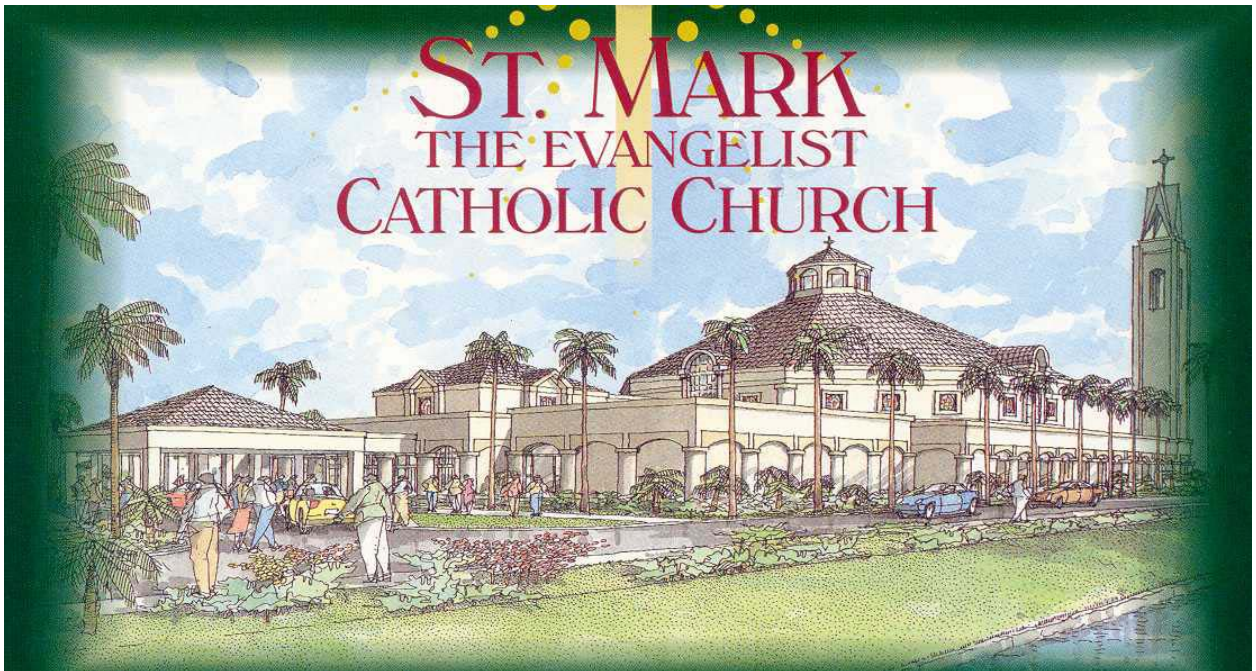


ST. MARK
THE EVANGELIST
CATHOLIC CHURCH

SCHOOL OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
2010-2011

PARENT / STUDENT HANDBOOK



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GREETINGS FROM REV. EDMOND WHYTE, PASTOR

Welcome to Saint Mark Catholic Church, School of Religious Education. Thank you for allowing us to join you in your children's spiritual formation.

It is our sincere goal to provide the highest quality religious education program based on authentic Roman Catholic doctrine, tradition and principles.

To help ensure this, we have made every effort to supply our staff, catechists, and volunteers with the best resources available. We have and will continue to provide opportunities for their continued spiritual development so they in turn may teach your children solid Catholic doctrine and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

However, if we are to realize our goals, we need the full cooperation of parents and students. Our students and their families are expected to attend Mass regularly and to be involved in other parish events. We sincerely hope you will take full advantage of all that Saint Mark Parish has to offer. We look forward to another great year.

Mission

Religious formation is the core of the religious education program's educational mission. This formation is accomplished through the building of a community of faith within the religious education program and through instruction of the children in an age-appropriate understanding of the Catholic faith. The Catholic religious education program should be one that respects the individual child, and provides personal support and a sense of belonging to each child.

Objectives

- * To help students acquire both experience and knowledge of their faith, and to instill in them a love for God and His Word, for self, family, and neighbor.

- * To educate students in sound Roman Catholic doctrine so they can relate their personal world as children of God with their duties as participatory members of their Church, country and community.

