

Parent / Student Handbook

An Annotated Checklist

Listed below are the sections of a religious education parent / student handbook, which are recommended by the Diocese. Listed within each section are various concerns, which should be addressed, based on local needs and circumstances.

MISSION & VISION STATEMENTS

Mission and Vision Statements - these stand at the beginning of the handbook as a clear statement of program goals and directions. All that follows in the handbook should flow directly from these statements. The **mission and vision** statements should be identical to those found in the catechist/staff handbook. If there is a parish mission statement it would be appropriate to include it as well.

ADMISSION POLICIES

- **A Nondiscrimination Statement** - a statement should be included saying there is no discrimination on the basis of race, sex, national origin, physical or mental challenge.
- **Standards** - for admission, continuance in the program, expulsion, and readmission should be specific.

FINANCIAL PROCEDURES

- **Book and Material fees** - information should be specific.
- **Refund policies** - should be stated clearly.

ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES

- **Attendance Expectations** - stated clearly.
- **Records** - a statement indicating that attendance and performance record will be kept on file. Also explains the manner in which parents may have access to the records as well as all conditions under which records would be shared.
- **Absenteeism** - a statement which indicates the program's response to student absence and the consequence of such absence. This needs to respond to questions regarding children who spend weekends out of the parish with a parent.
- **Homework** - expectations need to be clearly stated as well as those in the event of absence.
- **Communication** - procedures by which parents, catechists and program administrators contact each other. Also includes the procedure that parishioners/parents can follow when they have a complaint.

NON-CUSTODIAL PARENT RIGHTS

Non-custodial Parent Rights - the law holds that parents do not cease to be parents when they no longer have custody of their children. It is important to include a statement such as “The Religious Education Leader needs to be informed by the custodial parent of the rights of the non-custodial parent,” such as what information will be sent to non-custodial parents and in what circumstance.

DISCIPLINE

- **Rules and penalties** - need to be stated simply and clearly. Avoid long lists of rules.
- **Consequences** - a statement of unacceptable behavior needs to be specific. The final recourse in all disciplinary situations should be identified.
- **Exceptions** - a statement should be included that the catechetical leader or pastor retains the right to make exceptions to the disciplinary procedures.
- **Search and seizure** - the procedure applied when a young person is suspected of having illegal substances should be clearly communicated. (E.g. weapons, drugs, stolen property, alcohol, tobacco products)
- **Weapons and threats of violence** - these policies should be clearly stated.

OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES RELATED TO PROGRAM

Field trips - these directives should be clearly stated. Parents will be expected to sign a permission form, which releases the parish from liability. These rules include retreats or any reason for which the children would leave church grounds (walk to the nearby park, Dairy Queen visit, etc.).

The following **sample** (adapted from the Diocese of Erie) is provided as a demonstration guide for writing a parent / student handbook. Please feel free to use anything you find in these pages if it is applicable - **however - not everything here will apply to every parish and the sample will need to be reviewed and revised for your parish.**

These ideas are **not** intended to suggest what the policies of a particular parish ought to be, but are provided to demonstrate how a policy might appear in a Handbook.

Sample Parent / Student Handbook

St. Idealia's Religious Education Program

Introduction

The Catholic Church has issued many documents that describe the ministry of catechesis. This program is based upon the principles and guidelines found in these documents. *The General Directory for Catechesis*, *The National Catechetical Directory*, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* as well as diocesan statements on the ministry of catechesis provides a framework for our parish programs. The following is a summary of the most important directives provided by these documents and a clarification of how they help guide the catechetical program in this parish.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church quotes Pope John Paul II from *Catechesi Tradendae* as he describes what is entailed in the ministry of catechesis:

Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life. CCC, #5

The National Catechetical Directory further clarifies what elements should be a part of a quality catechetical program:

Like other pastoral activities, catechetical ministry must be understood in relation to Jesus' threefold mission. It is a form of the ministry of the word, which proclaims and teaches. It leads to and flows from the ministry of worship, which sanctifies through prayer and sacrament. It supports the ministry of service, which is linked to efforts to achieve social justice... NCD, #32

Guided by the principles found in the documents of the Church concerning the ministry of catechesis, the catechetical program of this parish will include the following elements:

Message

The story of Scripture and the teachings of the Church will be communicated within the context of the faith story of each student and the signs of the times.

