



# ST. JOHN NEUMANN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION



## 2018-2019 PARENT HANDBOOK

St. John Neumann Catholic Church  
Religious Education Office  
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### RELIGIOUS EDUCATION STAFF

- Therese Stahl, Director of Religious Education and Evangelization, extension 113, [tstahl@sjnstcharles.org](mailto:tstahl@sjnstcharles.org)
- Kristi Loar, Coordinator of Religious Education
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### OFFICE HOURS

Our office hours when Religious Education classes are in session:

- Sunday: 8am to Noon
- Monday, Tuesday, Thursday: 9am to 4pm
- Wednesday: 9am to 8pm
- Friday: Closed
- Saturday: Closed

Our office hours when Religious Education classes are *not* in session:

- Sunday, Friday, and Saturday: Closed
- Monday-Thursday: 9am to 4pm

# ST. JOHN NEUMANN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM

St. John Neumann's Religious Education program shares its goal with the Church's definitive aim of catechesis:

*Mission:* To put our children and families not only in touch with, but also in communion and intimacy with, Jesus Christ.

This mission is accomplished by focus on the Church's fundamental tasks of catechesis:

*Goals:*

- To promote knowledge of the faith
- To promote liturgical education
- To promote moral formation
- To teach our families to pray
- To educate our families to live a life in a community of faith
- To initiate our families to the missionary dimension of our Christian faith

## CURRICULUM

The parish uses several curriculum to prepare its students to live a life of faith:

- Preschool and Kindergarten children use Our Sunday Visitor's *Allelu!* series.
- Children in Grades 1 and 3-5 use Loyola Press' *Finding God* series.
- Grade 2 uses *Signs of Grace*, Augustine Institute.
- Youth in Grades 6 and 7 study *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers*, St. Mary's Press.
- Grade 8 prepares for Confirmation using Dynamic Catholic's *Decision Point*.
- Younger classes also use the St. Mary's Press *Children's Bible*. Disciples in grades 5 through 8 purchase their own copy of the St. Mary's Press *BreakThrough! Bible for Young Catholics*.

For children preparing for First Reconciliation and First Communion, catechists send home Family Pages to complete at home.

All these texts present Church doctrine and Tradition accurately and comprehensively and with the approval of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

For the most part, the curriculum is a spiral curriculum. Children are introduced to and revisit concepts and vocabulary from one year to the next, including: God, Jesus, the Church, the Creed, sacraments, morality, prayer, Catholic Social Teaching, and Scripture. As children progress through the grade-levels, their knowledge and experiences of these concepts broaden and deepen.

- The 3- to 4-year-old lessons begin with God's creation of the world, as well as an understanding of the self as part of a family.

- The 4- to 5-year-old lessons focus on the relational aspects of the faith. Children learn how they relate to God, their family, and their parish.
- The Kindergarten lessons delve into Catholic identity and participation in the faith community.
- Grade 1 focuses on God and Creator and how God found everything good. Grade 1 visits the Our Lady of Guadalupe Chapel, the Baptismal Font, and the Eucharistic Chapel
- Grade 2 focuses on Reconciliation and Eucharist. Grade 2 takes a tour of the Sacristy, visits the Eucharistic Chapel, and celebrates First Reconciliation and First Communion.
- Grade 3 focuses on Church and the Holy Spirit and how, as disciples, we are fishers of men. This grade works with the *Catholic Children's Bible*, learns the Rosary, and visits the Eucharistic chapel.
- Grade 4 focuses on the beatitudes and the Ten Commandments. This grade works with the *Catholic Children's Bible* and visits the Eucharistic chapel.
- Grade 5 focuses on sacraments and worship, as well as an introduction to the Bible. Grade 5 works with the *Breakthrough Bible*, learns Marian prayers, and visits the Eucharistic chapel.
- Grade 6 focuses on the Old Testament, the Trinity, and the mission of Christ. This grade views segments from "Encounter," the Great Adventure Bible Series for middle school students, to illustrate Salvation History and connections between the Old and New Testaments, and visits the Eucharistic chapel.
- Grade 7 focuses on the New Testament, the Church and the Sacraments. This grade views segments from the "Altaration" DVD series by Ascension Press to break open the person of Christ and the Mass, prays the Stations of the Cross, and visits the Eucharistic chapel.
- Grade 8 focuses on Confirmation preparation and visits the Eucharistic chapel.