- * To invite students to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through instruction in their faith and participation in liturgical, para-liturgical, service and sacramental experiences.

- * To create a healthy respect for self, all life, the family, the Church, the community and the environment by emphasizing Catholicism as a mode of living.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Address/Telephone

Change of address or telephone numbers must be reported immediately to the office of Religious Education and a note written to your child's teacher.

Administration

The Pastor is responsible for the Religious Educational Program in the Parish. He has appointed Susan W. Mikluscak to serve as the Director of the Program.

Arrival and Dismissal Policy

The children are to arrive no earlier than ten minutes prior to class beginning. Parents are expected to adhere to all parking and traffic directions. Be aware that these are subject to change throughout the year.

This year brings a change in our arrival and dismissal policy. We will no longer provide a carline. All students are considered "Park and Walk" students. All families are to park in the Archbishop McCarthy High School parking lot and enter St. Mark property on foot through the pedestrian walk way. Students are to be escorted by their parent/guardian to their classroom. Please do not enter the classroom or leave your children until an adult catechist has arrived. All parents and other visitors are asked to exit the building prior to the beginning of class. If you are volunteering or have other business in the building, proceed to the Hospitality Desk in the South school building to sign-in and receive a visitor's pass. All persons in the building must have an identification tag or pass.

All students in grades kindergarten through fifth will be dismissed from their classrooms. All other students, in grades sixth through high school will dismiss from the piazza.

(See Park and Walk)

All students will be dismissed only to a parent or authorized person. Older siblings, in grades sixth through high school may walk younger siblings to the piazza if designated by the parent on the first night as an authorized person. They may not walk them to their car or be asked to wait in any other location than the designated piazza area. High School students who drive themselves and their siblings to Religious Education sessions are the only exception to this rule. In this case, the parent/guardians are to notify the office of this arrangement in writing in advance. Car pool participants are reminded to designate the drivers as authorized persons.

Any child who has not been picked up ten minutes after dismissal time will be sent to the office and their parent(s) will be called. Due to our large enrollment please adhere to this policy to ensure the safety of your child. Please do not ask

your children to disregard our policies. If you have extenuating circumstances please contact the Director of Religious Education.
(See Release of Students)

Attendance

The Archdiocese of Miami recommends the Religious Education Department of a parish supply 30 hours of catechetical instruction to students each year. Students are expected to attend all 30 hours.

We realize, of course, that sickness and family emergencies will arise during the school year.

Students returning to class following an absence are asked to present a written excuse signed by a parent stipulating the reason and the date of the absence. The student's catechist or the office of Religious Education will call after two consecutive absences. Our concern is for the well being of the student and the family. If there is any situation or health issue we should be aware of or can be of assistance with, please contact the office.

Parents have the responsibility to see that their children are on time for school. Excessive tardiness will result in a parent conference with the Director of Religious Education. A student is tardy after 4:00PM, 5:00PM or 7:00PM depending upon the designated session. If arriving late, parents are asked to escort their children to the hospitality desk to receive a pass.

Confirmation and Communion Parents are expected to attend the parent sessions during the sacramental preparation years. If for any reason you are unable to attend please call the office of Religious Education. (See Sacramental Guidelines.)

Mass attendance is essential. Please make Mass attendance a family priority!

Regular weekly attendance fosters the child's growth in knowledge of Catholic doctrine and tradition as well as nurturing the understanding of service and community.

Children are expected to participate in the continuous Religious Education process each year from first grade through confirmation in order to derive the maximum benefit of our curriculum, which is designed to enrich their formation of faith.

Cellular Telephones

Students are not permitted to use cellular telephones while in class. The catechist will remove the student's phone if necessary. Parents will need to see the catechist or a member of the Religious Education staff for the phone to be returned.

Parents are to refrain from using cellular telephones during the arrival and dismissal process to help ensure the safety of our students.

Communications

Parental Communications with the Religious Education Program

Communication between home and school is a vital part of the Religious Education process. All those involved in the Religious Education Program strive to have an ongoing relationship with the families of our students. We encourage you to come, call, or write to us if you have any concerns regarding your child.

Persons with concerns about a catechist should first attempt to address the concern with the catechist. Only after such attempts have failed, should the parent contact the parish Director of Religious Education. If the parent continues to be dissatisfied, the parent should contact the pastor. Only after such attempts have failed should the Department of Religious Education of the Archdiocese of Miami be contacted.

