

Vision Statement

St. Michael the Archangel Parish believes that catechesis involves the whole faith community and begins within the family. This process empowers people to live their mission as the Body of Christ within the Church and the larger world community.

Mission Statement

St. Michael's Faith Formation Program seeks to help strengthen the faith and Catholic identity of its students. Through prayer, education, service and preparation for the sacraments each person is better able to profess and live the Gospel.

Introduction: Forming Disciples - Our Catholic Tradition

The Catholic Church has issued many documents that describe the ministry of catechesis. This program is based upon the principles and guidelines found in these documents. *The General Directory for Catechesis* (1997), *The National Directory for catechesis* (2005), *The Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Ed.* (1997) as well as diocesan statements on the ministry of catechesis provides a framework for our parish programs. The following is a summary of the most important directives provided by these documents and a clarification of how they help guide the catechetical program in this parish.

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.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, #5

The National Directory for Catechesis (2005) further clarifies what elements should be a part of a quality catechetical program:

A parish is a community of the Christian faithful established within a diocese. The pastoral care of a parish is entrusted to a pastor under the authority of the diocesan bishop. The parish is 'the primary experience of the Church' (*Our Hearts Were Burning*, 1999, #114) for most Catholics. It is where the faithful gather for the celebration of the sacraments and the proclamation of the word of God, and where they are enabled to live distinctively Christian lives of charity and service in their family, economic, and civic situations.

The parish is the preeminent place for the catechesis of adults, youth, and children. 'Knowledge of the faith, liturgical life, the following of Christ are all a gift of the Spirit which are received in prayer, and similarly a duty of spiritual and moral study and witness. Neither aspect may be neglected' (*General Directory For Catechesis*, 1997, #87). Pastors have the duty to provide catechesis; parishioners have the reciprocal duty to participate in and support the catechetical activities of the parish. Parish catechetical efforts should be in harmony with the catechetical goals and objectives of the diocese.

National Directory For Catechesis (2005) Ch. 9, #60, p. 254-255

Elements of Catechesis

This Faith Formation Program includes 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 student, their family and the larger faith community.

Community

Through interaction and faith sharing, efforts will be made to form Christian community among students and families.

Worship

To become closer to God and one another, students will experience various forms of prayer and worship

Service

Service and justice, basic to the message of Jesus and the teachings of the Church, will be modeled and taught.

Program Goals

St. Michael the Archangel Parish strives to be a Christian community faithful to the Gospel and the Catholic Tradition. The parish is united in the search to know, love and serve God, self and one another. Our parish offers a rich resource for learning. The goals of our catechetical program are:

1. To provide a program of formal religious instruction for the children and youth of the parish.
2. To support parents in their role as primary educators of their children.
3. To offer sacramental preparation to children and youth.
4. To help youth discover the richness and challenges of Scripture and the teachings and traditions of the Catholic Church.
5. To build a strong Catholic identity among the youth of the parish.
6. To allow youth to experience the Church as community.
7. To deepen the prayer life of children and youth.
8. To motivate youth to live lives rooted in charity and justice based on the moral teachings of the church.
9. To expose students to the liturgical and sacramental richness that is part of the Catholic Tradition.
10. To enable students to become responsible, self-reflecting, loving and praying individuals.
11. To provide programs that meet diverse spiritual needs and life-long formation available to adults of the parish.

Admission Policies

St. Michael the Archangel's religious education program does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, and national origin, physical or mental challenges.

Any family that is registered in St. Michael the Archangel parish may enroll their children in the catechetical program. In order for their children to be admitted, the family must complete the appropriate registration and student information forms and indicate that they have read and accept the policies contained in this handbook. These forms are available from the religious education office.

Students are typically enrolled in the grade in which they are currently attending in school, unless other arrangements are made with the religious education leader.

A general registration session for all children is held yearly during the final months of the school year. Families who wish to enroll their children at other times during the year may do so by contacting the religious education office.

Students with Special Needs

Our parish is committed to providing faith formation for all students with consideration for their individual learning needs. If the needs of students require special assistance, the pastor and faith formation leader will meet with the family to assess the situation. Together they will develop an individualized learning plan, using resources available within the Diocese.

