

**The Catechist Handbook
for
Saint Luke Parish
Westport, CT**

2005 – 2006

ST. LUKE
RELIGIOUS FORMATION

RELIGIOUS FORMATION STAFF

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The Saint Luke Religious Formation Program

Please take a few moments to read this handbook. It contains important information for you as a catechist, whether you are new or experienced.

Welcome

We welcome you as a catechist in our Religious Formation Program at St. Luke Parish. Your presence in our program is essential to this ministry of catechesis. We are grateful for your willingness to journey with our young people in their faith development. Your gift of “time, talent and treasure” is a most important witness to our parish community.

Introduction

Religious Formation is a life-long process. During this process, each person grows towards a mature understanding of their faith. A deepened relationship with God is nurtured through this process. The work which is begun at Baptism is then enriched and deepened through Christian formation in the home and through a formal process within the local parish community. The aim of this process, called catechesis, is to nurture people in Christian discipleship.

Our Mission of catechesis at St. Luke is to ...

- Support the religious formation which occurs in the home
- Foster enthusiasm to live the Catholic Faith
- Give witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- Encourage meaningful participation in the communal, sacramental and liturgical life of the Church and the Parish

Goals of Religious Formation

- To teach the Catholic Faith leading to a continual conversion of heart
- To witness a commitment to Christ
- To model community spirit that inspires active participation
- To practice prayer that leads to a deeper relationship with God

Methodology of Religious Formation

- Support parents in the promises made at Baptism to raise their children in the Catholic Faith
- Advocate that parents are the first teachers in matters of Christian living
- Teach the Word of God as a dynamic reality
- Promote the liturgical celebration of faith
- See the Gospel in everyday living

Catechist Personal Qualifications

A catechist is a **fully initiated Catholic** who is committed to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is one who lives the Catholic faith and is willing to explain and impart the faith to others.

The Office of Safe Environments

The Office of Safe Environments was formed to insure the safety of all children in our diocese. Under its charter, four elements have been identified which outline the Diocese of Bridgeport Requirements affecting all employees, volunteers and contract employees.

- Policy
- Background Checks
- Awareness Training
- On-going Training

Policy – Mandatory for all Employees, Volunteers & Contract Employees. This is the newly revised **Policy and Procedures Relating to Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests, Deacons, Lay People or Volunteers.** It is in full accordance with state and federal laws and meets the standards set forth in the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young people. All clergy, employees, volunteers and contract employees of the Diocese of Bridgeport will receive a copy of the policy. The receipt for the policy will be stored for 30 years by St. Luke Parish.

Background Checks - Mandatory for all Employees, Volunteers & Contract Employees. Background checks are now required for all clergy, employees, volunteers and contract employees within our Diocese. Signed consent forms will be completed and a criminal background check completed prior to beginning volunteer service.

Awareness Training - Mandatory for all Employees, Volunteers & Contract Employees. An awareness training session titled “**Protecting God’s Children for Adults**” must be attended. The training helps adults to learn about the warning signs of potential abuse and also teaches adults how to create a safe environment for children. Copies of the **Diocesan Sexual Abuse Policy, Reporting Guidelines, contact names and phone numbers** as well as **Incident Reports** are available in the Religious Formation Office.

On-going Training – Each catechist will receive the latest version of the Diocese “Code of Conduct”.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem School for Catechists

All catechists are encouraged to deepen their knowledge of the Catholic faith. The St. Cyril program offers a comprehensive and systematic formation based on Scripture, the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It aims to empower each participant to become a more effective witness and teacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Full day classes in a variety of subjects are held throughout the year. Contact Deacon Lance Fredricks in the Religious Formation Office for more information about the subjects and locations in which they are offered.

Catechist Rights

You are a valued member of our parish and have the right to be treated with the respect due any adult staff member. You have the right to worship with us. You have the right to the tools and information necessary to perform the tasks to which you are assigned. You have the right to ask questions. You have the right to expect answers to those questions.

Catechist Duties

The catechist is responsible to teach the curriculum as determined by the Director of Religious Formation. Presently we are using the “*Christ Our Life*” material prepared by Loyola Press. I am pleased to mention this material has been specifically approved for use by Bishop William Lori in the Diocese of Bridgeport. It a) covers relevant material at each grade level and b) presents the material in a manner acceptable in our diocese. The catechist manual contains more lessons and material than we can cover in one year. Therefore we are using the 18 week version identified in the beginning of the manual. For your convenience, I have also prepared a “suggested teaching schedule”. All catechists are expected to use the *Christ Our Life* materials as the primary source of their lesson plan.