Community

Efforts will be made to form Christian community among the students through interaction and faith sharing.

Worship

The participants will experience many forms of Catholic prayer and worship to help them become prayerful people.

Service

Participants will be called to service and justice, which is inherent in the message of Jesus and the teachings of the Church.

Religious Education Board

Mission Statement

The Religious Education Board of St. Idealia establishes policy to ensure that all parishioners have appropriate and sustained opportunities to grow in faith.

Vision Statement

St. Idealia religious education programs will enlighten the human and spiritual dimensions of each parishioner regardless of age or vocation.

Religious Education Program

Mission Statement

The catechetical program of St. Idealia parish forms parishioners in the faith of the Catholic Tradition so that both they and the world may be transformed into the living Reign of God.

Vision Statement

So all will grow in the awareness, knowledge and practice of faith.

Program Goals

St. Idealia's Catholic Parish strives to be a Christian community faithful to the Gospel and the Catholic Tradition. The parish is, in reality, a community of communities: students, faculty, farmers, townspeople, commuters, all united in the endless struggle and search to know, love and serve God, self and one another. The unique diversity of the parish offers at once a challenge and a rich resource for learning. The goals of St. Idealia's catechetical program are:

- To provide a program of formal religious instruction for the children and youth of the parish.
- To support parents in their role as primary educators of their children.
- To offer sacramental preparation to children and youth.
- To help youth discover the richness and challenges of Scripture and the teachings and traditions of the Catholic Church.
- To build a strong Catholic identity among the youth of the parish.
- To allow youth to experience the Church as community.
- To deepen the prayer life of children and youth.
- To motivate youth to live lives rooted in charity and justice based on the moral teachings of the church.
- To expose students to the liturgical and sacramental richness that is part of the Catholic Tradition.
- To enable students to become responsible, self-reflecting, loving and praying individuals.
- To make programs that meet diverse spiritual needs available to adults of the parish.

The Role of the Parent(s)

It is the role of the parish to assist parents in nurturing the faith of their children. Parent(s) who enroll their children in the parish catechetical program will be assisted and enabled in their role as the primary educators of their children. Parent(s) are encouraged to approach the staff with ideas to meet specific needs in raising healthy and holy Catholic children and youth.

At the same time, it is essential that parents cooperate with the parish and work with those who are the designated leaders of the parish program. Parents are asked to fulfill the following expectations in order to promote the faith growth of the children and youth and to insure a quality program,

A parent(s) who would like their child to attend the program:

1. Must be a registered member of a parish.
2. Is responsible for providing the parish with information regarding the child's baptism and other sacraments if applicable.

3. Attends Mass weekly with the child.
4. Takes responsibility for their role as primary educator.
5. Collaborates with the catechists in the program by sharing faith with the child (ren) at home and by making sure the child does any required follow-up to the lessons taught in class.
6. Teaches the child the traditional prayers of the Church at home.
7. Maintains an open line of communication with the child's catechist.
8. Brings the child to class at the prescribed time and picks them up promptly at the conclusion of class.
9. Makes sure the child enters the building where classes are held and goes to the classroom.
10. Brings his / her child to class dressed appropriately, ready to participate.
11. Attends parent meetings when requested.
12. Is supportive of the catechist, especially in the area of discipline.
13. Reads this handbook, completes and turns in the forms necessary for registration.
14. Informs the religious education leader of the rights of the non-custodial parent in the case of divorce. This is essential to ensure that the program acts in the best interest and safety of the child (ren).
15. Informs the religious education leader of any pertinent medical and emergency information.

Admission Policies

St. Idealia's religious education program does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, national origin, religion, physical or mental challenges.

Any family that is registered in St. Idealia parish (or a parish with whom St. Idealia has a formal relationship for religious education) may enroll their children in the catechetical program. In order for their children to be admitted, the family must complete the appropriate registration and student information forms and indicate that they have read and accept the policies contained in this handbook. These forms are available from the religious education office or at the rectory.

Parents are also required to fill out a health form on each of the children they seek to enroll in the program.

Students are typically enrolled in the grade in which they are currently attending in school, unless other arrangements are made with the religious education leader. An exception to this may be necessary to meet specific requirements for sacramental preparation.

A general registration session for all children is held each August. Families who wish to enroll their children at other times during the year may do so by contacting the religious education leader.