Parent/Catechist Communications

Catechists are always eager to discuss a student's needs or progress with parents or guardians. If a problem should arise concerning your child and a classroom situation, please contact the individual catechist first, before referring it to the director or pastor.

Parent/ Department of Religious Education Communications

We ask that you carefully read all materials sent to your home via mail, email or carried home by your student. These important communications could reflect changes in previous publications and will supersede any prior communication.

Conduct, Whether Inside or Outside the Religious Education Program

(See Code of Conduct)

Confidentiality

Catechists/Volunteers will keep confidential information entrusted to them as long as no one's life, health or safety is at stake. In these cases, parents will be promptly notified of the concerns.

Cooperation with Legal Authorities

It is the practice of the religious education program to cooperate with any local, state, or federal investigators or law enforcement officers that contact the religious education program in the course of any criminal investigations. The religious education program will attempt to notify the parents of any students sought to be interviewed in the course of a criminal investigation on the Church and school premises, unless directed by an investigator or law enforcement officer to the contrary, which is usually the case in investigations involving sexual or physical abuse. The religious education program will attempt as well to have

a representative present during such an interview, unless this is not permitted by the investigators, which is often the case in investigations involving sexual or physical abuse.

Custodial Rights

In the case of divorced parents, the religious education program will interact with the parent who has legal custody of the child. The religious education program ordinarily will deal with the parent having legal custody in matters of absence, lateness, truancy, early dismissal, disciplinary issues, religious education program records, authorization to receive sacraments etc. Access to in-person conferences and the records and information pertaining to a minor child, including, but not limited to religious education program records, may not be denied to a parent because the parent is not the child's primary residential parent. Full rights apply to either parent unless a court order specifically revokes these rights. In the latter case, it is custodial parent's responsibility to provide evidence of such a court order.

Dismissal (See Arrival & Dismissal Policy)

Dress Code

Students are expected to dress appropriately when attending religious education classes. Clothing that is too short, too tight, or that contain vulgar or suggestive graphics and undergarments that are clearly visible are considered inappropriate. Students wearing inappropriate clothing will be brought to the office and the parents will be called.

Emergency Information

If a family emergency arises while a student is attending religious education parents are to call the office of Religious Education. Please do not call the student direct.

The policy of the religious education program with regard to religious education program closings in cases of emergencies is to follow the decisions of the Public Schools in the county in which the religious education program is located. Parents should listen to broadcasts and keep their children home on days when the local public schools are closed.

Emergency Treatment

You will be notified immediately in case of sudden illness or accidents of a serious nature. Please be certain that the office has the correct information and phone numbers (cellular phones, beepers) to contact parents/guardians and emergency contact persons listed on your registration forms. Please notify the office of any changes during the year. In a situation that would require immediate medical care, we will contact the first person listed. The School of Religious Education is not permitted to send a child to a doctor for emergency treatment without the permission of a parent or guardian. The signature on the front of your

child's registration form empowers the school authorities to exercise their own judgment in calling the physician listed or if not available, to transport the child to an emergency room.

Parents of children with severe allergies or disorders are asked to share that information with the administration and state it on the student's registration form.

Field Trips

Field trips are privileges given to students; no student has an absolute right to a field trip. Students can be denied participation if they fail to meet academic and/or behavioral requirements.

Parents may always refuse to allow their child to participate in a field trip.

Students are required to bring a parental permission slip, which releases the religious education program from liability in order to participate in a field trip. Students who fail to submit a proper form will not be allowed to participate in the field trip. Telephone calls will not be accepted in lieu of written permission.

Fundraisers

Saint Mark Religious Education will have fundraisers during the year. We encourage every family to participate and cooperate in these endeavors. We also have a partnership with the women and men's club of our parish, whereby we support each other's endeavors.

Harassment

The Archdiocese of Miami religious education programs are committed to providing a religious education program environment that is free of discrimination. In keeping with this commitment, our parish will not tolerate harassment of employees, volunteers, or students occurring in the religious education program or at religious education program-sponsored events.

