second grade and preparing to receive their First Eucharist. If they seldom participate in the Mass, children will not understand or be able to live out the faith they are learning about in Religious Education classes.

**Grades 1-6 Religious Education**

Children in grades 1-6 have four options for Religious Education at St. Malachy: our parish school, our academic-year Sunday morning program, our two-week Summer Intensive program, and F.I.R.E. (Family Intergenerational Religious Education).

Our academic-year Sunday morning program runs from September to mid-spring. Currently, each session is from 9:15-11:30 a.m. Our two-week Summer Intensive program meets Monday-Friday from 8:00-11:00 a.m. for two weeks in June. Both of these programs consist of 30 hours of instruction. F.I.R.E. follows an intergenerational model, in which all members of a family grow in their faith by meeting regularly with other families and studying important themes and topics of religious education, both in age-specific groups and as an intergenerational community. Each option meets the requirements for a religious education program in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.

### **Other Religious Education**

If parents/guardians, in consultation with the Director of Faith Formation, determine that regular Grades 1-6 Religious Education is not appropriate for their child, other options will be discussed. **SPRED** (SPecial Religious EDucation) may be an option in the case of a child with particular challenges.

### **Ordinary Sacramental Preparation: Reconciliation and Eucharist**

In this diocese, preparation for the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist normally occurs during a child's second grade year. At St. Malachy, we require that children be in the Religious Education program here or at another Catholic parish or school for a year before they can begin their preparation for the sacraments, so that they receive a sufficient foundation in faith formation before they begin their specific sacramental preparation. This also helps them begin to understand faith formation and the celebration of the sacraments as a lifelong process rather than as a one-year commitment.

Fees for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist preparation cover the books, group photo, and materials for the Eucharistic Retreat.

### **Sacramental Preparation: Other Situations**

We do not require that children entering St. Malachy's Religious Education program in grade 1 or 2 already be baptized, but we encourage parents to have their children baptized as soon as possible. Unbaptized second graders may prepare for the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist with their classmates, but because baptism is the first Sacrament of Initiation, all people, including children, must be baptized before they receive their First Eucharist.

Children entering St. Malachy's Religious Education program in grades 3-6 must already have been baptized. Children in grades 3 through 8 who are not baptized or who have not yet received the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist will receive instruction and preparation for the sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, and Eucharist in our special RCIC (Rite of Christian Initiation of Children) program. These children are usually baptized and receive their First Eucharist at the Easter Vigil.

## **Registration Policies**

### **Who May Register?**

The St. Malachy Grades 1-6 Religious Education program serves children whose families are registered in St. Malachy Parish. If you wish to enroll your children in these programs, we ask that your family first register with St. Malachy Parish by visiting the Parish Center during office hours (Monday-Friday 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.) or by calling the Parish Center (852-3195).

## **Yearly Registration**

Registration for each program takes place each year in order to ensure that we have up-to-date, accurate contact and emergency contact information on file for every child.

## **Updating Contact Information**

If your contact information changes during your children's session, please notify the Faith Formation Office. Notifying the parish receptionist or administrative assistant is sometimes not sufficient, as our Faith Formation database is currently separate from the larger parish database.

## **Fees**

The fees we collect for Grades 1-6 Religious Education help defray the cost of textbooks, supplies, staff salaries and development, and catechist training. These fees may vary from year to year. We ask that each family pay the required fees, but no child will ever be turned away because of a family's inability to pay.

## **Non-discrimination Policy**

Because we are followers of Christ with a moral and social obligation to treat everyone fairly and with respect, St. Malachy does not discriminate based on race, color, sex, national origin, native language, socioeconomic class, or handicap status in our Grades 1-6 Religious Education program. St. Malachy does not discriminate against those with HIV/AIDS. As discussed elsewhere in this handbook, if parents/guardians, in consultation with the Director of Faith Formation, determine that regular Religious Education is not appropriate for their child, other options will be discussed.

## **Attendance**

### **General**

In order to ensure the safety of all children in our programs, we ask that parents/guardians take their children into their classrooms and leave them only after a catechist is present. We also ask that parents/guardians pick up their children directly from their classrooms at the end of each class. Children should bring a note for their catechist signed by a parent if the person who will pick them up is not a parent. For safety reasons, catechists will not release a child from a classroom until they see the parent or designated person who is picking the child up.

If classes must be cancelled because of severe winter weather occurring before class time, catechists will call each family to inform them. Please also consult local radio and TV announcements. More information will be sent home with the children as winter approaches. For severe weather occurring before class time during the Summer Intensive program, we trust each family to determine the best course of action. During both sessions, all severe weather during class time will be handled based on our emergency plans.

## **Grades 1-6 Religious Education**

Attending Mass is a vital part of a child's faith formation. If it is impossible for your children to participate in Religious Education and attend Mass on Sundays, we ask that you enroll them in the Summer Intensive program. Children should have regular attendance in their Religious Education classes. Catechists record attendance during each session. Although many of the same topics are covered each year, a child's knowledge of the faith must be developed gradually. If a child has missed the fundamentals, future instruction will be less fruitful. We expect parents to support their children's faith formation by ensuring that they attend each class. If your child must miss a class for a serious reason, please check with his or her catechist for make-up work. In case of frequent absences, catechists, in consultation with the Director of Faith Formation, may recommend that a child repeat that year of instruction.