Religion Curriculum Guidelines – The Diocese of Bridgeport has also published guidelines containing standards, rationale and competencies for parish programs for grades K-12. You were provided a copy at the catechist orientation session. Parents were given copies for grades relevant to their children as well. You will notice the guidelines are fairly aggressive. However, a comprehensive program such as *Christ Our Life* covers all elements of the guidelines over the period of years K-9.

All catechists are expected to respect and enforce the policies of this program. The catechist should arrive on time and perform the assigned tasks. Catechists should remember the focus of the program and treat all young people as Jesus would. The catechist should ask for instructions and assistance when needed. Finally, catechists are expected to be familiar with the Religious Formation Handbook.

Non-instructional duties of the catechist include supervision of any children in the program. Before and after the program and inside and outside the facility is when and where this assistance is most needed.

Catechist Conduct

Catechists are professionals rendering a service. A catechist should strive to avoid becoming so emotionally involved with a child that objectivity and fairness are compromised. If a relationship with any student prevents a catechist from responding to other children’s needs on a regular basis, the catechist should seriously examine the appropriateness of the relationship.

Catechists should use the Religious Formation Office Conference Room for individual meetings with their students. **Never** touch a child in any way that can be construed as punitive or abusive.

Discipline Code

The catechist is to follow the **Religious Formation Parent's Handbook** for behavior and sexual harassment issues. All catechists, catechist aides and volunteers must sign and agree to abide by the Diocese of Bridgeport's Policy on Sexual Misconduct. The Director is to be notified and updated with these concerns. All written reports should be specific, behaviorally oriented, and verifiable. Respect for each other is expected of all those in our program. All matters are to be handled with fairness and compassion. Religious Formation is a right for the children of all our parishioners, but it isn't an absolute right.

Field Trips

Service projects or other activities related to our program are to be conducted with the permission of the Director. A permission slip for the off-site event will be issued from the office. All Religious Formation policies and rules are in force. Chaperones are to stay with their assigned group. Supervision is both mental and physical. If your own child is on the trip, he or she must not be treated any differently than any other child. Remember, your first responsibility is the safety of all members of your class.

It is important to realize that any adult over the age of 18 who participates in any session involving a child must have completed all the Safe Environment requirements prior to their participation. This includes parents who participate as drivers.

Health and Safety

A catechist should never leave their class unattended. If a child becomes sick while in your care, the child is to be sent to the office accompanied by another student. If the child is too ill to go to the office and the catechist needs assistance, a responsible child should report the incident to either the hall monitor or the office and request help. The office will determine whether a parent needs to be contacted. If a child needs immediate medical attention, 911 should be dialed for emergency medical assistance. The office should then be notified as soon as possible. **No catechist is to dispense any medications.** Catechists are to report any medical concerns to the Director.

Emergency Procedures

Catechists are to know the fire / disaster procedure for their specific meeting room or area as well as for the Religious Formation facility in general. You are bound to follow this procedure and evacuate the building upon the sound of any alarm or warning.

Child Abuse Laws

Any catechist or volunteer who has cause to suspect a case of child abuse or neglect, or a child at risk, shall immediately notify the Director or Pastor. As required by law, the Director or Pastor will then report the case to the Department of Children and Families as outlined by the regulations of the Diocese of Bridgeport and the State of Connecticut. A copy of applicable State laws may be examined in the Religious Formation Office. See the reporting guidelines for our diocese for specific names and numbers.

Loyalty to Church and Program

When you are a catechist in St. Luke Parish, you are a representative of the Church and the parish. You should support the directions given by staff and administration. If you disagree with program policy, the Director will be happy to hear your concerns and discuss them with you. Since you are serving in a Catholic parish, you are expected to support the teachings of the Catholic Church and to live in a manner consistent with them.

Confidentiality

In the course of your ministry as a Catechist in our parish, you may learn confidential information about children, their families or other catechists. You are expected to keep this information confidential in any setting inside or outside this program, just as you would wish your own privacy rights to be respected.

However, there are times when confidences cannot be kept. Any information, which if shared with parents and or the Director, may save someone from harm, must be shared.

Supervision of Catechists

The Director of Religious Formation is responsible for the total operation of the Religious Formation program. Therefore, the Director supervises all who serve in any capacity within the program. The Director will visit classes and supervise catechists.

