



ST. BERNARD'S CATHOLIC CHURCH
"A Stewardship Community"

Faith Formation Parent Handbook 2016 - 2017



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Mission Statement

Catechesis is essential for developing a personal relationship with Jesus as the foundation for discipleship.

"At the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth...To catechize is to reveal in the Person of Christ the whole of God's eternal design reaching fulfillment in that Person...Catechesis aims at putting people in communion with Jesus Christ..." (Catechism of the Catholic Church #426)

Goals and Objectives

- To support parents in the formation of their children in the Catholic faith.
- To provide a program that develops the participant's knowledge of the Catholic faith.
- To nurture a student's desire to develop a personal relationship with Jesus.
- To enrich their Spiritual life through prayer and the Sacraments.
- To encourage families to actively participate in the Parish life.

WE BELIEVE...

- The home is the most influential force in the life of a child and that the family has primary responsibility for forming the faith of children.
- Faith Formation programming supplements the family's faith development process.
- Catechists are faith-filled people called by God to be a witness for Jesus Christ and to share the Good News of their faith to bring others to Christ.

OUR FOCUS:

- To provide a safe and supportive environment for the growth of each student in the spiritual and moral aspects of his/her life.
- To give each student the opportunity to be heard, understood and valued as a precious child of God.
- To help each student recognize God's love in all aspects of life.

Youth Programs

- **Baptism of Children**
 - Designed for children from aged 0 – 6 years old.
 - Children in grades 2 - 5 need to apply for the Religious Education program.
 - Students in grades 6 or above apply for the R.C.I.C. program.
- **First Communion/Reconciliation Preparation**
 - Open to baptized students in 2nd grade or above.
 - Two year process.
 - Parents are required to attend “Classes for parents of Communion Prep Students.
- **Enrichment Classes**
 - Open to students who have received the Sacraments of Baptism and First Holy Communion, but not ready to enroll in the Confirmation process.
- **R.C.I.C. Programs**
 - Open to students in sixth grade or above who have not yet been Baptized
- **Confirmation**
 - Open to students in grades 6 – 12, who have been baptized and have received their First Holy Communion.
- **R. E. S. P. E. C. T.**
 - Religious Education for Special People Encountering Christ Together is a special religious program designed for the mentally challenged Christian 12 years of age and above. It is taught under the instruction of the *Rose Fitzgerald Program to Improve Catholic Religious Education for Children and Adults with Mental Challenges.*

Adult Programs:

- **R.C.I.A.**
 - **Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (R.C.I.A)** - is designed for adults who have never been baptized, perhaps been baptized in another faith, or Baptized Catholic but never received First Holy Communion and Confirmation.
- **Adult Faith Formation**
 - Open to adults over the age of 18 that have been baptized and have yet to receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist, Confirmation or both.
 - Adults who are returning to the Faith seeking a “refresher” course, are welcomed to attend this course..

Program Registration and Participation Requirements

- Family and/or participant must be registered member/s of St. Bernard's Parish.
- Completion of Registration packet in the desired program.
- At time of registration, submit a copy of Birth and Baptismal Certificates.
- Payment of registration fees.
- Attendance at all sacramental preparation classes.
- Attendance at any special sessions, as required by selected program.
- Attendance at Mass each Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation.

Registration Process

Registration is done yearly, through the Office of Faith Formation in early spring. Orientation meetings, registration dates and location will be posted in the Church Bulletin in February. Registration is done on a first come first served basis; the registration packets, received at orientation meetings, must be submitted complete at registration.

Tuition Fee Policy

- Tuition fees are due at the time of registration. In the event of financial hardship, financial assistance is available on request; details will be discussed on an individual basis.
- Payment Plan – Initial down payment required, with monthly payments, details will be discussed on an individual basis.
- Refund Policy – fees are not refundable after the second week of program start.

Records Policy

Student information will be released *only* to authorized persons. When Students receive the Sacraments of Initiation at St. Bernard's, the information is recorded in the Parish Office. Records are forwarded to the Church of the student's Baptism.

