

PHILOSOPHY:

Our true "religion" is not something that can be taught in a classroom. Rather, it is most effectively passed on from one generation to another through the family itself. Christian parents, by sharing their own faith, their reverence for God and for the Church, their values and their love for all God's people, are the primary educators of their children. By registering a child for Religious Education classes, parents are re-affirming the commitment made at their child's Baptism, to pass on our faith. It is presumed that parents will make every effort to bring their children to weekly Mass and other Holy Days of Obligation (listed in Calendar).

The Religious Education Process supports parents in their efforts to:

- Teach the message of Jesus Christ
- Reflect and build a community of believers
- Support and develop lives of prayer and worship
- Foster a spirit of service to others

To accomplish all of this requires the *combined* effort, support, and belief of **ALL**: Families, catechists, parish community, and most of all, the grace of God.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT:

To ensure the safety of our children, **all staff and volunteers** are required to:

- complete a C.O.R.I. background investigation form
- read and sign a Ministerial Code of Conduct
- Participate in a safe environment training class

Parents may request additional curriculum materials, which are also available for examination by visiting the Diocesan website at worcesterdiocese.org.

ATTENDANCE:

As in any other educational process, our effectiveness is strengthened by regular attendance. We anticipate the cooperation of parents to ensure that absences are minimal. If a student has been absent one quarter of the scheduled class times and the lessons have not been made up, the student may be asked to repeat the year. In the event of sickness or emergency, please call the Religious Education Office prior to class.

We follow the Ashburnham-Westminster school calendar, which means we have no classes during school vacations, holidays, and staff-development days. On **HALF-DAYS**, there will be no classes for grades 1-5. **Grades 6-8 will meet as usual**.

If the Ashburnham-Westminster Schools are cancelled due to inclement weather, Religious Education classes are automatically cancelled for the rest of the day and evening. Cancellations will also be announced by recorded message at 827-4892. If weather conditions worsen while the public schools are in session, or in the case of early-dismissal from school, the parish hall will remain open for all children until they have been picked up by their parents. We will respect the decision of any parents who wish to pick their children up early on bad-weather days.

CURRICULUM:

Grades 1 through 8 follow the “Blest Are We” series published by RCL Benziger (www.blestarewe.com)

Grade One focuses on the theme of the Trinity. The children are taught that God made each person special, and that we are all responsible to love and care for all God’s gifts of creation.

In **Grade Two**, the children learn about the sacramental life of the Church. Their understanding of the Trinity grows as they see God presented as a loving father who forgives them, Jesus as one who gives the gift of himself, and the Holy Spirit who calls us to serve others.

Grades 1 & 2 gather on Tuesday afternoons from 3:00-4:30.

Grade Three focuses on the study of the Church, and some of the beliefs held by Catholics. Knowledge of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit grows through a study of the Apostles’ Creed, not just as a prayer, but as a belief to be understood.

Fourth Graders study morality through an extension of the lessons learned in grade 3, as well as a study of the Beatitudes. The students see God as merciful and always ready to

forgive. They see Jesus as the example of Christian life and love, and the Holy Spirit as our helper and guide in times of temptation.

Grade Five centers on a study of all seven sacraments, which are presented as sacred signs as well as celebrations. Students learn that God gave us the ultimate sacrament in Jesus – a visible sign of God’s love. They learn that love continues through us to the world in the Spirit of God. Their understanding of morality is strengthened as they learn what it means to live as faithful followers of Jesus.

Grades 3-5 gather on Mondays from 3:00-4:30.

Sixth Grade students learn that it is in the study of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) that we find the roots of our faith. God is taught as the Creator who cares deeply for people and interacts in their lives. Jesus is seen as the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures. A study of morality is woven throughout. It is seen as the relationship of God and the people that can grow stronger or weaker.

Seventh Grade focuses on the story of Jesus. Students deepen and extend their knowledge of Jesus, his life and his teachings. They will develop a deeper understanding of our relationship with God and what it means to live a Christian life.

Eighth Grade focuses on the story of our Church, where students will learn more about the Catholic Church from her early beginnings, through the Medieval Ages and the Renaissance, and how the Church today meets the challenges of contemporary life.

Grades 6-8 gather on Monday evenings from 6:45-8:00.

Our 9th & 10th grade program is adapted from the Decision Point Series by Dynamic Catholic and Catholic Essentials published by Ave Maria Press. The focus is on Jesus, Prayer, the Bible, Sacraments as well as themes of Christian Morality and Social Justice. As part of our goal to help develop in students a spirit of service, we do require our High School students to complete a minimum of 12 Community Service hours each year. While they may choose their own service projects, we do ask that at least four hours are completed in service to our church. We will notify students of opportunities available to them throughout the year.

Grades 9 & 10 meet once a month on Sunday evenings from 6:00-9:00.

The process of religious education includes both information and **formation**, that is something for the “**head**” and something for the “**heart**”. Besides acquiring knowledge

about our faith, some of our students will also receive opportunities to participate in “retreat-days” throughout the year. **Please note and reserve these dates.** They are a vital part of their faith experience.

SACRAMENTAL PROGRAMS

Sacraments are a central part of the life of our parish community, and therefore we take seriously our responsibility to prepare parishioners for these celebrations. Baptismal records are required. For children who have not yet been baptized, parents are asked to call the pastor at 978-827-5806. Parents who enroll their children in sacramental programs are expected to attend scheduled meetings with their children where questions can be answered, and adult education also takes place. Regular Mass attendance is expected of any children enrolled in our sacramental programs as well as participation in all preparation classes and retreats.

RECONCILIATION

Diocesan policy mandates that “...the first communion of children is always preceded by sacramental confession and absolution.” Further information will be shared at a parent meeting in early September, and immediate preparation will take place at Parent/Child gatherings in Sept, Oct and Nov. After children have celebrated their first Reconciliation, we provide yearly opportunities to repeat the sacrament during scheduled class-time and update their comprehension at an age-appropriate level. We ask parents to support us by also celebrating this sacrament with their children throughout the year.

FIRST HOLY COMMUNION

Preparation for First Holy Communion begins with three monthly parent/child sessions from January through March, followed by a minimum of two hours of interactive participation in our “Parent/Child Retreat” in April. Parents are expected to attend weekly Mass with their children regularly throughout this process.

CONFIRMATION

Confirmation is a regional celebration which is celebrated in the spring along with the parishes of Westminster and Gardner. High School students, in tenth grade or higher, who participate regularly at Mass and have a desire to confirm their faith may request this sacrament by scheduling an interview with the pastor or coordinator. Required preparation classes begin at the conclusion of our tenth-grade program. Students will also experience a

full day retreat presented by the Worcester Diocese Office of Youth Ministry. Information and requirements will be discussed at a meeting for parents and students prior to the start of classes.