

St. Francis Xavier Parish
Faith Formation/Religious Education Policy Handbook

This booklet is designed to give a perspective on the policies and procedures in all areas of Catechesis at Saint Francis Xavier Parish.

St. Francis Xavier Faith Formation/Religious Education Program is a Diocesan Accredited Program.

MISSION STATEMENT

Faith Formation/Religious Education makes possible the enlightenment of God’s love for us. We endeavor to develop a deep understanding of who we are as Catholics. We work to hand on our faith in God through experiences of Faith Formation, Witness, Service and Worship.

VISION STATEMENT

The integrity of our volunteers and our curriculum is the cornerstone of our program. Through the Faith Formation program we strive to meet the faith formation needs of our parishioners and enable them to have strong sense of Christian values and faith in God.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* quotes Pope John Paul II from *Catechesi Tradendae* as he describes what is entailed in the ministry of catechesis:

Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life.

CCC, #5

The *National Catechetical Directory* further clarifies what elements should be a part of a quality catechetical program:

Like other pastoral activities, catechetical ministry must be understood in relation to Jesus’ threefold mission. It is a form of the ministry of the word, which proclaims and teaches. It leads to and flows from the ministry of worship, which sanctifies through prayer and sacrament. It supports the ministry of service, which is linked to efforts to achieve social justice...*NDC, #32*

Guided by the principles found in the documents of the church concerning the ministry of catechesis, the catechetical program of this parish 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 child and the signs of the times.

Community

Efforts will be made to form Christian community among the children/youth through interaction and faith sharing.

Worship

The participants will experience many forms of Catholic prayer and worship to help them become prayerful people.

Service

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

Curriculum

St. Francis Xavier Parish follows the Diocese of Erie *Curriculum Guidelines* issued by Bishop Donald Trautman in 1995 and 2005. Textbooks and other materials used are in conformity with the teachings found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. They have been chosen because they offer catechists the resources necessary to conduct classes, and include all the elements of the ministry of catechesis. Presently the textbooks used are:

K-Grade 8 *Faith First, Legacy Edition* published by RCL

Website for home support www.faithfirst.com

Grade 9 *Total Faith Initiative* (St. Mary's Press)

Grade 10 *World Religious, Morality* (Center for Learning)

Grade 11 *Confirmed in a Faithful Community*

Published by St. Mary's Press

All of these texts have been evaluated and found acceptable by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Catechism of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

PROGRAM GOALS

St. Francis Xavier Parish strives to be a Christian community faithful to the Gospel and the Catholic Tradition. The parish is, in reality, a community of communities: youth, faculty, farmers, townspeople, commuters, all united in the endless struggle and search to know, love and serve God, self and others. The unique diversity of the parish offers at once a challenge and a rich resource for learning. The goals of St. Francis Xavier's 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 help youth discover the richness and challenges of Scripture and the teachings and traditions of the Catholic Church
- To build a strong Catholic identity among the youth of the parish.
- To allow the youth to experience the Church as community.
- 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 youth to the liturgical and sacramental richness that is part of the Catholic Tradition.
- To enable youth to become responsible, self-reflecting, loving and praying individuals.
- To make programs that meet diverse spiritual needs available to adults of the parish.

THE ROLE OF THE PARENT (S)

It is the role of the parish to assist parents in nurturing the faith of their children. Parent(s) who enroll their children in the parish catechetical program will be assisted and enabled in their role as the primary educators of their children. Parent(s) 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 insure a quality program,

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

1. Must be a registered member of the parish or have a valid reason for attending this program and have the permission of the home parish's religious education leader and pastor.
2. Is responsible for providing the parish with information regarding the child's baptism and other sacraments if applicable.
3. *Attends Mass weekly with the child.* And is responsible to see that the child receives communion and the sacrament of Reconciliation regularly.
4. Takes responsibility for their role as primary educator.
5. Collaborates with the catechist in the program by sharing faith with the child(ren) at home and by *making sure the child does any required make-up work or follow-up to the lessons taught in class.*
6. Takes part in family sacramental preparation programs.
7. Teaches the child the traditional prayers of the Church.
8. Maintains an open line of communication with the child's catechist.
9. Brings the child to class each week at the prescribed time and picks them up promptly at the conclusion of class.
10. Makes sure the child enters the building where classes are held and goes to the classroom.
11. Brings his/her child to class dressed appropriately, ready to participate.
12. Attends parent meetings when requested.
13. Is supportive of the catechist, especially in the area of discipline.
14. Reads this handbook, completes and turns in the forms necessary for registration.
15. Informs the faith formation leader of the rights of the noncustodial parent in the case of divorce. This is essential to ensure that the program acts in the best interest and safety of the child(ren).
16. Informs the faith formation leader of any pertinent medical and emergency information.