Attendance Policy

- The attendance requirements have been developed according to Diocesan guidelines and should be met in order for participants to celebrate their Sacraments; therefore, attendance will be recorded at ALL events. Partial attendance may be considered non-attendance.
- Attendance is the responsibility of the parents. Please establish Faith Formation as a top priority – if you don't, neither will your child. Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes, Masses, retreats and family events. Arrive on time, but not more than 15 minutes before class begins. There will be no supervision prior to that time. Doors to the building will be locked 20 minutes after classes are in session. If your child arrives after that you will need to call the Faith Formation emergency line, (209-321-3073) to gain access. ***Please note: excessive absences may affect your students status within the program.***
- If a participant is going to be absent: it is the participant's or participant's parent's responsibility to contact, by telephone or email, the Faith Formation Department. A reason for the absence must be stated in the message if voice mail is reached.
- Parents with students in sacramental preparation programs are responsible for attending parent meetings, which provide you with both adult education and information about the sacrament and its celebration.

Entering, Gathering, and Departing Class

- Please drop off and pick up children as close to the entrance as possible.
- Please be PROMPT in picking up your children. After 15 minutes, children will be required to wait inside to be picked up, as we do not want any child to be left alone outside without supervision.
- Parents or Guardians may designate another adult to pick up their child; they must complete a “**Student Pick-up Policy Form**” sheet at the Parish Office. Students must be escorted off campus by an adult 18 years or older.
- Students are not allowed to leave the campus unaccompanied, if parents/guardians wish to authorize their child to do so, they must complete a “**Student Release Policy Form**” at the Parish Office.
- The Faith Formation emergency phone line at 209-321-3073 to utilize in times of **emergencies**.

Dress Code Policy

Appropriate dress reflects a reverence for Our Lord; it assists our young people to develop a respect for the virtue of modesty and promotes a sense of self-respect and mutual respect for one another. Anyone who dresses inappropriately will be asked to go home, change, and return to class.

- No Tank tops – (girls or boys).
- No words or designs on tee shirts that is offensive to our **faith**.
- No short shorts, skirts, or dresses.
- No sagging pants.

Health Concerns/Medication/First Aid

- Parents will be directed to a complete an emergency information card. This information is confidential and will assist us in better serving your student in cases of medical emergencies.
- We will apply a band-aid or ice to an injury if one occurs, but we cannot act further. We cannot administer any medication. In cases where any further action is deemed necessary, parents and/or medical personnel will be notified.
- In case of emergency, we will use prudent judgment in determining action, and in all cases, make every attempt to contact a parent or designated adult and in serious matters “Emergency Personnel” will be contacted.

Emergency Procedures

- During class times on a staggered schedule, students and catechist will practice for emergency events that might occur. These practices are to ensure that all will be prepared if an emergency should arise.

Behavior & Discipline

- Please convey to your child/children that their catechists are volunteers who give of their time to share their Catholic faith. They do this because of their love for God and their love for God’s children. They deserve to be treated with respect.
- Students are expected to conduct themselves in a Christian manner, showing respect for all catechists and other students, before class begins, while class is in session and after class has been dismissed. All electronic devices should be turned off during class time. If this request is ignored the catechist will take the device away until the end of class. Disruptive behavior will be dealt with in the following manner:
 - Catechists will remind the student of proper behavior and will expect cooperation from the student.
 - The Director will handle continued disruptive behavior.
 - In the case of on-going discipline problems, parents will be required to meet with the Director

Take Home Materials

- Students will regularly bring home information or assignments. Please make sure you ask your child each week what they have to share.
- In addition, we will use email, weekly updates, church bulletin and pulpit announcements as avenues to disseminate important information.

Homework

- We realize that students’ schedules are hectic, so we are careful not to assign busy work. When outside work is necessary parents are encouraged to work with their child to complete the assignment.

