

Heart of Mary Cluster
St. Mary, URBANA
St. Mary, VINTON
Sacred Heart, WALKER

Faith Formation Program



**PARENT/GUARDIAN
HANDBOOK**

2021 – 2022

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Faith Formation (FF) Weather Cancellation Policy

***If school is cancelled or dismissed early due to inclement weather, FF classes are cancelled.**

***If school isn't dismissed early or cancelled and it is necessary to cancel FF classes, we will request that announcements be posted on the **websites of the following TV stations**: kgan.com (TV-2), kwwl.com (TV-7), and kcrq.com (TV-9).**

***Check the Heart of Mary Cluster website: www.heartofmary.org**

***Check our Facebook page: [Heart of Mary Cluster Catholic Churches](#)**

***A text message and/or e-mail message will be sent to families who chose to be notified via those options when they completed online registration for Faith Formation classes.**

(August 2020)



Heart of Mary Cluster
St. Mary, Urbana
St. Mary, Vinton
Sacred Heart, Walker

Heart of Mary Cluster Mission Statement:

The Heart of Mary Cluster, inspired by the Holy Spirit, provides a welcoming faith community in which we proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ by the way we live, by our worship together, and by serving others.

**Parish Catechetical Leadership
Heart of Mary Cluster
2021-2022**

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Introduction

This handbook is designed to serve as a guide for parents/guardians, students, and catechists involved in the Faith Formation Program in the Heart of Mary Cluster, including St. Mary, Urbana; Sacred Heart, Walker; and St. Mary, Vinton. The philosophy, goals, policies, guidelines, and schedule serve to communicate the content of our Faith Formation Program.

The catechetical formation of each child is a responsibility shared both by the parent/guardian and the cluster Faith Formation Program. The goal of faith formation is threefold: 1) to present information about our Catholic Christian faith, 2) to enable formation in the values and attitudes needed to live a Catholic Christian faith, which leads to the end goal of 3) transformation and conversion in Christ Jesus.

The policies in this handbook have been adopted by the Heart of Mary Cluster Faith Formation Commission (Board of Education) and apply to the Faith Formation Programs of the Heart of Mary Cluster. These policies give the Coordinators of Faith Formation and Youth Ministry, site supervisors, parents/guardians, students, and catechists a direction in responding to the religious and spiritual needs of parish families.

Rules and regulations are made to help inform students of the rights and needs of others, as well as to help serve as a guide for their own acceptable behavior. Rules and regulations create and maintain an environment wherein quality faith formation and the safety of every child are considered to be of the utmost importance.

Parents and catechists are requested to acquaint themselves as well as the children with the contents of this handbook. Knowledge of the policies and guidelines will help achieve the goals of our faith formation program.

Faith Formation Programs

Heart of Mary Cluster Faith Formation Programs include the following:

- Faith Formation Classes for children in grades K to 12th
- Youth Ministry/Adolescent Catechesis

HELP FOR VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

The Archdiocese of Dubuque has established a program of pastoral assistance to people who believe they or those in their care have been sexually abused as minors by clergy or other Church personnel. This assistance will include help in informing civil and Church authorities. Victim Assistance Coordinators are trained to facilitate access to appropriate professional mental health services, social service agencies, support groups, and/or individuals who can provide spiritual care. To report current or past sexual abuse by Archdiocese of Dubuque personnel, please call: Dr. Stephen Frommelt 563-584-3000. This program is part of the “Policy for the Protection of Minors.”

Roles and Responsibilities

Parent/Guardian

You model your faith for your children daily. What your child will learn from faith formation class depends on your support and reinforcement at home, attending Sunday Mass as a family, and family prayer. Your interest and encouragement let your child know you value what is being done in the faith formation class. Learning prayers and the Catholic faith cannot be done only during class time. We expect you to talk with your child about what is being learned in the classroom.

Catechist

The role of the catechist is to “echo the Good News.” The Good News is the message of Jesus and the Catholic Church, prayer and worship, community with each other and within the parish, and service to all peoples. Catechists help lead the children to grow in their faith and relationship with Christ in the Church.

Cluster Faith Formation Commission (FFC)

The Cluster FFC is responsible for establishing goals, setting policies in collaboration with the Archdiocesan Board of Education, setting the budget, implementing programs, and evaluating the programs with the Coordinator of Faith Formation and/or Coordinator of Youth Ministry. Members are elected or appointed from each parish. The Pastor/Parish Life Coordinator and the Coordinator of Faith Formation and/or Coordinator of Youth Ministry serve as ex-officio members.