FAITHFORMATION/RELIGIOUS EDUCATION POLICIES

Parents and Catechists

Catechists that teach in the faith formation program are volunteers. The parish has made every effort to screen them to insure 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 faith formation 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 first contact the catechist to discuss the situation. If that does not lead to a satisfactory resolution, please contact the faith formation leader. All parishioners have the right to final recourse from the pastor of the parish.

Youth are typically enrolled in the grade in which they are currently attending in school, unless other arrangements are made with the faith formation leader. An exception to this may be necessary to meet specific requirements for sacramental preparation.

Sunday Liturgy

Children and youth are called by their church and their faith to attend Mass weekly (preferably with their family). The faith life of children grows through participation in the liturgy and other parish community gatherings.

Sacrament of Reconciliation

Regular reception of the sacrament of Reconciliation is encouraged. The Sacrament of Reconciliation will be offered at least once a year to youth in grades 3-10. Confirmation Candidates will attend the Advent and Lenten Penance Service. It is the responsibility of our families to make sure their children receive this sacrament regularly.

Registration

All families with children in grade levels Kindergarten through 11 will be required to register their children each year. Baptismal Certificates and First Eucharist Certificates (if applicable) must be provided for all new children at the time of registration. Children who have not been baptized will be accepted into the program provided the family intends

to have them baptized and is willing to enroll them in the children's initiation program. Transferring families need to provide the name of the program they attended for verification.

Attendance

A) All children registered in Saint Francis Xavier Parish who are enrolled in Grades K through 11 are expected to be in attendance for each scheduled class session, retreat, liturgy or youth activity. It is the responsibility of the families to insure their presence.

B) If for some **SERIOUS** reason a child cannot attend regularly scheduled classes, special permission may be given for a child to do private study of the appropriate material. The Faith Formation Leader and Pastor grant this permission in conjunction with the family. The child doing private study must demonstrate continual progress to the satisfaction of the Director and the Catechist. This may be accomplished by periodic written and/or oral exams.

C) Each class session builds on the material covered in the preceding classes. *Children who are absent miss a great deal and are required to make up the material covered in the missed class.* Parents are encouraged to contact the Catechist to learn of classroom work, homework and announcements that may have been part of the missed class. In the event of an absence, as a matter of courtesy, a written excuse from the parents would be appreciated. These excuses should be sent with the child upon his/her return to class.

D) *If a child misses more than 12 classes in a program year without making up the work they will be required pass a test on the material in order to advance to the next level. If the child fails the test they will be required to repeat the grade level.*

E) Any child requesting an early dismissal is required to present a note from his/her parent to the Catechist before class begins. No child will be dismissed early without a note.

F) The Sacramental preparation process for Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation will require more specific attendance policies. These are covered separately in this handbook and will be conveyed to the candidates and their families at the appropriate time.

Illness/Injury

Should a child arrive ill, or become ill during class, the child's condition will be assessed and the parent(s) may be called to take the child home. If the parent is unavailable, attempts will be made to reach the backup person listed. Every effort will be made to keep the child comfortable. Medications will not be administered to the child. If an injury occurs, first aid will be administered in accordance with the policy of the Diocese of Erie and the parent(s) notified. If the injury requires immediate medical attention, the Faith Formation Leader will call the appropriate emergency services, followed by a call to the parent(s).

Change of Address/Phone Number

Please inform the Office of Faith Formation as soon as possible of any changes in address or phone number. In case of emergency it is essential that we have correct information on file.

Emergency Cancellation

In the event of severe inclement weather, WJET-TV will carry the message. The answering machine will also state canceled classes. As always parents are free to use their own discretion when classes are not canceled.

