Dear Parents:

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.

St. Elizabeth will follow the family catechesis model. The responsibility for conveying the material will be your task as parents, but we will support you with a good textbook series, parent focus/overview sessions, and classes for students led by our awesome catechists. We hope to provide some opportunities for family growth in prayer, and we’re 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 six will use the Finding God series from Loyola Press. Your child will like the new 2021 edition, which has been updated to include QR codes that link to songs, prayers, saint videos and artwork! Each textbook is divided into five units of five chapters each. The broad subject areas (God, Jesus, the Church, Sacraments, and Morality) are the same throughout these grades, although the material is, of course, more complex the older the child. This facilitates family lessons and discussions because the children are focusing on the same aspect of their faith at the same time across the board.

On the weekend of September 25th-27th at specific times noted on the calendar, 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 texts 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 will participate in an online overview session which explores the theme for that unit. Then there’s a 15-minute break, during which time parents will help their child(ren) get connected to online sessions with their catechists. With parents focused and students oriented to the theme, families will be able to negotiate the material together in the manner and at the time that works best for their households. The year continues in this pattern. At the start of each unit (chapter 1), parents and students Zoom in for online coaching. For the
remainder of the unit (chapters 2-5), parent instruction is what guides the student through the textbook. Step-by-step lesson “scripts” are available on the Loyola Press website; they are helpful for moms or dads concerned about their teaching abilities. To get you started, we’ll include Unit 1 instructions in your textbook package. Aside from these unit overviews, there are just 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 and times. The First Sunday of Advent falls during the weekend after Thanksgiving, when some families are likely to travel.

- 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.

- **If you have a student receiving First Communion this year,** there will be some additional classes and activities. We are trying to simplify this process as much as possible. You will be contacted separately regarding sacramental preparation.

- **If you have a student in PreK or Kindergarten,** you will receive updated information on Zooms and curriculum once we see how many students of this age are registered.

The Archdiocese expects that we build “accountability” into our program. For us that means: (1) The catechist will take attendance at each 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.”

That’s it in a (very big) nutshell. Do plan to attend a Zoom orientation prior to the program start date for help in navigating this. Looking at the calendar will put the year in perspective. I’m happy to answer any questions you may have! This will be a challenging catechetical year, but it will also be a wonderful opportunity to grow stronger together as families in faith.

Abundant blessings,

Mary Theresa

Mary Theresa Heneghan
Director of Christian Formation