Coordinator of Faith Formation

The Coordinator of Faith Formation (CFF) is responsible for the faith formation program for children in grades K-5, including efforts to form and support parents in their role as the primary catechists of their children. Major responsibilities of the CFF include overseeing the faith formation program through 5th grade; communicating with families with young children regarding faith formation opportunities for both the children and parents; providing sacramental preparation for children preparing to receive the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist; and overseeing other spiritual opportunities for young children such as Vacation Bible School, Children's Liturgy of the Word, and Totus Tuus. The CFF works closely with the Pastor/Parish Life Coordinator, Coordinator of Youth Ministry, members of the Faith Formation Commission, and catechists.

Coordinator of Youth Ministry

The Coordinator of Youth Ministry (CYM) is responsible for the faith formation program for grades 6-12 as well as Youth Ministry. Major responsibilities of the CYM include overseeing the faith formation program for grades 6-12; communicating and providing resources for families with pre-teen/teenaged children; providing sacramental preparation for students preparing to receive the sacrament of confirmation; and overseeing other spiritual opportunities for teens such as retreats, NCYC, conferences, and service trips. The CYM works closely with the Pastor/Parish Life Coordinator, Coordinator of Faith Formation, members of the Faith Formation Commission, catechists, and other volunteers.

Faith Formation Site Supervisor

This person is responsible for preparation and readiness of the facility for faith formation sessions as well as providing attendance record information, knowing and enforcing discipline procedures, and being a supportive presence to the catechists and students in the building. A site supervisor is accountable to the Coordinator of Faith Formation/Coordinator of Youth Ministry.

Curriculum

Grade School (Grades K-5th):

The Pflaum Gospel Weeklies program consists of a Catechism handbook— What the Church Believes and Teaches—for each child, plus weekly Gospel-based lessons provided in individual handouts. The Catechism handbook leads children to understand the basics of the Catholic faith. The weekly lessons inspire them to seek out ways to practice their faith in their daily lives. A special section in the weekly lessons and catechist guides integrates each lesson with doctrine in the handbook. Every lesson encourages parents and children to actively participate in the Sunday Mass and the life of the Church. *(Second grade uses God’s Gift, published by Loyola Press.)*

Kindergarten and First Grade – **Promise** helps children begin to participate in the Mass with an active understanding.

Second Grade – **God’s Gift: Reconciliation** and **God’s Gift: Eucharist** prepare the children for their first celebration of the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

Third Grade -- **Good News** guides children to more involvement in Sunday Mass as they see how the Sunday readings tie to their own lives. Realistic stories and Gospel narrations—plus fun-to-do, hands-on activities—support formative learning.

Fourth Grade and Fifth Grade – **Venture** leads students in making moral choices and exploring and expanding their faith. Dramatizations, current events, and original stories link the Sunday Gospel to kids’ own lives. Lives of saints (illustrated as comics) and imaginative activities demonstrate applications of the Gospel message.

Middle School (Grades 6th-8th):

Edge will be the main program used for grades 6-8. Edge takes the youth out of the classroom and uses a combined large and small group model to help them grow in their relationship with Christ.

High School (Grades 9th-12th):

Life Teen will be the main program used for grades 9-12. Life Teen takes teens out of the classroom and uses a combined large and small group model to help teens grow in their relationship with Christ. Our goal is to support the participants on their journey to know God by helping them recognize who God is, appreciate the way God reveals Himself in their lives, and to help them encounter the Living Word through a deeper understanding of the Sacred Scripture and Tradition. We will help them recognize Jesus as the ultimate revelation of a personal, loving God who invites us to live a life of peace and joy in relationship with God and the Church.

Home School Options (Grades 6th-12th):

Grade 6 will use the Pflaum Gospel Weeklies **Venture** program described on the previous page.

Grades 7-9 will use Pflaum Gospel Weeklies **Visions**, which emphasizes social justice, moral reasoning, and service through current-interest articles, life-dilemma stories, and real Christian life examples. Discussion starters help young teens explore links between today's issues, the Sunday readings, and their own lives.

Grade 10 will use **The Catholic Faith Handbook** from St. Mary's Press. This book is an understandable and down-to-earth guide to all things Catholic. Its chapters are divided into four parts: creed, liturgy and Sacraments, morality, and Christian prayer.

Grades 11 and 12 will use either **Decision Point** by Matthew Kelly or **Chosen** by Ascension Press. **Decision Point** is a book-and-DVD program specifically designed to speak to the everyday lives of young Catholics and to teach them why choosing Jesus and the Church matters. **Chosen** takes young people on a journey through the entire Catholic faith in all its richness and vitality. Teens will be captivated by the story, from Creation all the way through salvation history, and they will come to see how the sacraments, prayer, and discipleship are the keys to a happy life.