Book and Material Fees

The pastor, in cooperation with Parish Council, determines the annual fees for the Religious Education Program. The following fee schedule per family has been recommended:

One Child.	\$20
Two Children	\$30
Three or more children....	\$40

No student will be prevented from attending because of his / her parents' inability to pay. An inquiry to either the pastor or the religious education leader is all that is necessary to have fees excused. Please know that this is offered in the spirit of a community called to assist one another in love.

Book and material fees are non-refundable after the start of classes.

Baptismal Certificates

Families with children who were not baptized at this parish are requested to bring a copy of the baptismal certificate, along with any other sacramental records, when they initially enroll their child in the program. Children who have not been baptized will be accepted into the program provided the family intends to have them baptized and is willing to enroll them in the children's initiation program.

Parents & Catechists

Catechists that teach the classes in the religious education program are volunteers. The parish has made every effort to screen them to insure that they are capable of handling the responsibility involved in this ministry. The parish also offers training courses that increase the skills needed for the catechists to be successful. The religious education leader supervises the catechists in order to help them fulfill their responsibility. As parents you are asked to recognize the challenges involved in being a volunteer catechist and to support them in whatever ways possible. If any problems arise however, please first contact the catechist to discuss the situation. If that does not lead to a satisfactory resolution, please contact the religious education leader. All parishioners have the right to final recourse from the pastor of the parish.

Classes

Attendance

Children who are enrolled in the parish catechetical program are expected to be in attendance for each scheduled class session. It is the responsibility of parent(s) to insure their presence. If your child is to be absent, you are asked to contact the religious education office in advance. Attendance will be taken weekly and the parent(s)

will be called by an office volunteer if the child is absent and we have not received prior notification.

Missed Classes

Each class session builds on the material covered in preceding classes. Children who are absent miss a great deal and will have to make up the material covered in the missed class.

Arrival and Dismissal

Classes are held in the Parish Center. Parent(s) are asked to bring their children before the start of classes. Supervision will be provided for students during the stated class times. The program is not responsible for supervising children arriving more than 15 minutes early or for the activity of the children 15 minutes after dismissal. Please do not drop off children more than 15 minutes before classes are scheduled to begin, and please pick up your child promptly at the end of class. Children are to be picked up only by parent(s) or their designee. Parent(s) are to notify the religious education leader if someone other than the parent or designee is to pick up their children. While all reasonable attention will be given to car-pool and the like, the police will be notified immediately if a child is seen leaving in a car not recognized by the religious education leader or catechist.

Class Schedule

Elementary classes are held on Wednesday afternoons from 4:30 - 5:45 or 7:00 - 8:15. Grades 7-12 meet on Sunday evenings from 7:00 - 8:30. The calendar of classes gives the starting and ending dates, along with all breaks.

Classroom Visits

Parent(s) are permitted and encouraged to visit their children's classroom at any time. They are required to sign in with the program leader before entering the classroom.

Homework

Catechists are encouraged to assign work for the children to do at home with the assistance of their parent(s). Parent(s) are encouraged to ask their children about homework after each class period.

Progress Reports

Parent(s) will be sent a progress report for each of their children twice a year. The reports will be sent at the end of November and again in early April.

Arrival and Dismissal

Curriculum

St. Idealia's parish follows the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana's guidelines. Textbooks and other materials used in the classrooms of St. Idealia's are in conformity

- **Confirmation** is celebrated for students in the 9th grade at St. Idealia's. The preparation involves bi-weekly meetings with the youth, which includes their sponsor or an adult mentor, one overnight retreat, an evening of reflection and two parent meetings as well as twenty-five hours of service to the parish and/or parish community. Confirmation is celebrated during the Easter Season on a date set by the Bishop.

Celebration of Liturgy and the Liturgical Year

In an attempt to help children and youth understand more deeply the power and mystery of the sacred liturgy, they will be given the opportunity to celebrate the seasons of the liturgical year. Youth will also be given opportunities to plan and celebrate para-liturgies (prayer services) and Eucharistic liturgies (Mass). Insofar as is possible, parent(s) will be notified of such occasions and will be invited to attend.