Arrival/Dismissal

Classes are held in the classrooms in the basement of the church and in the parish center. The program time is 9:00-10:20 am. All children should enter through the Gathering Space or the parish center front door. In order to insure the safety of our children in the parking lot, we request that cars pull completely into the parking lot on the church side and exit on opposite side of the property. We request that there be no stopping in front of any doors for pick up. All classes held in the basement are dismissed from the Gathering Space. Parents of kindergarten and first graders are urged to come into the Gathering Space to meet their child/children

Homework/Special Assignments

Catechists are encouraged to assign work for the children to do at home with the assistance of their parent(s). Parent(s) are encouraged to ask their children about homework after each session, and check

their child's folders/bags each week for homework and notices.

Special Events

Parents will be notified regarding any event or field trip for which the children will be taken off the parish grounds. If the child desires to attend a field trip or special event, the parent must fill out a permission slip and turn it in to the religious education leader. No child can be taken on such trips without the required permission/medical forms. Phone permission is not permitted.

Progress Reports/Successful Completion of Grade Level

We realize that the primary responsibility for the faith formation/religious education of children lies with the parents. We also realize that faith cannot be tested. The role of the parish is to provide a formal program to reinforce the teaching of the faith in the home. Formation, of any sort, especially religious education, requires tremendous cooperation and communication among parent/child/catechist.

Progress reports are given out twice a year, in December and April. To successfully complete a grade level the child must: have good attendance (85%), complete all required homework and make-up work, display a working knowledge of the material for the grade level, participate in the classroom, take part in all service projects and activities, retreats and take an active role in the Liturgy.

Sacramental Programs

Guidelines for our sacramental programs are listed in the back of this handbook.

Announcements

On occasion important information will be sent home with your child. Please ask them if they have any announcements for you.

Safety Procedures for Fires and other emergencies

There is a safety procedure posted in each room for fire emergencies. Catechists will instruct the students in these procedures the first week

of class. In case of emergency, 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 Faith Formation Leader before leaving with their child to avoid unnecessary search and rescue operations.

Smoking, Drugs, Alcohol

For safety and health reasons, the use of tobacco, alcohol or drugs is prohibited in the building.

Gum CHEWING GUM IN THE BUILDING IS PROHIBITED.

Cell Phones brought to into the building must be turned off during class sessions and mass. No child will be permitted to use their cell phone during class sessions or retreats.

Appropriate Dress

All hats, including baseball caps, must be removed when entering the building. A fee of \$1.00 (to be given to the Food Bank) will be charged to anyone not removing a hat. Hats will be returned when fee is paid. All coats must be removed upon entering the classroom.

Clothing with suggestive slogans or pictures will not be tolerated. Anyone displaying such messages will be asked to turn the clothing inside out or sent home to change.

Discipline

Everyone involved in the program is challenged by the words and example of Jesus to respect each person's right 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 children and catechists can learn to follow Jesus' call to love, some rules for behavior are necessary. Children are expected by their behavior to make the classes safe and positive experiences for themselves and their classmates. The program exists for individual growth and in turn children are expected to carry out the following responsibilities:

1. Show respect to catechists, other children/youth and program personnel.
2. Treat the property, good name and physical safety of others with

respect.

3. Be present only in the areas of the building for which they have permission at a specific time.
4. Act in safe manner in and around the building.
5. Use voice and display actions in a manner appropriate for a classroom.
6. Be respectful of the study time of others
7. Use of or possession of illegal drugs, alcohol, or tobacco is strictly prohibited. Such items will be seized and parents notified immediately. The child will be immediately removed from the environment.

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 St. Francis accept the demeaning or intimidation of children in the name of discipline.

Disciplinary Process

At the time of the first correction, the child will be warned. Children whose behavior becomes a continual problem in the classroom will be sent out into the hallway to complete the lesson of the day. If a child has been sent into the hallway three times in a 2 month period that child's parent(s) will be contacted either by phone, in person or in writing.

If the child's behavior continues to be a problem, the child will be removed from the class and the parent(s) will catechize their child at home for a length of time of at least two weeks but not to exceed six weeks. In order to return to the classroom, the student and parent(s) will meet with the catechist and faith formation leader to resolve the issue. At this time the parent(s) may be asked to sit in on the class for a few weeks to observe their child and his/her interaction with the catechist and other students. If the situation cannot be resolved, the child will be placed in another class (if one is available) or the parent(s) will be asked to complete the year at home. The child will be treated as one who is being home schooled and will follow parish policy for homeschooling. The child will be admitted into the program

in the next calendar year with no prejudice.

