

August 22, 2016

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 7, 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 are two Wednesday dates this year, which pertain only to VWCS; however, they greatly affect attendance at SOR. Be sure to check the class dates included in the SOR Policy book, 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. In

the past, I have been able to offer parents the opportunity to run off the forms from the parish website, fill them out at home, and bring them to the gym already completed. However, this year, our website is going through major changes. I cannot promise that the website will be up and running by the time of our first class.

If the website is up and running and everything is complete, you may fill out the forms ahead of time by going to [www.stmarysvanwert.com](http://www.stmarysvanwert.com). Click on *Religious Education* and follow the prompts.

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. Due to Confirmation classes this year and the extra materials needed, the fee is \$55 for children in Grades 7-8. 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. One time, I was simply handed cash with no forms, and the child proceeded to walk away.

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.

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 19, 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 25.

Confirmation letters to parents should also be received in the mail by Monday, September 19. The first date to keep in mind is for the Parents' Class for Confirmation on Sunday, September 25, from 1-3 PM in the library. Much more information will be given in the letters throughout the year.

We have been following diocesan mandates concerning Safe Environment for several years now. This year, a few items have changed so the Diocese of Toledo (and St. Mary's Parish) will be most compliant with the Bishops' Charter of 2002. Our Catechists and Aides will still have background checks; however, this will be done through VIRTUS and the training in recognizing child abuse will be through *Protecting God's Children*, a 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 is *Touching Safety*. This is a several-part program 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.

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 plainly 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 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 new 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](http://www.stmarysvanwert.com) and on [www.wbcl.org](http://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.

Our textbook company has added a new option, and we would like to take advantage of this. In the past, religion textbooks were always sent home and it was expected that students would bring them back to class each week. There are parent pages with the lessons, and the textbook is a great way to review what your child has learned and to share your faith on the subjects. This year, the textbook company has added e-books. On the first evening, your child will take home a code with which you can open an account with RCL Benziger. The e-book is the textbook; however, there are also links to other websites of interest. This will enable us to keep the physical textbooks in the classrooms until the end of the year, when the children will take them home. Confirmation books will still be sent home and it is expected that those students will bring them to Confirmation classes.

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 a sixth grade catechist for Old Testament, and there is especially a need for subs. I would really like the chance to meet with you and to explain what is involved so you can make an informed decision. Ask a friend to come with you to talk about this. Partnering as catechists can be a great way to teach, and I would like to help you with anything you need. Thank you.

Yours in Christ,

Cheryl L. Freewalt  
CRE