

August 29, 2017

Dear Parents:

A new year of religious education classes will begin soon. This is a good time to recall that religious education is the right of every child; and that makes it the responsibility of every parent. At the time of baptism, parents accept the responsibility of training their child in the practice of the faith, in keeping God's commandments as Christ taught, and by truly loving God and neighbor. Religious education takes place in every home by the words and actions of family members in everyday life situations, by family prayer, by family activities, and by active participation in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church.

Formal religious education in St. Mary's Elementary School or St. Mary's Parish School of Religion (SOR) not only reinforces the education of the home and provides more of what faithful Catholics should know as they enter adulthood and pass on the faith to their own children, but also offers children opportunities and experiences of the larger Church community. It is not only an opportunity of the parish to offer religious education classes, but the parish is bound to it by the very evangelizing nature of the Church. It is a divinely entrusted mission of the Church to assist men, women, and children so that they can experience the fullness of the Christian life.

If your child is not enrolled in St. Mary's Elementary School, then it is expected that your child will be enrolled in St. Mary's SOR. Good attendance should be the norm. Failure on the part of a child to attend every year, or to attend all the classes throughout the year, cannot help but be regarded as a lack of desire to participate in the sacramental life of the Church.

SOR classes, grades one through eight, will begin on Wednesday, September 6, and will meet from 6:45 PM to 8:00 PM.

The public schools of Van Wert County entered into an agreement, with the churches of Van Wert, to keep Wednesday evenings free of activities to allow families to participate in religious programs without conflicts. However, there is at least one date, which pertains only to VWCS, that will greatly affect attendance at SOR. Be sure to check all the class dates included in the SOR Handbook, which will be given to the youngest member of the family in SOR on the first evening of class.

There are many other activities for children, which are not connected to the schools, throughout the county and outside the county. Some hold classes on Wednesday evenings. If your child is involved in any of these other activities (dance, martial arts, swimming, gymnastics, hockey, etc.) ask the instructor to schedule your child for an evening class held on a night other than Wednesday. Many instructors recognize the importance of religious education and, when given sufficient notice, can work out a new schedule with your child.

Registration for SOR will take place during the first evening of class in the gym from 6:45 to 8:00 PM. Parents may come into the gym, pick up the forms and fill them out there.

Parents may also visit our parish website, www.stmarysvanwert.com. Click on Religious Education. This will take you to a page with several options, including registration forms. These forms can be filled out ahead of time, saving a little time.

Family Registration Form (one per family) to be filled out every year

Medical Emergency Form, two pages (one set for each child) to be filled out every year

If you are not registered with the parish, you will need to call the parish office to register or you can fill out a parish registration form in the gym during SOR Registration.

The fee for SOR is \$45 per child for children in Grades 1-6 and 8. Since the Confirmation packets will be given to our seventh graders this year, with Confirmation celebrated in eighth grade every year beginning in 2018-2019, the fee is \$55 for children in Grade 7. The \$10 extra will not pay for everything, but does help. Payment is due at registration. Please make checks payable to: St. Mary's Church. You may also pay with cash. Be sure to collect your receipt. If there is a financial difficulty, please talk with me. We can definitely make arrangements. No child will be denied religious education due to a lack of funds.

Please do not send money or forms with your children with the expectation that they should take up class time in order to register themselves. Also, children should not hand money and forms to the catechists.

A baptismal record is required before the reception of any of the other sacraments. Please bring a baptismal record for your child if your child was not baptized here at St. Mary's and was not registered in SOR or St. Mary's School last year. If you do not have a baptismal record, please call or write the church of baptism. The church of baptism can send a record directly to St. Mary's. However, do not wait to receive the baptismal record before registering your child. Also, do not send a baptismal record with your child. Please bring it in yourself.

In December, the Bishop mandated some changes to the preparation of the Sacraments of Initiation. Some of these changes will be implemented this year and some next year. If your child is preparing to celebrate any of the sacraments, letters concerning the preparations will be mailed to you throughout the year. For First Reconciliation and First Communion, if you do not receive a letter in the mail by Monday, September 23, please let me know. The first date to keep in mind is for the Inscription Promise Sunday for First Reconciliation and First Communion at the 10:30 AM Mass on September 29. Much more information will be given at the Parent Class on Sunday, October 15, from 1-3 PM in the library.

Confirmation letters to parents should also be received in the mail by Monday, September 23. The first date to keep in mind is for the return of Sponsor forms by January 2. The Parent/Sponsor Class for Confirmation will be on Sunday, March 4, from 1-3:30 PM in the library. Much more information will be given at the meeting and in the letters throughout the year.