The Role of the Parents

Faith Formation at St. Michael the Archangel Parish is a cooperative effort between parents and catechists. The parish works with parents to support them in their role as primary educator. To help this program run more efficiently, parents are asked to:

1. Register as members of the parish.
2. Provide the parish with information regarding their child's baptism and other sacraments as needed
3. Attend weekly and Holy Day Mass with their children.
4. Teach their children to include faith practices into their daily routine through the establishment of rituals such as family prayer at meal time and bed time.
5. Instruct their children in the beliefs and teachings of the Catholic Church as is outlined in the textbook and program materials, completing any given assignments.
6. Attend Parish Faith Formation Meetings
7. Maintains an open line of communication with the child's catechist.
8. Brings the child to class.
9. Participate in yearly progress reports.
10. Help children, when able, to attend special activities designated as part of our program such as retreats, youth rallies, special liturgies, ski trip and social gatherings, assisting in the activities when able and as needed.
11. Communicate with the leader and catechist any information necessary for their children's safety and wellbeing when participating in parish activities
12. Reads this handbook, completes and turns in the forms necessary for registration.
13. Informs the religious education leader of the rights of the non-custodial parent in the case of divorce.
14. Informs the religious education leader of any pertinent medical and emergency information.

Protection of Children Policy: Diocese of Erie

The Diocese of Erie is committed to protecting the children and youth who are entrusted to its care and to ensuring that those in ministry with our young people are in right relationship with the children/youth receiving services. At St. Michael the Archangel, we realize sharing in the ministry of Christ is a great privilege as well as a tremendous responsibility. The *privilege* is the joy of sharing in the mission of Jesus Himself. The *responsibility* is acting in a way that conforms to the attitude and actions of Christ.

In this spirit, the diocese has issued a ministerial Code of Conduct, which can be accessed at <http://www.eriecd.org/pdf/codeofconduct.pdf>. The code is included in the diocesan *Policy for the Protection of Children*, which also includes mandates for creating safe environments. To read the policy, go to <http://www.eriecd.org/pdf/protectionpolicy.pdf>. For more information, you may contact Mrs. Cindy Zemcik at czemcik@eriecd.org or at the diocesan offices at 814-824-1195.

At St. Michael the Archangel Parish, Diocesan policies are completely adhered to for our staff and volunteers that have contact with parish children and youth. If you have any questions or concerns, you may contact Elisa Cirell at our office 724-867-0110.

Protection of Children Policy

St. Michael the Archangel's Pastor, Religious education staff and all volunteers who work with children are required to have clearances completed from the PA State Police (Criminal Record Check) and the PA Department of Public Welfare (Child Abuse History Clearance). They must complete all appropriate forms as identified by the diocesan *Policy for the Protection of Children*, <http://www.eriecd.org/pdf/protectionpolicy.pdf>. They are also bound by the Pennsylvania Revised Code and Diocesan Policy of Protection of Children to report suspected or actual child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. All staff, paid and volunteer, must complete an in-service training on protection of children, identification of child abuse and appropriate reporting procedures.

Children are also in-serviced on safety issues each year in an effort to create an aware and informed citizenry. Prevention is the best of all possible outcomes when it comes to child safety.

Catechist/Adult Leaders

Catechists that teach the classes in the religious education 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. Catechists are strongly encouraged to participate in Diocese of Erie Department of Religious Education catechist formation process.

The religious education 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 religious education leader. All parishioners have the right to final recourse from the pastor of the parish.

Class Attendance

Families enrolled in this program are expected to attend scheduled classes and meetings, and to complete and return assignments. A calendar of class and meeting dates and times is distributed to each family who participates in the program at the beginning of the year. Additional copies are available in the Religious Education office and on our website, www.stmichaelrchurch.com. Classes and meetings will be held following the 9:00am Mass on Sunday. A breakfast/social time will be held from 10:00am until Program Prayer at 10:20am. Class will conclude at 11:30am.

Missed Classes

Classes and meetings serve several purposes. First they provide a time for both children and parents to come together as a Church community. Second, they provide instructional time. Finally, this time provides an opportunity for both children and parents' questions to be answered. If a class is missed, it is the parents' responsibility to be sure that the catechist or leader is contacted to find out what material needs to be made up and completed.

Classroom Visits

Parent are permitted and encouraged to visit their children's classroom at any time. They are required to inform the religious education leader before entering the classroom.

Homework

Catechists will assign work for the children to do at home with the assistance of their parents. Parents are encouraged to ask their children about homework after each class period.

Curriculum

St. Michael's Parish follows the Diocese of Erie Curriculum Guidelines. Textbooks and other materials used in the program are in conformity with the teachings found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church and have been selected to most using these guidelines.

Presently the textbooks used are:

Grades Pre-K and K – Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Grades 1 through 8 - Sadlier "We Believe"

High School - St. Mary's Press – Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth in combination with curriculum from the Center for Ministry Development as mandated by the Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2014.