## **LITURGICAL CATECHESIS**

Bringing our children toward a deeper understanding of the Mass is an important component of our Religious Education classes. Each lesson contains a link to the liturgy. Basic prayers and responses of the Mass will also be reviewed with the children and used as part of classroom prayer. Attendance at class is not a substitute for attending Mass. Weekly Mass attendance is a minimum precept of the Church and is the ideal way that we as disciples gain spiritual sustenance and communion with Christ and his Body.

## **PRAYER**

Prayer is an integral component of every Religious Education class. Lesson plans contain opening prayer, a midsession extended prayer, and closing prayer. *Finding God* often uses guided meditation as well. Each class is also asked to schedule at least two visits to our Eucharistic Chapel for time in quiet prayer before Our Lord in the Tabernacle, and each class has at least one experience of Eucharistic Adoration scheduled for the year.

Memorization of communal prayers and certain doctrine of the Church is another important component to catechesis. Think of "praying by heart" as carrying prayers and doctrine in our hearts so that we have words to pray when our words fail us.

The Rockford Diocese has set the following memorization expectations. Parents are asked to help their children memorize these prayers, as time will not be spent in class on memorization.

#### Pre-Kindergarten

- Sign of the Cross

#### Kindergarten

- Sign of the Cross
- Hail Mary
- Our Father
- Glory Be
- Angel of God

#### Grade 1

- Prayers from previous years
- Grace Before Meals

#### Grade 2

- Prayers from previous years
- Act of Contrition (traditional)

#### Grade 3

- Prayers from previous years
- Apostles' Creed
- Rosary

#### Grade 4

- Prayers from previous years
- Nicene Creed (as a group)

#### Grade 5

- Prayers from previous years
- St. Michael the Archangel Prayer

#### Grade 6

- Prayers from previous years
- Hail, Holy Queen

## Grade 7

- Prayers from previous years
- Memorare

## Grade 8

- Prayers from previous years
- Come, Holy Spirit

### **SCRIPTURE**

Scripture is another integral component of our Christian faith and of every Religious Education class. Our children will be given every opportunity to meet the Living Word of God and find its power and relevance in their lives. Lesson plans contain references to Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Each classroom has a *Catholic Children's Bible* on its prayer table. Catechists make every effort to read passages from the Bible provided and put the Bible into the hands of the children so that they can explore its pages. Young disciples in Grades 5 through 8 purchase their own Bible, *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*, which we try to use at every class meeting, just as the student textbook is used during each class.

### **FAMILY FAITH GATHERINGS**

Families with at least one child in Grades 1-5 are asked to participate in our Family Faith Gatherings one time per month (September through April) as a family. This gathering will be instead of the child's weekly drop-off class. These gatherings are an expectation for all families with a child in Grades 1-5, whether their children attend on-site or home study classes. These family gatherings are typically on either the first Sunday or first Wednesday of the month (there are a few exceptions). Sunday family gatherings will meet 9am to 10:15am. Wednesday family gatherings will meet 6:45pm to 8pm.

Families with only middle school (Grades 6-8) children are not required to attend these Family Faith Gatherings.

Weekend Mass attendance as well as the attendance of both parents/guardians at the gatherings, if possible, are of primary importance to St. John Neumann. Thus, families will have the flexibility to choose to commit to either a Sunday or Wednesday family gathering, regardless of the session that their Grade 1-5 child attends.

Why are these Family Faith Gatherings part of the expectations of our program? Think of this statistic: Children are in Religious Education classes .003% of their time. Just based on the amount of time we spend with your child, the parish-based formation program cannot possibly take on the sole role of faith transmission for your children. The Church teaches, and studies have supported, that parents are paramount to forming faith-filled children. The Church also teaches that the parish must support you in your role of handing on the faith to your children. Part of this support comes from on-site classes or home study. Additional support will come from on-site Family Faith Gatherings. Our families will benefit from these gatherings through: facilitated faith discussion with

your children, praying together as a family, meeting other Catholic families in the parish who can provide inspiration and support, and by demonstrating to your children your commitment to life parish – an essential part of our Christian faith.

### **FIRST RECONCILIATION PREPARATION**

The sacrament of Reconciliation is a profound experience of God’s forgiveness and love. Reconciliation is a certain reminder that we are each, individually, important to God. God seeks each of us, his children, to bring us back into relationship with him after we have sinned. God rejoices when we have returned.