Harassment consists of unwelcome conduct, whether verbal, physical, and/or visual, that is based on a person's protected status, such as sex, color, race, ancestry, national origin, or other protected group status. The Archdiocesan religious education programs will not tolerate harassing conduct that affects tangible job benefits, that interferes unreasonably with an individual's work performance, or that creates intimidating, offensive, or hostile environment.

If any employee or volunteer or student feels that he/she has experienced or witnessed harassment, that person must immediately notify her/his Director of Religious Education. However, if the Director of Religious Education is the individual who is believed to be harassing the employee, volunteer or student, then the employee, volunteer or student notifies the Pastor who will conduct an investigation. An appeal would be made to the Director of Religious Education Programs or the Vicar for Education. The Archdiocese forbids retaliation against

anyone who has reported harassment.

Holiday Celebrations

These celebrations will focus on our Faith (Advent, Christmas, and Easter etc.). All plans for parties/celebrations will be at the discretion of the catechists and the administration. All holiday celebrations, if approved, may have store bought food goods only. Florida law prohibits "home-baked" goods.

Homework/Project Guidelines

Homework is given at the discretion of the individual catechist. The purpose of homework is to expand the child's understanding of the concepts they have learned in class. Homework projects are a wonderful opportunity to involve family participation.

Hours

The children are to arrive no earlier than ten minutes prior to class beginning. Any child who has not been picked up fifteen minutes after dismissal time will be sent to the office and their parent(s)/guardian will be called. Due to our large enrollment please adhere to this policy to ensure the safety of your child.

Illness

You will be notified immediately in case of sudden illness or accidents of a serious nature. We are not equipped to take care of your child other than for minor first-aid treatment. (See Emergency Treatment)

Inclement Weather Conditions

If a tropical storm or other extreme weather conditions arise during the Religious Education scheduled time, please keep your children home. We will observe the same regulations as Broward County Schools as to whether or not classes will be in session during hurricanes or severe storm days.

Insurance of Students

The Archdiocese purchases general liability insurances which covers the students in our religious education programs during the times that the students are involved in the activities of the program or are traveling on parish-arranged transportation.

Items Brought From Home

Expensive items should not be brought to Religious Education classes. This includes Gameboys, CD players and Cellular Telephones. If students bring such items they will be held by the catechist until the parents come to retrieve the items. Toys or articles that symbolize war, violence or immorality are not acceptable at Saint Mark Catholic School of Religious Education.

Lost and Found

To avoid frequent loss of items, please mark all belongings with your child's

name. Lost items will remain in the office for two weeks. If they have not been claimed they are given to the needy.

Make-up Class Work

If your child is absent please notify the teacher upon his or her return. Please include an explanation of absenteeism, date etc. At the individual catechist's discretion, make-up work will be assigned.

Mass

Religious Education classes are not a substitute for regular mass attendance. Our Parish community is invited and strongly encouraged to attend weekly mass.

Medication Procedures

The administering of medicine to a child outside the doctor's office or health institution is a parental responsibility and should not be delegated to religious education program personnel except under unusual circumstances. Only when absolutely necessary is the religious education program willing to accept responsibility for administering medications, and then under the following guidelines:

The school will never administer/dispense medicines, including "over the counter" drugs, to students without specific authorization by both a licensed physician and the parent of the students. An "Authorization for Medication" form must be completed and submitted by the parent. The name of the medication and dosage must be indicated on this form.

All medication must be brought to the office with a parent's authorization.

Only prescription medication can be brought to religious education program and must be stored in a religious education program office; no over-the-counter medication is allowed, unless a doctor's written authorization is submitted.

Prescription medication must be in original bottle, which must be with labeled with prescribed dosage.

All medications will remain in a secure location. (By exception, students who are asthmatic may carry a prescribed inhaler with them during the session.) A written log will be kept of dispensed medication.

Students are forbidden to have in their possession any type of over the counter medication such as aspirin, cough drops, eye drops, etc.

Monetary Collections

Money is not to be collected or solicited for any reason unless, permission has been given by the director. There are no exceptions to this policy.

Park and Walk (See Arrival and Dismissal)

All students are considered “Park and Walk” students. They are to be escorted by their parent/guardian to their classroom. Please do not enter the classroom or leave your children until an adult catechist has arrived. All parents and other visitors are asked to exit the building prior to the beginning of class. If you are volunteering or have other business in the building, proceed to the Hospitality Desk in the South school building to sign-in and receive a visitor’s pass. All persons in the building must have an identification tag or pass.