Supplemental Texts:

First Reconciliation – Sadlier Sacrament Program/Reconciliation

First Communion – Sadlier Sacrament Program/Eucharist

Confirmation – RCL Benziger/Confirmation

Admission/Book and Material Fees

There is no registration fee for the Faith Formation Program. A textbook will be provided for each child enrolled. If textbooks are lost or destroyed during the year, the family is responsible for replacing them.

Sacraments/Liturgy

First Penance

The parish follows the diocesan policies for sacrament preparation. Children are prepared for the **Sacrament of Reconciliation / Penance** during second grade. The preparation involves a parent meeting, catechesis at home, a retreat along with classroom preparation as found in the regular classroom text. First Reconciliation is usually held during the month of February.

Our Pastor will make several opportunities for Reconciliation through the religious education program Parents are encouraged to celebrate this sacrament with their children and to bring their child to the Sacrament of Penance at other times.

First Eucharist / Communion

Students are prepared for **First Holy Communion** in the third grade. The preparation involves a parent meeting day, catechesis at home, a retreat along with regular classroom instruction. First Holy Communion is celebrated during the month of May.

Confirmation

Confirmation is celebrated for students in the 11th grade at St. Michael the Archangel Parish. The Sacrament of Confirmation is celebrated on a date set by the Bishop. These dates are typically announced toward the end of January or early February. Students are required by the Diocese of Erie to prepare for the Sacrament of Confirmation for a period of three years.

Celebration of Liturgy and the Liturgical Year

Parents, the Pastor and Faith Formation team will work together to help students prepare for our Liturgical seasons and celebrations. Special events are scheduled which focus on main points in the Liturgical year. An opportunity to attend Children's Liturgy is also provided during the Mass. Parents are urged to encourage their children to be altar servers, greeters, ushers, presenters of the gifts, or become trained to be lectors.

Discipline

In order to provide a safe and positive environment behavioral expectations are set in our program. Students share the responsibility of maintaining a Christian environment by:

1. Show respect to catechists, other students and other adult leaders.
2. Students are expected to display Christian values in their manner of dress, speech and behavior. No hats are to be worn during class time. Cut offs, offensive T-shirts, mid-riff or revealing shirts are not acceptable.
3. Treat the property, good name and physical safety of others with respect.
4. Act in a safe manner in and around the building.
5. Use voice and display actions in a manner appropriate for a classroom.
6. Use of, or possession of illegal drugs, alcohol, or tobacco is strictly prohibited. Such items will be seized, and both the student and items will be removed from the class with immediate notification of parents notified immediately.

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. Michael's accept the demeaning or intimidation of children in the name of discipline.

Disciplinary Process

1. At the time of the first correction, the student will be warned.
2. Students whose behavior becomes a continual problem in the classroom will be sent to the religious education leader and their parents will be notified.
3. If the student's behavior continues to be a problem, the student will be removed from class and the parents will be contacted again. Prior to returning to the classroom, the student and parents will meet with the catechist and religious education leader to resolve the issues. At this time the parents 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.

4. The Faith Formation leader or Pastor retains the right to make exceptions to the disciplinary process.

Cell Phone Policy

Personal cell phones **must** remain turned off during class time and Mass. If violated, your child's phone will be held by the catechist until the end of class or Mass. If a child repeatedly violates this policy, the parents will be notified to keep the phone through class and Mass time.

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. Michael the Archangel 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. **This is a zero tolerance policy.**

Any student who violates this policy will be subject to immediate parish disciplinary action over and above any civil/criminal action brought by injured parties.

The student will be removed from the religious education class and an alternative method of religious education will be negotiated with the parents for the remainder of the year. Judgments about re-admittance 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.

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. Students 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 religious education leader to be "minor" (meaning: no reason to believe the situation would lead to physical harm) the students 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 students will be immediately separated, the religious education leader will be notified, and the parent(s) of the students will be called. The religious education leader must determine that the conflict is resolved before the students will be readmitted to the program.

Students are expected to report to their catechist or religious education leader any threat made by a student, which mentions the killing of any person. Such threats will be immediately reported to the police for investigation. The student 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 re-admittance to the program will be made on a case by case basis and this decision is at the sole discretion of the pastor.

