

Dear 7th & 8th Grade Parents:

Please read this email in its entirety; there is much information to share with you relating to our program this year.

First, I'd like to explain in more detail what our Christian Formation program looks like for the Fall. Our plan has evolved over quite a few meetings with colleagues, publishers, and religious education experts in the field, and is compliant with what the Archdiocese is asking of parishes during this pandemic.

In an earlier email, I referred to our program as an online one. That was an incorrect choice of words. The better way to say this is that St. E's will follow the family catechesis model. The responsibility for conveying the material will be your task as parents, but we will support you as best we can with a good textbook series, parent focus/overview sessions, and classes led by catechists for students. We are also planning for some outdoor events and service projects if these can be managed safely.

Here's how it will work:

All students in grades one through eight will use the Finding God series from Loyola Press. The lower school will be using an updated 2021 edition, but there is not an updated edition for 7th & 8th grade. So, 7th & 8th grade will use our regular 2013 edition. Each textbook is divided into five units of five chapters each.

On the weekend of September 25th-27th at specific times noted on the calendar (attached), families will pick up their textbooks in the Commons. (Note that there may be other times throughout the year when you will be asked to pick up supplementary materials.) We opted for paper textbooks because of the number of parents who did not want their child to spend additional time on screens. There will be several Zoom orientations for parents during the following week (in the evenings).

We begin officially on Sunday, October 4th, with Unit 1, Chapter 1. From 10:00 to 10:30, parents are asked to participate in an online overview session which explores the theme for that unit. Then there's a 15-minute break, during which time you'll help your child(ren) get connected to their online sessions with their catechists. With parents focused and students oriented to the theme, you'll be able to negotiate the material together in the manner and at the time that works best for your family. Step-by-step teaching instructions from the publisher are available online; you may find them helpful. To get you started, we'll include Unit 1 instructions in your textbook package.

We've been asked by the Archdiocese to structure some sort of "accountability" into our program. For us that will mean: (1) The catechist will take attendance at the online session, and (2) when the student has finished working through each chapter, he/she will go online and complete the interactive chapter review found on the website. At the end of the review, the student is prompted to send the results to an email address. We will use:

quizzes@stelizabethchurchmd.org. There is also an assessment at the end of each unit in the form of a game called “Fishers of Faith.”

So basically, this scenario for family catechesis requires online connection – on the part of the students and the parents – once every five weeks. This is coupled with parent instruction, work in the textbook, and quizzes taken by the student on the website after every chapter and unit and sent back electronically to St. E’s.

There are a few more times that online connection would come into play:

- There are two “seasonal” lessons – one for Advent/Christmas and the other for Lent/Easter. The Lenten class is on the calendar, but for Advent, we’ll need to be creative in terms of dates times. The First Sunday of Advent falls during the weekend after Thanksgiving when some families might be traveling.
- The Archdiocese is requiring that we teach a “Safe Environment” lesson (as we do every year). This will be led by catechists and is on the schedule for November 8th (10:45 – 11:20). It is mandatory for every student.
- Several catechists have asked about offering additional Zoom classes. These would be optional and intended not as work but as fun and enlivening reinforcement activities.

For 8th grade parents specifically - we will incorporate specific lessons for Confirmation preparation as part of our at-home and catechist led sessions. There will be a separate textbook for that which we usually begin to work in during the month of January/February. More to come on that...I will be sending out an email to all of you regarding details for preparation for Confirmation; a parent ZOOM meeting to attend next month outlining all the details, forms needed, dates and other info. We are still finalizing the dates for those parent meetings. **Please add to your calendars the date for Confirmation this year - April 24th with a rehearsal the evening before.** We usually have a morning and an afternoon liturgy. This will all be covered at our ZOOM parent meeting. So, please hold any questions until then. We shall see, of course, where we are with the pandemic next Spring. Let's all pray hard for a vaccine and that this pandemic crisis is behind us by then.

For those of you who have already registered for Christian Formation for the upcoming year, thank you! I am so happy that you want this for your children – not *in spite of* the challenges of this pandemic but *because of* the challenges of this pandemic. Hopefully, as you present the faith to your children, you will re-discover its richness and the truths it contains.

For those of you who have every intention of registering but have not quite gotten around to it, may I ask you to do so as soon as possible? It takes two weeks to get additional textbooks from the publisher, and I'd like to make sure we have these ready for pick-up by September 25th.

For those of you who are planning to “skip” Christian Formation this year, please consider changing your mind. When you presented your child for baptism, you undertook the responsibility of educating him or her in the faith. Some of this you do by example and by the values you instill in your home, but a part of this education is systematic knowledge of what we as Catholics believe. That knowledge should grow with the child’s age and ability to understand, and it is difficult to convey without a curriculum, a committed time for study, and especially the

support of and connection to a faith community. Plus, we would miss you! We are less without you and your children. One more important point to remember - preparation for a sacrament takes place over a two-year period - so to you 7th-grade parents who have not yet registered, please do if you plan to have your son/daughter confirmed next year. Here is the link to our registration form: <https://stelizabethchurchmd.org/cfregistration>

This is it for now (Phew!). Do plan to attend a Zoom orientation prior to the program start date for help in navigating this. Be sure to open the calendar found on the Elementary/Middle web page <https://stelizabethchurchmd.org/elementary-cf>

Happy to answer any questions you may have! This will be a challenging catechetical year, but together we will flourish and grow stronger together as families in faith.

Peace & Blessings! Stay safe and well!

Mrs. Boston

Upper School Christian Formation Program Coordinator/Confirmation Coordinator