

Middle School CATHECHIST HANDBOOK

2016-2017

Mission Statement:

St. Thomas the Apostle Religious Education Program is dedicated to proclaiming Christ through teaching, service, praying, evangelizing, and living our Catholic Faith.

**St. Thomas the Apostle
Religious Education
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A Catechist's Prayer for Discipleship

Lord, make me your disciple. Help me to bring the Good News to others as you did.

Give me the **courage** to answer your call as Simon and Andrew and the other Apostles did, and to invite others to answer bravely, too.

Give me the **wisdom** to see that following your Way brings blessings and true joy, and give me the words and actions to show this wisdom to others.

Give me your spirit of **forgiveness** that I may never allow anger or judgment to enter into my relationship with my students. In this way, I will help them to be reconcilers too.

Give me the **reverence** to pray always, in my words and in my deeds. Help me to teach my students to pray, that they may grow ever closer to you.

Give me the gift of **creativity**, to bring your message of hope alive in the hearts of my learners, so that I can engage their hearts, heads, and hands in the work of the Gospel.

Give me a spirit of **generosity and poverty**, so that I will never become too attached to the world's goods. Help me to inspire my students to see the emptiness of material things.

Give me the **faith** of Martha and Mary, to find the balance between prayerfulness and my good works for the Gospel. In this way I will lead my students to greater works than my own.

Spirit of Love, help me to proclaim the **Good News** to all I meet, so that I can hasten the day when your Reign will come in its fullness. Amen.

JOB DESCRIPTION FOR CATECHISTS

Due to the fact that you are viewing this handbook, you must already possess many of the essential qualities of being an effective catechist. You have displayed an openness to how God is calling you to serve the young people in our community and to share the Gospel message that has no doubt echoed with meaning and fulfillment in your own life. It is the attitude behind the humble and gracious “yes,” declared when responding to this challenge, that will prove instrumental in sharing the faith as a catechist.

Basic to the ministry of religious education is the idea of presenting this same challenge and adventure of discipleship to the young people in your classroom in a way that excites and inspires them to apply the faith they learn to their own lives. **Listed below are some of the essential qualities needed to pose the challenge of discipleship to the youth and facilitate an effective and Spirit-driven classroom:**

1. **A personal faith** which is continually deepened through prayer, reflection, study, and participation in the worshiping community on a regular basis is essential. Above all else, the youth will attach to your own story, convictions, and witness of faith more than they will to concepts and definitions.
2. **Participation in teacher training/formation opportunities** is strongly suggested. This includes prepared and active attendance at catechist formation and middle school catechists meetings. Additional opportunities for growth & professional development in classroom management, lesson planning, and catechetical training are also encouraged.

The 2016-2017 middle school catechists meetings are listed below.

- Wednesday, August 24, 7:00-9:00 pm – All Catechists Kickoff Meeting
- Monday, August 29, 7:00-8:30 pm – Middle School Catechists Meeting
- Monday, November 7, 7:00-8:30 – Middle School Catechists Meeting
- Monday, January 9, 7:00-8:30 – Middle School Catechists Meeting
- Monday, February 20, 7:00-8:30 – Middle School Catechists Meeting

3. **Personal preparation and readiness for each classroom session** is necessary for effective teaching. This may take up to a few hours of planning for each class, depending on the catechist, years of teaching experience, and lesson content.
4. **Catechists must adhere to the provided curriculum content, but can *and should* also infuse their own creativity and personal teaching styles into each lesson.**
5. **Early arrival and faithful attendance at all class sessions** is extremely important for the good of the students.
6. **Clear communication with the youth, parents, other catechists, classroom aides and the program coordinator** is vital in ensuring a successful year. If at any time you have questions, insights, or ideas, feel free to share them with your fellow catechists, as well as the program director.

CLASSROOM PROCEDURES

1. SUGGESTED CLASS TIMELINE

15 – 30 minutes before classes begin: catechists arrive, pick up attendance folder, prepare classroom, review lesson, and pray!

Start time of class: take attendance, distribute handouts, flyers, opening activity/prayer

First 15 minutes of class: Welcome and Breaking Open the Word (reading and discussion of next Sunday's readings)

15 minutes into class time: begin lesson content and activities

Last 10 minutes of class: wrap-up and bring lesson to a conclusion, review key points, announcements and closing prayer

2. ATTENDANCE

A permanent attendance sheet will be given to you each week in your brown envelope. Please take attendance; place attendance sheet, tuition received, notes, etc., back in the envelope and place outside your door. The envelopes will be collected at approximately 15 minutes after classes begin. Attendance envelopes will also be used to communicate with catechists so please check them carefully each session.

3. RESPECT FOR BUILDINGS AND PROPERTY

We are guests in the building we use. Materials and equipment in the room are **NOT** to be used without permission. Catechists should note condition of room prior to use and always return the classroom to its original order. If there are any issues with the classroom set-up, room condition, or materials, please let Peggy Goralski, the program director, know as soon as possible.

4. DISMISSAL

Do not dismiss before the appointed time. Please watch students move to the main exit so they are not roaming through the building. Individual students may be dismissed early only if they are called out of the classroom by the program director. Communication should be initiated between the catechist and the program director any time there is a request for early dismissal.