Harassment

Respect for the dignity and worth of each individual is a basic precept of Catholic doctrine and our parish. Each person is entitled to work in an environment free from discriminatory practices such as any form of harassment based on race, sex, creed, color, age, or disability including sexual harassment. Parish leadership wishes to be vigilant regarding harassment whether between or among catechists and/or parish leaders, among students or between catechists/parish leaders and students. Such behavior will not be tolerated and if persistent harassment is proven, the offender will be dismissed when this is appropriate. Harassment of all forms is illegal as well as immoral and individuals will be encouraged to seek legal protection when necessary.

“Harassment” refers to behavior that is not welcome, that is personally offensive and that fails to treat others with dignity and respect. It includes treating someone unfavorably because of his or her race, sex, creed, color, age or disability. Harassment may take the form of discrimination, unwelcome or critical comments or action. Harassment on the basis of sex might include unwelcome sexual advances, requests or demand for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct, including, but not limited to:

1. Verbal conduct such as epithets, derogatory jokes or comments, slurs or unwanted sexual advances, intimations or comments.
2. Visual contact such as derogatory and/or sexually oriented posters, photography, cartoons, drawings or gestures.
3. Physical contact such as assault, unwanted touching, blocking normal movements, or interfering with work, study or play because of sex.
4. Retaliations for having reported or threatened to report such harassment.

The term “sexual harassment” refers to harassment based on the gender of the offended individual when the people involved are of different “levels” within the parish. It involves threats and demands to submit to sexual requests as a condition of employment, grades or other benefits or to avoid some other loss and offers of benefits in return for sexual favors. It also means creating a hostile environment for the student or employee such that it is an unfit environment for learning or work. Examples include, but are not limited to repeated unwelcome sexual advances, repeated sexually explicit jokes or comments, or the displaying of sexually inappropriate materials.

Allegations and complaints of any type of harassment must be reported as soon as possible. Parents who become aware of incidents of sexual harassment should report them immediately to the pastor or to the religious education leader.

Weather and Other Emergency Situations

Cancellation of Classes

Classes, meetings and/or events may be canceled from time to time due to inclement weather. Every effort will be taken to contact parents and guardians in the event this may occur. Please check the parish website at www.stmichaelrcchurch.com or our parish APP for any possible updates in the event of inclement weather. Due to our rural location and homes in outlying areas, **parents are asked to use their own discretion in the event we experience inclement weather.**

Safety Procedures for Fires and other emergencies

Safety procedures are posted in each room for fire, tornado and other emergencies. Catechists will instruct the students in these procedures the first week of class. In case of fire or a tornado, attendance will be taken after an emergency evacuation and no child will be dismissed without their parent or guardian. Parents must check with the religious education leader before leaving with their child to avoid unnecessary search and rescue operations.

Sickness

Should a student become ill while in class, parents will be contacted according to the information provided on the student medical form. If the parent is unavailable, attempts will be made to reach the backup person listed. The religious education leader will make every effort to keep the child comfortable until he/she is picked up. Medications will not be administered to the child.

Medications

Children are not to bring medications with them to religious education classes without advance permission of the religious education leader. It is the responsibility of parent(s) to notify the religious education leader immediately of any changes in allergies or dietary restrictions.

Injury

Catechists are asked to report any injury to the religious education leader immediately. If an injury occurs, first aid will be administered in strict accordance with the *Blood-borne Pathogens* regulations of the Diocese of Erie and the parent(s) will be contacted. If the injury requires immediate medical attention, the religious education leader will call the appropriate emergency services, followed by a call to the parent(s). A first aid kit is available in the religious education office and a safety kit with band aids and gloves in all classrooms.

Field Trips

Some catechists may wish to take their class on a field trip or any other activity out of the ordinary routine. Permission must be requested for the activity at least two weeks in advance in writing. If permission is granted by the pastor or religious education director/coordinator, the activity may be arranged under the following conditions.

1. The activity or field trip will have a catechetical purpose.
2. The catechist is responsible for informing parents and getting permission forms (Diocese of Erie) from all students IN ADVANCE, IN WRITING.
3. Parents are required to sign a Confidential/Release Form (Diocese of Erie) for each student attending the event.
4. The field trip or special event must be limited to the pre-arranged plan and should not be altered.
5. At least one adult chaperone for every 10 children above fourth grade, and one adult for every 5 children in fourth grade and younger.
6. A bus should be used for transportation whenever possible.
7. If cars are used, drivers must be 21 years of age. The Diocese of Erie *Application for Driving Privileges* must be completed. A copy of the driver's license and registration must be obtained and certified to be current. They must show proof of current insurance, and they must be informed that their insurance is the primary insurance in the event of an accident. They must be informed of the route to be taken, and follow that route.