Child Abuse

Saint Francis Xavier's Pastor and Faith Formation Leader and volunteers are required by the Pennsylvania Revised Code and Diocesan Policy on Child Protection to report suspected or actual child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. All other members of St. Francis, are bound by Christian conscience to report suspected or actual child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. All parish staff and volunteers have participated in an in-service training on child protection and reporting procedures and have the proper clearances (Act 151 and Act 34) according to Diocesan policy.

Weapons Policy

In order 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, or within the geographic boundaries of St. Francis Xavier Parish, or in any location used by the parish to conduct any catechetical activity, or in any conveyance providing transportation to or from any activity related to the religious education program.

Weapons or potential weapons will be confiscated by the faith formation when this action does not place the faith formation leader in danger. If the child has used a weapon against another person or will not surrender the weapon or offending object/material/substance immediately and willingly, the local police will be called first, followed by notification of the parent(s). This is a zero tolerance policy. Any child who violates this policy will be subject to immediate parish disciplinary action over and above any civil/criminal action brought by the injured parties.

The child will be removed from his/her class and an alternative method of religious education will be negotiated with the parent(s) for the remainder of the year. Judgments about readmittance 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.

If the incident involves an exchange of bodily fluids (for example, as in a wound which breaks the skin), the student(s) will be asked to submit to medical tests for transmittable diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis B as recommended by a doctor. These tests will be at the parent(s) expense. In the name of being a community of Christians motivated by care and respect, this policy asks that the results of these tests, which are governed by guidelines of strict confidentiality, be openly shared with the respective parties on a need-to-know basis.

Threats of Violent Behavior

As a community of believers who value patience over aggression, and love above all else, it is inconsistent with our basic values to tolerate an environment of threat or fear. Threats of harm made against another individual or group of individuals are not acceptable and will not be tolerated. This policy recognizes that in any community of people there will always be some conflict. Children will always be encouraged to manage their conflict in a positive, non-aggressive manner. Behavior such as cursing, pushing or fighting will not be tolerated.

In cases which are deemed by the catechist or faith formation leader to be “minor” (meaning: no reason to believe the situation would lead to physical harm) the children will be separated and encouraged to work out their differences after a “cool-down” period.

If the catechist regards the altercation as “serious” (meaning: reasonable expectation that the conflict will lead to physical harm) the children will be immediately separated, the faith formation leader will be notified, and the parent(s) of the children will be called. The faith formation leader must determine that the conflict is resolved before the children will be readmitted to the program.

Children are expected to report to their catechist or faith formation leader any threat made by a child, which mentions the killing of any person. Such threats will be immediately reported to the police for investigation. The person making such threats will be suspended from the program until such time as the police investigation is completed and the appropriate authorities are satisfied that there is no real threat of harm. In such a case, judgments about readmittance to the program

will be made on a case by case basis and this decision is at the sole discretion of the pastor.

Book and Material Fees for 2011-2012

The book and material fees for families registered in the program are as follows:

Parishioners of Saint Francis Xavier:

\$35.00 per child

Non-parishioner fee:

\$50.00 per child

Additional Sacrament Book and Material Fee:

\$10.00 per child in grades 2, 3, and 11

Book and material fees are non-refundable after the start of classes. Fees for the costs of retreats and other special activities may be assessed at other times during the year. No child will be prevented from attending because of inability to pay. An inquiry to either the Pastor or the Faith Formation Leader is all that is necessary to have fees excused. Schedules are mailed in August of each year.

Program Times

The Faith Formation program will be held on Sundays from 9:00-10:20 am. All Catechists are in the rooms 5 minutes before the beginning time. *Please have your child here on time as a child who is 5-10 minutes late unfairly disrupts the other children and Catechists.*

Adult Education

“The Church’s pastoral ministry exists to sustain the work of the Gospel. One way it does this is by nourishing and strengthening lay men and women in their calling and identify as people of faith, as contributors to the life and work of the Church, and as disciples whose mission is to the world. To grow in discipleship throughout life, all believers need and are called to build vibrant parish and diocesan communities of faith and service.