Students in grades kindergarten through fifth will be dismissed from their classrooms. Students in grades sixth through high school will dismiss from the piazza.

Public Display of Affection

The Catholic religious education program promotes friendship, charity, kindness, love and respect for self and others. However, inappropriate displays of affection, such as kissing or embracing which connote more than simple friendship, are not permitted in the religious education program or at any religious education program event. The administration reserves the right to determine what is appropriate behavior in a Catholic religious education program.

Registrations

No person on the grounds of race, color, or national origin is excluded or otherwise subjected to discrimination in receiving services provided by the religious education program. Nor do we discriminate in receiving hiring, promotion, discharge, pay, fringe benefits, job training, classification, referral and other aspects of employment on the basis of race, color, disability, age, sex or national origin.

It is the goal of the parish to provide religious education for every child in the parish. In rare cases, the parish may not be able to invite a student into the program because it does not have the resources to meet the special needs of the child. In such cases, the parish will assist the parents in providing catechesis for their child, especially in preparation for the sacraments.

In matters of admission to the program or to the reception of a sacrament, the pastor is responsible for a decision.

Release of Students

A child should never be released early without the knowledge of the parent/guardian. The Director of Religious Education will release the child only to the person who has placed the child in the religious education program. Any other person seeking release of the child must have the approval of the parent with legal custody, which ordinarily shall be in writing.

Religious Education Program Records

The following records are kept in the official file of the student: sacramental records, health records and emergency information. Only the contents of the official file will be forwarded to a new religious education program.

Reporting Physical/ Sexual Abuse

Parents and guardians should understand that State law requires a teacher or administrator who has reasonable suspicion that sexual or physical abuse has occurred to report this to the Division of Children and Family Services. The teacher or administrator who fails to fulfill this responsibility can be charged with sexual or physical abuse, because the silence contributes to the crime.

Safety Plan

The Parish intends to provide a safe environment for the children attending Religious Education Sessions. For this reason, the Religious Education Program has developed a Safety Plan. A copy of this is available in the Office of the Director of Religious Education where the parent may read it.

Sacramental Preparation

St. Mark Religious Education follows the two-year preparation guideline given by the Archdiocese of Miami for the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation. Throughout the year, children, parents and sponsors will be asked to attend various programs intended to nourish and strengthen one's faith and spirituality. Please be sure to refer to the calendar for all meeting dates and times in reference to the particular sacrament your child will receive. Attendance of these meetings is a requirement.

School Property

Accidental damage to school or church property must be reported immediately to the office. The students should develop pride in trying to keep their classrooms and school surroundings in good condition. Sharing a facility can have obvious challenges, but with proper respect for each other and each other's property, we can work together to create a harmonious environment. Willful or deliberate damage to school property will be brought to the director's attention. This is cause for the dismissal from the Religious Education Program.

Search and Seizure

The Director of Religious Education or his/her delegate in our religious education programs has access to the desks, handbags, cars or any other object that is brought onto the campus of the religious education program, and may remove any object which is illegal or contrary to religious education program policy.

Security

St. Mark Department of Religious Education intent is to provide a safe and secure environment for our students and our employees. After depositing your children into their classrooms you are asked to exit the building. After that time

the doors will be secured until the staff opens them for dismissal. Please do not open doors for anyone that you do not know. The office will assume responsibility for this. All visitors are to use the entrance in the south school building to sign-in and receive a pass. We have filed a plan of evacuation/security with Broward Sheriff's Office and the Archdiocese of Miami Department of Schools and Religious Education.

Social Justice /Community Service Programs

The Social Justice/Community Service Programs provide the opportunity for students to share their time and talent with their community. Participation in this Social Justice Program is required for all Pre-Confirmation and Confirmation Candidates. (See Confirmation Packet)

Spirit Day

All Confirmation Candidates are required to participate in a spiritual retreat. (See Confirmation Packet)

Student Withdrawal

The education of a student is a partnership between the parents and the religious education program. The Church considers the parents to be the primary catechists of their children. Just as the parent has the right to withdraw a child if desired, the religious education program administration reserves the right to require the withdrawal of a student if the administration determines that the partnership is irretrievably broken.