We have been following diocesan mandates concerning Safe Environment for several years now to keep our parish and the Diocese in compliance of the Bishops' Charter of 2002. Our Catechists and Aides have background checks and training in recognizing child abuse through the VIRTUS program. This is the same program used in both the Archdiocese of

Cincinnati and the Diocese of Columbus. Two other dioceses in Ohio are considering this program, also.

One new mandate for the SOR and the School began last year with *Touching Safety*. This is a several-part program spread over a few years, offered as one class in the fall and spring each year. When the time for the dates of these classes come closer, a notice will be sent home with your children. You will have the opportunity to “opt out.” However, this “opt out” does not mean that your children do not need to come that evening. Religious Education opportunities will be given to your children, but in a place away from the classroom presentations.

Please use the bell tower entrance or the Jennings Road School entrance to come into the building before class. The doors to the back parking lot and the doors at the library end of the education wing will remain locked to anyone outside. The other doors will be locked when class begins. The double doors leading from the hallway into the education wing will be locked during class time as well as classrooms.

All children will leave by the bell tower. Pull your car forward far enough under the bell tower carport so that three cars can be in the carport area at one time. Please do not leave your car to walk up to your children, run into the building for something, or engage in a conversation with a catechist. That just holds up the line. Please do not pull out of the line to go around other cars unless you are directed. There is really no need to arrive extra early to pick up your children. The bell tower pick up lasts from eight to twelve minutes. If you do not want to wait in line for up to ten minutes, consider coming at 8:05 PM. The line will be greatly diminished. A slightly longer pick-up time should be expected the first week or two until everyone learns how it works.

A suggestion was made last year. We can certainly try it. To help with the pick-up, please use a marker to print your child’s name, or at least your child’s last name, on a piece of cardstock, which can be placed in the windshield of the car. This would be especially helpful to a new catechist, who has not yet learned to recognize parents and vehicles.

If you carpool, please write a letter telling us which families are riding together.

If you have an older child in high school, who has a driver’s license, and who is parked in the back parking lot on a Youth Group meeting night, that high school driver may walk from the Administration Center to the bell tower to pick up your younger children to walk together to the back parking lot. We had some misunderstandings about this in the past; so a once-a-year letter from the parents is needed to tell us that your high school driver will be driving on the evenings of Youth Group and will pick up younger siblings. This is intended to assure that all the SOR students are with their families and not walking to cars we cannot distinguish from the distance of the bell tower. Please remind your high school driver to use the sidewalks to come to the bell tower, not to walk between cars and not to yell out to their siblings to come to the parking lot.

Although we have a weather policy in place, there have been situations in the past, which have been confusing. One example: We canceled class one evening due to freezing rain in the area just south of Van Wert while the town of Van Wert and north were dry. The families in Van Wert and north of town did not know about the freezing rain, and so they, understandably, did not check to see if there was a cancellation. Some people have suggested that, whoever is able to attend class should attend and those who cannot make it into town simply stay home.

However, we have catechists, who live throughout the county. It would be difficult to hold classes without the catechists. So how can families know? Technology has given us a good tool!

We have a Text Alert System. Go to <http://ohioalerts.org/stmarysvanwert>. Click on *subscribe to alerts* and insert your information. Make sure to follow the instructions down the entire page. Click on either St. Mary's School or SOR or, if you have children in both the School and SOR, click on both. You will be able to receive any alerts posted. If Youth Group falls on an evening when SOR cancels, both will be canceled, so consider them both under the title, *SOR*. The SOR alert will only cover SOR and Youth Group--not Mass nor any other parish event that evening. Cancellations will continue to be posted at the parish website, www.stmarysvanwert.com and on www.wbcl.org. There will be no alerts posted for evenings not scheduled for class, such as Thanksgiving or Christmas breaks. So, be sure to check the calendar in the SOR Handbook.

If you wish to speak to your child's catechist or to me after class, call the Religious Ed. Office at 419-238-3079 so we can be sure we can meet with you at that time, along with your child. Please park in the Jennings Road parking lot and enter the building through the Jennings Road School entrance.

If you feel called to become a catechist, co-catechist, catechist aide or substitute catechist, please talk with me. We could use your help. This year, we need an aide in Grade 2 and we need subs. I would really like the chance to meet with you and to explain what is involved so you can make an informed decision.

Thank you.

Yours in Christ,

Cheryl L. Freewalt
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