#3 Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us. A pastoral plan for adult Faith formation in the United States

Rapid changes in society and the Church make Adult Catechesis especially important today. Adults need help in dealing with their problems and in communicating their faith to the young. Adult Catechesis is also relevant to the Church's mission on behalf of justice, mercy, peace, and respect for human life - a mission that depends heavily upon informed and motivated lay people. Adults need to understand and practice the Gospel demands of stewardship. God gives everyone a measure of personal time, talent, and treasure to use for His glory and in the service of neighbor.

Because of its importance and because all other forms of catechesis are oriented in some way to it, the catechesis of adults must have high priority at all levels of the church. The success of programs for children and youth depends to a significant extent upon the words, attitudes and actions of the adult community, especially parents, family and guardians.

We urge the adults of Saint Francis Xavier Parish to avail themselves of the opportunities for adult education offered by our parish community as well as our Diocese. Announcements for classes will be made in the bulletin.

Baptism

A child gives promise, hope and expectancy that the world will become a better place to live because of this new life. If the world is to become a better place, you as parents, have a large responsibility. The Christian community of Saint Francis Xavier Parish shares that responsibility. We believe that it is only when people come together in the spirit of love and begin to care for each other that the Faith really comes alive.

At Baptism you will say "yes" for your child to God's invitation to belong to a Catholic Christian community. We as members of that community also say, "yes" to the acceptance of a new member. Together we accept the responsibility for a new life.

Parents who desire Baptism for their child must be registered, practicing members of the parish. Parents, Godparents and Witnesses are to attend a Baptism Preparation Session prior to the Baptism to become aware of the reality that underlies the Sacrament of Baptism and how the Christian community of Saint Francis Xavier can help parents fulfill the responsibilities that Baptism involves.

Baptism Preparation Sessions are held six times a year. Baptisms are held the 4th Sunday of every month during Mass. Expectant parents are asked to contact the parish office at 476-7657 for further instructions and details.

Sacraments of Reconciliation/Eucharist

Participation and successful completion of Grade 1 in either a Faith Formation/Religious Education Program or a Catholic School is a prerequisite before entering the second grade and a third grader must have successfully completed a first and second grade program. Families presenting children for remedial sacrament programs will be asked to follow the parish policy for remedial sacrament reception.

Good attendance and participation by each child is vital. This includes weekly Mass attendance. It is asked that parents become directly involved in these preparation programs in order to help make the preparation for these Sacraments a truly meaningful spiritual journey.

The Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist are prepared for and received as follows:

Reconciliation – Prepared for during the **second grade**. The preparation is a family based preparation program that requires a parent to attend six sessions with their child and a parent/child retreat time, First Reconciliation will be held during Lent.

Eucharist – Prepared for during the **third grade**. The preparation is a family based preparation program that requires a parent to attend six sessions with their child and a parent/child retreat. First Holy Communion is celebrated during the Easter Season usually the first Sunday in May.

Our program has a web site support system. It can be found at www.pastoralplanning.com. Many home activities and games can be found at this site along with information for parents.

A schedule of the class dates and times, retreat days, parent meetings, practice times and Sacramental Celebrations is given out at the beginning of the year.

Confirmation

Confirmation celebrates the outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit into Christian lives to enable them to bear effective witness to Christ. The Spirit comes not only to enrich them personally, but also to build up the Christian community through them. Confirmation is celebrated in the 11th grade. The preparation involves A Gifts Discernment Session, weekly sessions with the youth, 2 sessions with their sponsor, one retreat, penance services, a commitment Mass, one parent meeting as well as the candidates participation in the Crop Walk and being involved in one area of parish ministry. Confirmation is celebrated in the spring with the date set by the Bishop. These dates are typically announced in February.

Candidates for Confirmation must have successfully completed a 9th and 10th grade program. They will be asked to display knowledge of the catholic faith. They must be actively involved in the preparation process (with good attendance), properly instructed, and choose freely to be confirmed. They are expected to be participating members of Saint Francis Xavier Parish. The Confirmation process will be clearly communicated to the Candidates, Parents and Sponsors.

Families presenting teens with no formal religious education will be required to follow the remedial sacrament policy of the parish.

Adults who are interested in being confirmed are asked to contact the church office.

To contact our Faith Formation office please call Mrs. Cindy Zemcik at 476-1622, please leave a message if necessary. E-mail is available at cindyzemcik@gmail.com.