As a part of this partnership, parents are expected to pay the tuition that is charged for the Religious Education Program.

Substance Abuse Policy

The use or possession of illegal drugs or illegal mood altering substances, alcoholic beverages, drug-related paraphernalia, or the abuse of prescription or over-the-counter drugs by any student on parish property or while attending or participating in any religious education program sponsored activity is forbidden. Transgression of this rule will result in disciplinary action, which may include dismissal from religious education program, even for a first offense.

Any student selling drugs on religious education program property or at religious education program functions will be immediately expelled. All Archdiocesan religious education programs are committed to a drug free environment.

Textbooks

All text/workbooks must be treated with care. If a book is damaged or lost during the school year a new book should be purchased. Students are expected to bring their text/workbooks to class every week until the last session.

Use of Student Pictures

The religious education program reserves the right to use student pictures in publications. Any parent who does not wish his or her child's picture used must notify the Director of Religious Education in writing prior to the beginning of the religious education program year.

Visitors

All visitors are to enter the east entrance to the south school building and proceed to the Hospitality Desk to sign-in and receive a visitor's pass. All persons in the building must have an identification tag or a pass.

The office of Religious Education is located in the Parish Center.

All catechists, Religious Education personnel and students are required to report any visitor, not identified, to the office of Religious Education immediately.

Volunteers

There are many opportunities for parents, grandparents and parishioners to become involved in the Religious Education process. Volunteers are a vital part of our Religious Education Program. Anyone who wishes to volunteer must complete and return an Archdiocese of Miami Volunteer Application form, a Volunteer Code of Conduct sheet, be fingerprinted and have a national background check completed, as well as attend and participate in the VIRTUS, "Protecting God's Children" workshop and certification program promoted by the Archdiocese of Miami.

All Catechists and volunteers must check in at the Office of Religious Education. All parents, or any other visitors, must check in at the Hospitality Desk in the south school building, prior to entering the hallways or classrooms. No one is permitted to go through the building, after the session has started, without stopping at the Hospitality Desk to receive a visitors pass.

When assisting in individual classrooms, we ask that no discussion take place regarding individual student's circumstances. Confidential matters that are seen or heard in a classroom should remain confidential at all times. If you have any concerns regarding a student, catechist or fellow volunteer please contact the director. (See Confidentiality)

Weapons Policy

Weapons are not permitted anywhere on religious education program grounds. Students who bring weapons on religious education program grounds, who are in possession of weapons, or who threaten others with weapons or items used as weapons will be expelled from the religious education program.

CODE OF CONDUCT

Conduct, Whether Inside or Outside the Religious Education Program

A student who engages in conduct, whether inside or outside the religious education program, that is contrary to the moral code of the Church may be asked to leave the program.

Parental Responsibilities

Saint Mark Church and School of Religious Education believe that the ultimate responsibility for a student's behavior rests with the parents/guardians. Students are to respect authority, which includes adherence to school rules, regulations and procedures. We anticipate that parents will be concerned and cooperative in dealing with behavioral problems and expect that this cooperation is made apparent to the student.

Behavioral expectations of students: Students must show respect to all adults and students at all times.

No rudeness, use of vulgar or indecent language, or other inappropriate behavior will be tolerated.

No roughness or fighting in classrooms or on church grounds at any time will be tolerated.

Damaging or mishandling any school property, desks, walls, etc. or theft or personal or school property will be considered serious violations of good conduct.

Saint Mark Department of Religious Education has adopted a zero tolerance policy for weapons, drugs, and controlled substances, gang affiliation, threats and physical assaults.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM POLICY AND DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION'S RIGHT TO AMEND

Any student action that is not in keeping with the philosophy/objective of Saint Mark Religious Education Program is subject to the review of the administrator and may lead the parish to dismiss the student from the religious education program.

Since situations can arise that were not foreseen at the time of writing this Handbook, the religious education program reserves the right to initiate, change or modify the policies as needed. Parents and students will be notified of any amendments.

The Director of Religious Education and/or Pastor is the final recourse in all disciplinary situations and may waive any disciplinary rules for just cause at his/her discretion.