Right to Amend

We reserve the right to amend this handbook. Catechists will be notified of any changes.

Program Procedures

1. Catechists

- A. **Class Attendance:** You have made a commitment to teach on a weekly basis. If you will be absent, please inform me with as much advance notice as possible. It is helpful if you are able to arrange your replacement. Last minute replacements on the day of the class are extremely difficult to arrange.
- B. **Catechist Meetings:** Meetings will be held monthly to provide instruction and help with your formation. Regular attendance is expected. Please notify the office if you will not be able to attend in order that materials can be put aside for you.

In addition, I am available to meet with you as often as necessary to discuss your lesson plan, specific situations or provide exegesis on Gospel readings. Please see or call me to arrange a mutually convenient time.

- C. **Promptness:** Catechists are to arrive at least fifteen minutes prior to the start of your class session. We will begin and end all our programs on time – class sessions, meetings, celebrations, etc.

- D. Preparedness:** Each catechist is to prepare a lesson for each class. A general overview will be provided you at the start of the year indicating which lessons you should include and where you should be in the curriculum at any point in time. This preparation makes it easier for a substitute to cover your class should you be ill or not able to attend due to another commitment.
- E. Responsibility:** Each catechist is responsible for the children assigned to their class while in the building. No child is to be left unattended. If an emergency does arise, the catechist should send a student to the office or ask the hall monitor for immediate assistance.
- F. Substitutes:** Illnesses, yours or that of your child, or accidents can occur with no advance warning. However, when you know you cannot attend a session, give us as much lead time as possible to find a substitute. You can suggest a replacement for your class. However, the replacement must meet all the Safe Environment requirements. It is your responsibility to get the teaching material into the hands of your replacement.

2. **Students**

Arrival: Their arrival time will vary based on their method of transportation. Students should wait in the hallway outside the Religious Formation Office before the beginning the class session.

Dismissal: Grades K through 2 – Catechists should wait in the classroom with their children until parents arrive to pick them up. It is permissible for a child in these grades to leave with an older sibling.

Grades 3 through 8 – Catechists should walk with their students to the front hallway outside the church to help supervise and insure proper behavior. If weather permits, children are allowed to wait on the portico outside the church. Any child not picked up should be brought to the office and presented to a staff member for supervision.

Your help in maintaining some reasonable order in the front of the church after class is greatly appreciated. No roughhousing, hitting, running, etc.

Early Dismissal: Any child requesting to leave your classroom prior to the time of normal dismissal must have written parental permission. The notice must be sent to the office at the beginning of class. The child is to be sent to the office at the requested time and will then wait for his or her parent.

Behavior: Children’s behavior should always reflect Christian attitudes, training and values. If disrespectful or disruptive behavior occurs, please address the behavior privately with the student. Sexual harassment and other forms of demeaning behavior have no place in any catechetical program. Guarding the

dignity of all members of the parish community is a priority for all catechist. Therefore, the following policy has been adopted and has been communicated to parents:

- 1st offense:** Catechist warns student
- 2nd offense:** Student sent to Director
- 3rd offense:** Student sent to Director – parent called
- 4th offense:** Student sent to Director – Parent called; student not allowed to return until conference is held with Director, catechist, student and parent

Catechists should involve the Director early in the year when the problem with the child first manifests itself. **The longer you wait before establishing a firm discipline policy, the more difficult your job becomes.**

Use of Bathroom: Our sessions are only one hour and fifteen minutes in length. Therefore, it should be possible for children to remain in class for that entire length of time. Children are to be encouraged to use the lavatory before and after the session. Young people needing to use the bathroom during our session should be accompanied by a peer or an adult volunteer.

Attendance: Weekly attendance in our program and at Mass on Sunday is expected. Class attendance is monitored regularly each week. All absences occur result in the parent being called by office staff within ½ hour of the time class began. If you notice repeat absences, you too should call to check on the welfare of the student.

2. **Parent Contact**

Your initial contact with a child's parent should be positive. Call to introduce yourself or to express your delight in getting to know their child. One of the reasons we call home when a child is absent is to let both the parent and child know that we care and have missed them. You can also contact parents when you need them involved with celebrations, service projects, etc.

3. **Meeting Rooms and Areas**

A. Environment: It is very important that our program not appear as simply "another class". Try to be creative in seating arrangements, use of space, decorations, etc.