Parent Involvement

Parents make the commitment at the time of their child's Baptism to be responsible for the development of the faith life of their child. It is only through collaboration with parents that we can achieve our purpose and goals – that being -- to assist parents in fulfilling their responsibility. Parish faith formation is the mutual effort of the Parish and the family system. Parents/legal guardians are expected to support the faith development of their children and teens by:

- Participating in Mass every weekend
- Encouraging their child's faith life at home
- Making attendance at religious education sessions and youth activities a priority in the family calendar.
- Contributing to the Parish through Stewardship commitment of time, talent, and treasure to the extent that you are conscientiously able

Guests

- Friends MAY NOT accompany students to class. Our classroom space is limited and we are responsible for the safety of all children on our property. For security and safety reasons; adults not authorized by the Parish and/or the Diocese will be restricted from entering classroom areas. Parent visits to classes must be pre-arranged with Director in accordance of Diocesan policy and pastor approval.

Communication

- Attempting to work out difficulties mutually is certainly consistent with the demands of the Gospel. If a parent wishes to communicate with a Catechist, they may do so directly providing it does not interfere with class time. If a parent wishes a more formal conference it would be necessary to make an appointment through the Coordinator. The Director and/or Catechist may wish to request a conference with the parent. This will be via an appointment in the Director's office.
- Information will be disseminated via the Parish bulletin every week. All efforts will be made to include updates and vital information on the Faith Formation pages of our Parish website: <http://www.st-bernards.org>.

ENROLLMENT GUIDELINES FIRST EUCHARIST, FIRST RECONCILIATION & CONFIRMATION

- **An up-to-date Baptismal Certificate is REQUIRED before the reception of the Sacraments.**
- **The Sacraments of First Reconciliation & First Eucharist are usually celebrated in the Third Grade or above.**
- **The Sacrament of Confirmation is usually celebrated in the Seventh Grade or above.**

FIRST RECONCILIATION: SACRAMENT OF HEALING

- The Sacrament of Reconciliation celebrates God's healing and forgiveness. When the priest prays the words of absolution, we experience the mercy of God and are more able to forgive those who have hurt us.
- The First Reconciliation Celebration usually takes place in late January early February.
- First Reconciliation preparation is a partnership between the home and the parish. Parents must attend family sessions to receive the information and materials needed to help prepare their child for reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation You will be given the background information you need to understand the process, the moral development of children, and the "how to" of Reconciliation.

FIRST EUCHARIST: SACRAMENT OF INITIATION

- The Eucharist is the central celebration of the Church. We listen to the Word of God during the Liturgy of the Word and witness Jesus' sacrifice of love when we celebrate the Liturgy of the Eucharist.
- As Catholics, we believe that Jesus is actually present to us in the Eucharistic Bread and Wine.
- Families are an integral part of the First Eucharist preparation process for children to receive Jesus in the form of Eucharist into their hearts and lives. Parents attend parent classes to learn more about the Mass and the Liturgy of the Eucharist; focus on prayer as preparation to receive Jesus; enhance the understanding of the Eucharistic celebration by comparing setting the family table with setting the Lord's Table.

YOUTH CONFIRMATION: SACRAMENT OF INITIATION

- The Sacrament of Confirmation is a celebration of the gift of God's Spirit in our lives.
- The gift of the Holy Spirit guides believers more perfectly to Christ and gives them strength to become adult Disciples of Christ.
- The two years of formal preparation for the Sacrament is best seen as a continuation of catechesis as well as a time of discernment.
- Therefore, students requesting the sacrament of Confirmation must:
 - Be in middle or high school and at least 11 years old.
 - Attend the Parent/Student Orientation in fall.
 - Attend classes as scheduled.
 - Attend a retreat each year of preparation.
 - Complete the Parish and Community Service components.
 - Participate in an interview prior to the Celebration of the Sacrament.
 - Attend with Sponsor (or a parent stand-in) the Practice before Confirmation.
 - By completing these requirements, the student will be prepared to make the final decision regarding whether or not they are ready to be confirmed.