Safe Environment Training for Children Guidelines

Under the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, all dioceses in the United States have agreed to establish age-appropriate safe environment training for children.

Key components are to include information about quality relationships, proper forms of touch, actions to take in uncomfortable situations, and reporting possible abuse. Note: This training is not the same as education in human sexuality.

It is recommended that the training be offered at grade 1, grade 3, grade 5 or 6, grade 8, grade 9 or 10, and grade 11 or 12. All children of the designated grade levels are to be offered the training.

Parents/guardians will be provided the required notification letter concerning the timeline when the training will be offered; the content/curriculum of the training; information outlining the opportunity to review the content/curriculum materials; and a copy of the *Parent/Guardian Safe Environment Training Refusal Form*.

Catechists presenting the material will review the guidelines concerning their role in providing this training. Cross referencing between grade level catechetical outcomes and the outcomes of the Safe Environment Training will be encouraged for possible integration with existing curriculum.

Safe Environment Training Outcomes include:

- I am God's child.
- I must receive and give respect in the ways I talk and act and in the ways others treat me.
- I learn the difference between true friendship and false friendship.
- My body is private and must be respected.
- I learn the difference between good play and bad play.
- I learn the difference between good touch and bad touch.
- Secrets are not good when they separate us from others and harm us.
- People make good choices and bad choices, and I learn how to tell the difference.
- When someone does something wrong, I must tell someone I trust.
- I name people to whom I will go for help.

Cluster Sacramental Preparation of Children Policy

The Catholic Church recognizes that parents are the first and primary educators of their children in matters of faith. The faith formation of each child is a responsibility shared by the parent/guardian and the faith formation program of the parish/cluster* where the family is registered.

Baptism is the first sacrament we receive as Catholic Christians. It is the one sacrament that we share in common with other Christian denominations. Parents of infants and children under the age of 7 who wish to have their child baptized should contact the Parish Office to schedule their child's baptism and arrange to attend a pre-baptismal class.

Sacramental Requirements for Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Confirmation

To receive the sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Confirmation, a child must:

- Have been baptized in the Christian tradition.
- Demonstrate an active faith life, appropriate for their age.
- Regularly attend Sunday Mass with their family.
- Be enrolled and actively participating in the cluster Faith Formation Education program.
- Demonstrate a readiness to receive the sacrament as evidenced, in part, by knowledge of specific prayers and doctrine.
- Have participated in mandatory parent/child meetings and retreat days.

The sacramental preparation process for children necessitates active involvement on the part of the parents. Our Faith Formation Program is meant to assist parents in fulfilling their role as the primary educators in their children's faith. **Parents/guardians are required to attend meetings to assist in their child's sacramental preparation. Children will not be allowed to participate in the sacramental celebrations if the parents do not participate in mandatory meetings and retreat days.**

Unbaptized children older than age 7

In the Catholic Church, children normally receive the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist in the second grade.

Children who have not been baptized in the Christian tradition and are older than the age of reason (usually recognized as 7 years old, taking into account the child's maturity and level of reasoning) must participate in a catechumenate process (RCIA) to prepare for the sacraments of initiation (baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist). Prior to entering the catechumenate process, the child must attend one year of faith formation with their peers.

Baptized, but uncatechized, children

If a child is older than the age of reason and has been baptized, but not catechized (i.e., has not attended faith formation classes), they may be placed in a lower grade and/or receive supplemental instruction before entering the preparation program for the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist. The decision to place the student in a lower grade and/or complete supplemental instruction will be discussed with the parents and the Coordinator of Faith Formation and will take into consideration the child's level of understanding and maturity.

Questions about any of the above policies should be directed to the Coordinator of Faith Formation.

**Families not registered in the Heart of Mary Cluster will be asked to pay an additional fee for their child/children to attend Faith Formation classes at any of the parishes in the Heart of Mary Cluster which include St. Mary, Urbana; Sacred Heart, Walker; and St. Mary, Vinton.*

Discipline Policy

The respect and dignity of all persons is valued. Discipline helps all students as it contributes to a climate of learning, loving, and living. It helps each student as it provides an environment to guide students to become a self-disciplined person.

Each catechist in the classroom will clarify and set goals for learning and establish classroom guidelines. Goal setting and positive consequences encourage students to choose appropriate behavior. Normal discipline problems will be handled by the classroom catechist.