In some cases, regular attendance may not be possible. Please discuss your particular circumstances with the Director of Faith Formation when you register so we can determine in these cases what the best plan of action will be for your child and your family.

## **Record-keeping**

Grades 1-6 Religious Education attendance records are kept for six (6) years. Incident reports (disciplinary, illness during class, etc.) are kept for one year. Information gathered at registration, such as an explanation of a child's medical or learning concerns, is updated each year a child is in the program. This information gathered for registration may remain part of a child's permanent record for six (6) years.

Only authorized persons (parents/guardians or those who need access for appropriate program-related reasons) have access to these records, unless we receive parental permission or are required to turn over information by a court order. In the case of non-custodial parents, this program abides by the provisions of the Buckley Amendment. Non-custodial parents have access to student records, unless the custodial parent files a court order requiring otherwise to the Faith Formation Office.

## **Communication**

The Director of Faith Formation and the Coordinators of Religious Education will communicate with families by distributing newsletters or flyers during sessions, sending information through the mail, writing a column in the parish bulletin each week, and keeping updated information on the parish web site. Families may contact the Faith Formation Office by phone (852-8476), by e-mail [mknueven@stmalachy.org](mailto:mknueven@stmalachy.org), [sgutzweiler@stmalachy.org](mailto:sgutzweiler@stmalachy.org), [dtimko@stmalachy.org](mailto:dtimko@stmalachy.org)), or in person at the Parish Center.

Individual catechists or catechist teams may also communicate with families by sending papers home with children. In some cases, these papers will be projects the children have done or pages from their books, but in other cases, these papers will be notes or letters from the catechists. Please talk with your children about what they are doing in Religious Education. If you need assistance in contacting your child's catechist/s, please contact the Coordinators of Religious Education or the Director of Faith Formation.

## **Dealing with Concerns**

If a parent/guardian has a concern about an instructional or minor disciplinary matter in a child's classroom, he or she should first contact that child's catechist(s). Parents or guardians may also inform the Coordinators of Religious Education or the Director of Faith Formation that they have particular areas of concern. The Coordinators of Religious Education and the Director of Faith Formation will assist parents/guardians and catechists in mutually resolving any remaining concerns.

Please be aware that we are doing all we can to keep your children safe. As required by the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, St. Malachy requires all volunteer catechists and staff members who work with children to undergo a background check and to be trained to recognize and prevent situations of child abuse, particularly child sexual abuse, through the Protecting God's Children/Virtus program.

If a parent/guardian has a concern about a serious matter such as impropriety or potential abuse by a catechist or other person involved in the Religious Education program, he or she should contact the Director of Faith Formation. Though we ask that parents/guardians attempt to deal with minor matters directly with catechists, serious situations like potential abuse must be brought to the attention of the Director of Faith Formation so these issues can be thoroughly investigated and dealt with in a just, professional way. The Director of Faith Formation is responsible for reporting, in good faith, possible cases of abuse of children by catechists or by parents/guardians.

## **Resources for Families**

Sunday Mass is the best resource your family has for growing together in faith.

The Bible, which is woven into the Mass, is a great resource on its own, too. Every home should have a Bible. Families can grow together in faith by reading and talking about the stories recorded in Scripture.

The publishers of our textbooks, Sadlier and RCL, both provide excellent web sites with faith formation resources for families. RCL/Benziger publishes the *Faith First* series we use for 1-6. *Faith First* has its own web site, [www.faithfirst.com](http://www.faithfirst.com), which is full of information for children and families. In addition, you are welcome to access additional resources at the RCL web site, <http://rclweb.com/resources/>

## **Student Code of Behavior**

The St. Malachy Parish Grades 1-6 Religious Education program recognizes that all people are children of God. Therefore, students shall show respect for catechists, administrators, and other students at all times by listening well, speaking considerately, and following the instructions of catechists and administrators.

Students shall strive to understand the material they are studying by paying attention, participating in class discussions or activities, and asking appropriate questions.

Disrespectful behavior of any kind, including but not limited to sexual harassment, any form of discrimination, or inappropriate verbal or physical behavior will not be tolerated.

If a student displays disrespectful or inappropriate behavior during Religious Education classes, his or her catechist will be the first person to deal with the situation. Catechists will attempt to explain to the

student why his or her behavior was inappropriate and may separate the child from the rest of the class or use other appropriate in-class discipline. If a child continues to exhibit disrespectful or disruptive behavior, the Director of Faith Formation will speak to the child and devise a further plan of action, which may include asking a parent/guardian to attend class with the child.

If, for behavioral or disciplinary reasons, a child is unable to participate respectfully in regular Religious Education classes, the Director of Faith Formation may discuss with parents/guardians alternative methods of religious instruction and faith formation that may be more appropriate for that child.

**\*\*All general policies in this handbook, including those related to disciplinary procedures, are subject to change and may be adjusted by the Director of Religious Education to fit particular circumstances.\*\***  
Families will be notified of any general changes within a reasonable time of their implementation.