5. DISCIPLINE

Please do not hesitate to request assistance with any repetitive behavioral problems. It is best to deal with behavioral issues early in the year. Often a student just needs to know that there are consequences for misbehavior. Please contact Peggy Goralski if there are any concerns.

6. SUPPLY CLOSET

Supplies are stored in the teachers' lounge at All Saints Catholic Academy. Basic supplies are available; scissors, pencils, paper, colored markers, etc. If there are special needs for additional supplies and materials, please inform Marge Coronado or Peggy Goralski in the Religious Education Office within a suitable time, so that they can be procured.

7. AUDIO-VISUAL

We have access to a TV, a DVD player, CD players, and projectors. Should you like to reserve an item, please contact Peggy Goralski prior to the day/night of class to ensure that your request can be accommodated.

8. ABSENCES FOR CATECHISTS

The goal and expectation at the beginning of the year is that the catechists will be present for every classroom session. In the event of illness or any other reason for an absence, every effort should be made by the catechist to arrange for a substitute themselves using the “Substitute Catechist List”. If no substitute is available, please contact Peggy Goralski at 630.355.8980, Ext. 123 or pgoralski@stapostle.org.

MIDDLE SCHOOL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Middle School Religious Education at St. Thomas consists of Religious Education sessions, Teens with Character, and service project opportunities. Although the Religious Education experience can offer many opportunities for students to deepen their faith and share their faith journey with others, it cannot be stressed enough the importance of regular mass attendance in a student's faith development. The different facets of the Middle School Religious Education program are described below:

Religious Education Classes

Religious Education classes will meet approximately 20 times from September through April. Although most of these meetings are class sessions, special speakers, activities, and liturgical experiences are also incorporated into the curriculum. Each middle school grade level explores the main topics described below:

Grade 6

- **GOD, REVELATION, AND FAITH**
These sessions will help young adolescents know and understand the Scriptures and Tradition as sources of God's revelation. Young adolescents will begin to understand how God reveals God's Self to us. The core activities in these sessions will cover basic teachings about God, the Holy Trinity, and God's plan for salvation.
- **JESUS CHRIST AND THE HOLY SPIRIT**
Throughout these sessions the participants will come to know the many faces of Jesus and will be challenged to rely on Jesus as our Savior, a role model, a teacher, a caregiver, and a guide. The participants will have the opportunity to enter into a deeper understanding and relationship with our Lord, from Jesus' humble earthly beginnings to his glorious Resurrection, recognizing that their lives are centered in God. The final sessions will examine the Holy Spirit and the grace and gifts of the Spirit.

Grade 7

- **THE CHURCH**
Participants will explore how the Holy Spirit moves in God's people and will discover concrete ways that the Holy Spirit is present in the Church today. The young people will look at how God's Spirit was present in the lives of the Apostles, examine various models that help us to understand the meaning of Church, and look at how all the baptized participate in the mission of Christ to make disciples of all nations.
- **LITURGY AND SACRAMENTS**
These sessions are designed to help young people better understand and more fully participate in the Church's life-giving Sacraments. The sessions cover basic teachings about each of the Seven Sacraments. The participants will begin with an overview of the Church's Seven Sacraments and then explore the Sacraments in more detail. The importance of the central place of the Eucharist in Catholic life will also be emphasized.

Grade 8

- **THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH**

Throughout these sessions, the participants will explore how the Holy Spirit moves the God's people and will discover concrete ways that the Holy Spirit is present in the world today. They will examine how the gift of God's grace is made possible by the Spirit and what it means to be invited to participate in God's life.

- **CHRISTIAN MORALITY AND JUSTICE**

This course will help the participants to learn about the moral principles embodied in the Ten Commandments. Young people will have the opportunity to apply Christian moral principles to various real-life situations. They will also be encouraged to use these principles in their own daily lives as they examine their own experiences and consider many of the moral dilemmas young people face.

Teens with Character

Teens With Character (TWC) is a group of youth that primarily draws its participation from young adolescents in middle school (6th – 8th grade) and is centered around the challenge in Sacred Scripture found in the Letter to Timothy, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity.” (1 Timothy 4:12). It is our goal that the youth that participate in Teens With Character:

1. Experience an atmosphere in which youth are able to **HAVE FUN!**
2. Become involved in programs and activities that help **BUILD CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP**, connecting them with peers, as well as the larger parish community.
3. Are encouraged to see the world outside themselves and have the opportunity to **EXPERIENCE SERVICE** within the local community and beyond.
4. Are inspired to **GROW IN FAITH** and see the link between service, their faith, and God's unique call for them.
5. Empower youth with the skills necessary to **BECOME CHRISTIAN LEADERS**.

Teens meet 4-5 times a year to explore one of the Catholic Social Teachings and how to live those teachings in everyday life.

Service Projects

To perform acts of service is an important part of our call as baptized Christians. Many opportunities are provided for young people to grow in their understanding and experience of service. Although the service opportunities can vary from year to year, in the past young people have participated in Harvest Sunday, Sleep Out Saturday, Care Pantry Christmas, Feed My Starving Children, Grandparent's Day, DuPage River Cleanup, Just5Days summer mission trips, Snocones for Kyle, Kermes Fair at St. Nicholas, St. Vincent DePaul clothing drives, and summer Care Pantry food drives.

Any questions or for more information contact:
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