B. Cleanliness: Please keep your classroom clean; you are not the only catechist using the room! Before you leave:

1. Clean your chalk or white board
2. Pick up your floor area
3. Straighten the chairs and tables
4. Close windows and doors

Please report any unacceptable conditions or needed repairs to the office.

C. Supplies:

1. Closet and cabinet space is available in the classrooms for the catechists. Use the label in your folder to identify the space you have chosen for the year.
2. Each room will have pencils, crayons, paper, scissors, Bibles, storybooks, etc. either on table or shelves in the room.
3. Materials for your class will be inserted in a folder and placed on the bench outside the office prior to the start of your class session. This folder will also contain your class list. Please return the folder and class list to the office at the conclusion of your class.
4. Additional supplies are located in the supply closet next to the nursery. Please help yourself. If you need additional supplies or notice that materials are in short supply, notify the office.
5. If your class meets in the Community Room, a box of supplies will be placed on the head table.
6. Copies: Please try to give some advance notice to our staff when copies are needed. (5 minutes before start of your class is not sufficient.)

Resources

Christ Our Life blackline masters are available for every chapter of every grade. In addition, the catechist manual contains suggestions for a variety of projects.

Staff: Feel free to see or call us if you need assistance in teaching any session. Please notify the Director **immediately** if you are having difficulty with a student. A special staff area has been created in room 3. A desk, file cabinet and bookcase have been provided for your convenience.

Books and Magazines: There are many resource textbooks, texts and magazines in room 3.. A wide variety of catechist training magazines are available as well. If you would like a particular publication, let us know.

Videos: Many videos are available in the RelForm Conference Room. A list of videos by category can be found. We have obtained several new VCR and Monitors which have been placed in the classrooms. Availability of equipment should not be an issue.

Tapes and CD's: A large variety of audio tapes and cd's is available through the Religious Formation Office.

Other Catechists: You are the best resource to each other. Please use each other's experience, ideas and suggestions.

Clergy and Staff: We are fortunate to have several clergy and staff members willing to work with our catechists and young people. **Please send your request to the Director; we will help schedule them into your programs.**

5 Additional Information

Celebrations: There are certain holidays, Church feast days, etc. that we will celebrate together. As a Catechist, you may have additional celebrations in your meeting room. Please give advance notice to the RE Office when planning a celebration. Please note: We must enforce a **NO FOOD OR DRINK IN THE MEETING ROOMS** policy. Any celebration involving drinks and cookies, cake, etc. must be approved in advance by the Director and then consumed in the Community Room.

Outdoor Sessions: As a general rule, classes take place in the classroom. However, we do have beautiful outdoor surroundings. . If you wish to conduct an outdoor session, please contact the RE Office to discuss your plans and obtain permission. Misbehavior on the part of anyone in the class will result in outdoor privileges being withdrawn.

Meeting Area: Each catechist is assigned a meeting room or area for the year. Use of any other part of the facility can only be granted with prior approval from the Director. We encourage you to make use of the Church. Sometimes more than one class will be in the Church at the same time; other times a parishioner will be present for prayer. Remember to extend courtesy to all present.

Snacks: Parents are asked to provide a snack for their child prior to the start of the class session. Students arriving on Westport Transit can eat their snack in the kitchen. We have asked catechists in the past to clean their room and waste baskets after having snacks. Unfortunately, that request has not been requested, resulting in health problems. Therefore, we have had to adopt this policy: **No food, snacks or drinks are allowed in the meeting rooms or in hallways.**

Children's Liturgy of the Word: Catechists are invited to lead a Liturgy of the Word when convenient for them. These Liturgies are celebrated in the Community Room. Please notify Judy Torska in the Rectory Office or Deacon Lance if you are interested.

Service Projects: Each class will be encouraged to participate in the Christmas Fair Project in the fall. Other opportunities for participation exist as well. All service projects are coordinated through the Religious Formation Office. Permission slips will be provided if the activity is off St. Luke premises. Parents are urged to participate with their children.

The Religious Formation Office desires to work closely with various commissions within St. Luke as well as the Youth Group. It is our belief that only through our joint efforts will we continue to build a strong parish.

Bulletin Boards: We have several bulletin boards in the classroom hallways. Please feel free to place your students work on the boards in the hallways and in your classrooms.

Catechist Personal Space: Cabinet space has been provided in most classrooms for the use by Catechists. Since space is limited, you will probably need to share with another catechist. However, once you have identified the space you will use, it will be yours for the remainder of the year. **Please: No Food or Candy!**