Discipline

Everyone involved in the program is challenged by the words and example of Jesus to respect each person's right to be treated not only with dignity and respect but also with love. In order to provide for a safe and well ordered program, in which students and catechists can learn to follow Jesus' call to love, some rules for behavior are necessary. Students are expected by their behavior to make the classes safe and positive experiences for themselves and their classmates. The program exists for student growth and in turn students are expected to carry out the following responsibilities:

1. Show respect to catechists, other students and program personnel.
2. Treat the property, good name and physical safety of others with respect.
3. Be present only in the areas of the building for which they have permission at a specific time.
4. Act in a safe manner in and around the building.
5. Use voice and display actions in a manner appropriate for a classroom.
6. Be respectful of the study time of others.
7. Use of, or possession of illegal drugs, alcohol, or tobacco is strictly prohibited. Such items will be seized and parents notified immediately. The child will be immediately removed from the environment.

Good discipline is self-discipline and is always aimed toward growth. We recognize that children may make mistakes and the role of the catechist at times will be one of guiding and correcting those mistakes in a positive manner. These corrections will

always be done with the best interest of the child in mind and at no time will St. Idealia's accept the demeaning or intimidation of children in the name of discipline.

Disciplinary Process

- At the time of the first correction, the student will be warned.
- Students whose behavior becomes a continual problem in the classroom will be sent out of class to the religious education leader. Anytime a student is sent from class for disciplinary reasons their parent(s) will be contacted either by phone, in person, or in writing.
- If the student's behavior continues to be a problem, the student will be removed from class and the parent(s) will be contacted again. In order to return to the classroom, the student and parent(s) will meet with the catechist and religious education leader to resolve the issues. At this time the parent(s) may be asked to sit in on the class for a few weeks to observe their child and his/her interaction with the catechist and other students.
- As a last recourse, when a conflict between a student and catechist cannot be resolved, the parent(s) will be asked to finish the year at home with the child. The child will be treated, as one who is being homeschooled and the parish will follow the Diocesan guidelines concerning homeschooling.
 - The child will be admitted into the program in the next calendar year with no prejudice.

Resolution

- The Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana has a Policy for Conflict Resolution at the parish level.
- The goal of the policy is to provide a means for the resolution of problems and complaints of individuals which may arise from the application or interpretation of personnel policies, practices, or procedures.
- Contact the Human Resources Department for a copy of the policy.

Child Abuse

All residents in the State of Indiana are required to report suspected or actual child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. The pastor and DRE have those contacts available. All parish staff and volunteers have participated in an in-service training on child abuse identification and reporting procedures.

Weapons Policy

In order to ensure a safe and Christian environment, it is forbidden for anyone to possess a weapon or any object / material / substance that could be used as a weapon or confused with a real weapon by any reasonable person (toy guns, etc.) in the buildings, or within the geographic boundaries of (parish name), or in any location used by the parish to conduct any catechetical activity, or in any conveyance providing transportation to or from any activity related to the religious education program.

Weapons or potential weapons will be confiscated by the religious education leader when this action does not place the religious education leader in danger. If the student has used a weapon against another person or will not surrender the weapon or offending object/material/substance immediately and willingly, the local police will be called first, followed by notification of the parent(s). This is a zero tolerance policy.

Any student who violates this policy will be subject to immediate parish disciplinary action over and above any civil/criminal action brought by injured parties.

The student will be removed from the religious education class and an alternative method of religious education will be negotiated with the parent(s) for the remainder of the year. Judgments about re-admittance to the program for the following year will be made on a case by case basis and this decision is at the sole discretion of the pastor.

If the incident involves an exchange of bodily fluids (for example, as in a wound which breaks the skin), the student(s) will be asked to submit to medical tests for transmittable diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis B as recommended by a doctor. These tests will be at the parent(s) expense. In the name of being a community of Christians motivated by care and respect, this policy asks that the results of these tests, which are governed by guidelines of strict confidentiality, be openly shared with the respective parties on a need-to-know basis.

THREATS OF VIOLENT BEHAVIOR

As a community of believers who value patience over aggression, and love above all else, it is inconsistent with our basic values to tolerate an environment of threat or fear. Threats of harm made against another individual or group of individuals are not acceptable and will not be tolerated.

This policy recognizes that in any community of people there will always be some conflict. Students will always be encouraged to manage their conflict in a positive, non-aggressive manner. Behavior such as cursing, pushing or fighting will not be tolerated.

In cases which are deemed by the catechist or religious education leader to be “minor” (meaning: no reason to believe the situation would lead to physical harm) the students will be separated and encouraged to work out their differences after a “cool-down” period.