If there are recurrent or serious problems, the catechist discusses the situation with the site supervisor, who will communicate with the CYM/CFF (Coordinator of Youth Ministry/Coordinator of Faith Formation). The student will be dismissed from class, following this procedure:

1. The student will meet with the site supervisor.
2. The student and the site supervisor will discuss and agree on appropriate behavior.
3. The student and the site supervisor will fill out a discipline form. The student and the site supervisor will sign the discipline form. The student will then return to class. Following class, the site supervisor will inform the catechist of the discipline form and obtain the catechist's signature on the form. The form will be mailed to the home to obtain the parent's/guardian's signature with a request to return the form to the Faith Formation Office.
4. Discipline forms will be filed in the Faith Formation Office for the year. When a student has two forms on file, a conference will be held with the parent/guardian, the student, the catechist, site supervisor, and the CYM/CFF.
5. A mutual agreement with the parties involved may mean two weeks' assigned work at home.
6. If, after returning to the classroom, the student is again dismissed from class, the student will not be allowed to attend class for the remainder of the year. An appropriate family faith formation plan will be designed for home instruction and monitored by the CYM/CFF.

Discipline Form

Name _____

Date _____

1. Why was I asked to leave the room?

2. What behavior on my part contributed to this?

3. I will do the following so that my time in class will be more profitable:

Student Signature

Site Supervisor Signature

Catechist Signature

CYM/CFE Signature

Parent Signature

Electronic Devices Usage

Any type of electronic device not educationally relevant to the classroom should never be used during Faith Formation class by any student unless special permission is received from the catechist.

- When entering the classroom, students will be asked to silence their phones and electronic devices.
- At the catechist's discretion, students may be asked to place their devices, including cell phones, in a central, visible location when in the classroom. If this is the case, the devices will be returned at the end of class.

If violations occur, a parent will be notified.

Entering and Exiting Classes

WALKER

FIRST SESSION: Children will gather in the hall. Catechists will come to get the children to take them up to their rooms. At the end of class, catechists and/or the site supervisor will take the children outside to be picked up by their parents/guardians.

SECOND SESSION: Grades 7 and 8 may go directly to their classroom. High school students will gather in the hall. Upon dismissal at the end of classes, students may exit on their own to be picked up by parents/guardians or drive themselves home.

URBANA

FIRST SESSION: Children will enter via the front door of the church and gather in the hall. Their catechists will come to get them to take them to their rooms. At the end of class, catechists will take the children to the church. Parents will collect their children in the church, entering and exiting via the canopy door.

SECOND SESSION: Students will enter via the front door of the church and gather in the hall. Note that the first session dismisses from church using the canopy door as the second session gathers in the hall using the main church entrance, in order to avoid congestion in the hallways.

VINTON

FIRST SESSION: All children will enter via the office door and gather in the hall. Their catechists will come to get them to take them to their rooms. At the end of class, children will be dismissed to the office door, but will not be allowed outside until a parent/guardian arrives to pick them up.

SECOND SESSION: Middle and high school students should enter via the office door and gather in the hall. They may purchase and eat pizza before class if desired. Students will be organized for class and dismissed by their catechists.

COVID-19 Safety Protocols

MASKS

In accordance with current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines, in areas where COVID-19 transmission is substantial or high, we recommend that masks be worn when indoors. However, we also expect that everyone will be respectful of each family's and individual's decision regarding whether or not to wear a mask.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

We will try to promote three feet of social distancing while students are in classrooms, particularly younger students who are not yet able to be vaccinated. Please be aware that social distancing may not always be possible. The use of masks may mitigate risks when social distancing is not possible.

HAND SANITIZER

Hand sanitizer will be available in all the classrooms.

WATER BOTTLES

Drinking fountains are still blocked off in our facilities. Students are free to bring their own water bottles to class.

STAY HOME WHEN ILL

If your child is feeling ill, please keep them at home. If your child has recently been to a Faith Formation class and then tests positive for COVID-19, please inform us so that we can notify class members to monitor for illness. We will respect your privacy and not share your student's name in our notification.

Absences

If your child will be absent from Faith Formation class, please notify us. *If we don't hear from you, the site supervisor will call to check to be sure your child is safe.*

You may call any of the following numbers:

Vinton Office: 319-472-3368

Urbana Office: 319-443-2447

This office is staffed only on Wednesdays. Otherwise, you will need to leave a message on the machine.

Walker Office: 319-448-4241

Do NOT call on Wednesday for same-day absences. The office is not staffed on Wednesday, so we won't get your message in time. Please call Urbana on Wednesdays.

You may also send an email to the cluster email account: heartofmarycluster@gmail.com

When leaving a message, please include your child's name, grade, and class location.

If you leave a message and get a call from the site supervisor anyway, please forgive us. Sometimes things get pretty busy on Wednesdays. We might miss your message. We want to make sure we don't miss your child!