If the catechist regards the altercation as “serious” (meaning reasonable expectation that the conflict will lead to physical harm) the students will be immediately separated, the religious education leader will be notified, and the parent(s) of the students will be called. The religious education leader must determine that the conflict is resolved before the students will be readmitted to the program.

Students are expected to report to their catechist or religious education leader any threat made by a student, which mentions the killing of any person. Such threats will be immediately reported to the police for investigation. The student making such threats will be suspended from the program until such time as the police investigation is completed and the appropriate authorities are satisfied that there is no real threat of harm. In such a case, judgments about re-admittance to the program will be made on a case by case basis and this decision is at the sole discretion of the pastor.

HARASSMENT

Respect for the dignity and worth of each individual is a basic precept of Catholic doctrine and therefore of St. Idealia's parish. Each person is entitled to work in an environment free from discriminatory practices such as any form of harassment based on race, sex, creed, color, age, or disability including sexual harassment. Parish leadership wishes to be vigilant regarding harassment whether between or among catechists and/or parish leaders, among students or between catechists/parish leaders and students. Such behavior will not be tolerated and if persistent harassment is proven, the offender will be dismissed when this is appropriate. Harassment of all forms is illegal as well as immoral and individuals will be encouraged to seek legal protection when necessary.

The term "harassment" refers to behavior that is not welcome, that is personally offensive and that fails to treat others with dignity and respect. It includes treating someone unfavorably because of his or her race, sex, creed, color, age or disability. Harassment may take the form of discrimination, unwelcome or critical comments or action. Harassment on the basis of sex might include unwelcome sexual advances, requests or demand for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct, including, but not limited to:

- Verbal conduct such as epithets, derogatory jokes or comments, slurs or unwanted sexual advances, intimations or comments.
- Visual contact such as derogatory and / or sexually oriented posters, photography, cartoons, drawings or gestures.
- Physical contact such as assault, unwanted touching, blocking normal movements, or interfering with work, studies or play because of sex.
- Retaliations for having reported or threatened to report such harassment.

The term "sexual harassment" refers to harassment based on the gender of the offended individual when the people involved are of different "levels" within the parish. It involves threats and demands to submit to sexual requests as a condition of employment, grades or other benefits or to avoid some other loss and offers of benefits in return for sexual favors. It also means creating a hostile environment for the student or employee such that it is an unfit environment for learning or work. Examples include, but are not limited to repeated unwelcome sexual advances, repeated sexually explicit jokes or comments, or the displaying of sexually inappropriate materials.

Allegations and complaints of any type of harassment must be reported as soon as possible. Parent(s) who become aware of incidents of sexual harassment should report them immediately to the pastor or to the religious education leader.

WEATHER AND OTHER EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

Cancellation of Classes

Classes may be canceled from time to time because of inclement weather. The following direction for parent(s) is offered:

IF THE LOCAL SCHOOLS ARE CANCELLED OR DISMISSED EARLY, THERE WILL BE NO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CLASSES.

To find out if classes are canceled, parent(s) should listen for reports on (name local radio and television stations).

Safety Procedures for Fires and other emergencies

There are safety procedures posted in each room for fire and tornado emergencies. Catechists will instruct the students in these procedures the first week of class. In case of fire or a tornado, attendance will be taken after an emergency evacuation and no child will be dismissed without their parent or guardian. Parent(s) must check with the religious education leader before leaving with their child to avoid unnecessary search and rescue operations.

SICKNESS AND INJURY

Sickness

Should a student become ill while in class, parent(s) will be contacted according to the information provided on the student medical form. If the parent is unavailable, attempts will be made to reach the backup person listed. The religious education leader will make every effort to keep the child comfortable until he/she is picked up. Medications will not be administered to the child.

Medications

Children are not to bring medications with them to religious education classes without advance permission of the religious education leader. It is the responsibility of parent(s) to notify the religious education leader immediately of any changes in allergies or dietary restrictions.

Injury

Catechists are asked to report any injury to the religious education leader immediately. If an injury occurs, first aid will be administered in strict accordance with the *Blood-borne Pathogens* regulations of the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana and the parent(s) will be contacted. If the injury requires immediate medical attention, the

religious education leader will call the appropriate emergency services, followed by a call to the parent(s). A first aid kit is available in the religious education office.