At St. John Neumann, our children are taught lessons on the sacrament of the Reconciliation within their Religious Education classes. Yet the Church believes that parents are the first educators or catechists of their children. At Baptism, parents spoke for their children and asked for entrance into the Church. St. John Neumann supports parents in their role to prepare their children for the sacraments. Parents catechize primarily by the witness of their Christian lives and by their love for their faith. Parents also participate actively in First Reconciliation preparation by working with their children at home to complete Family Take-Home Pages that are part of the children’s *Signs of Grace Activity Book*.

Together, the in-class lessons and at-home preparation cultivate spiritual growth and faith in both children and adults. Given this preparation, children and their families joyously celebrate God’s love and goodness in the sacrament of Reconciliation.

After having attended Grade 1 Religious Education, children in Grade 2 are prepared for First Reconciliation with in-class lessons and at-home work. Older children, who join our program with no prior religious formation, are prepared for their First Reconciliation in the second year as well, regardless of their grade level. These older children are prepared with grade-level, in-class lessons and, if possible, a special Sacrament Class that parents are asked to attend with students.

First Reconciliation celebrations are held in December each year.

Catechists who teach Grade 2 are invited to attend all parent preparation meetings for First Reconciliation.

In recognition that we cannot pass on what we do not have, parents will be invited to attend to their own faith formation, which sometimes gets pushed to the side in focusing on our children’s faith. Parents are invited to complete the *Forgiven* video series on the Formed.org web site.

### **FIRST COMMUNION PREPARATION**

The first sacramental experience of God’s grace for our children is the sacrament of Baptism. Baptism connects us to the community of faith, and it is the foundation for our participation in the weekly Eucharist.

At St. John Neumann, our children are taught lessons on the sacrament of the Eucharist within their Religious Education classes. Because the family is the first and foremost “school” of faith, it is also important for families to regularly and actively celebrate Mass and to discuss the meaning of the

ritual, symbols, prayers, and gestures of the Mass to bring children to a deeper understanding of the sacramental nature of these concepts. For these reasons, parents actively participate in the preparation of their children by working with them at home to complete Family Take-Home Pages that are part of the children's *Signs of Grace Activity Book*. Together, the in-class lessons and at-home preparation cultivate spiritual growth and faith in both children and adults. Given this preparation, children joyously join our community at the Table of the Lord for the Eucharistic celebration.

After having attended Grade 1 Religious Education, children in Grade 2 are prepared for First Eucharist with in-class lessons and at-home work. Older children, who join our program with no prior religious formation, are prepared for their First Eucharist in the second year as well, regardless of their grade level. These older children are prepared with grade-level, in-class lessons and, if possible, a special Sacrament Class that parents are asked to attend with students.

First Eucharist celebrations are held in April each year.

Catechists who teach Grade 2 are invited to attend all parent preparation meetings for First Communion as well as participate during the First Communion retreat.

In recognition that we cannot pass on what we do not have, parents will be invited to attend to their own faith formation, which sometimes gets pushed to the side in focusing on our children's faith. Parents are invited to complete the *Presence* video series on the Formed.org web site.

## **CONFIRMATION PREPARATION**

St. John Neumann holds our Confirmation celebration in 8th grade. Confirmation preparation is a three-year program, in which youth study the Old Testament and stories of God's covenantal love (6th grade), the New Testament and Jesus Christ as the New Covenant (7th grade), and preparation specific to the sacrament (8th grade).

On-site middle school classes are held Wednesday evenings 6:45pm-8pm. We also have a home study option available, in which teens work through the curriculum with their parents at home and periodically hand in written assessments.

High School students who are not yet confirmed will be prepared for the sacrament by onsite classes as well and will be expected to join the High School Youth Ministry.

All Confirmation students will be asked to choose a saint name, name a sponsor, complete a service project, participate in a Faith Conversation with one staff member near the end of preparation, and participate in a retreat, attend rehearsal and, of course, celebrate with us at the Confirmation Mass.

Sponsors may be asked to attend Confirmation gatherings with their candidate. If a sponsor cannot attend, a parent can attend in the sponsor's place. Sponsors will be asked to view the DVD clips (online) that their candidates view during the Confirmation classes so that sponsors can have faith conversations with their candidates. We will have some prompts available to sponsors to assist

them in these conversations. Sponsors will also, of course, be asked to participate in rehearsal and the Confirmation Mass.

Parents are asked to assist their teen in completing a service project. The candidate will be asked to share the love of Christ with one other person or group of people, making the service significant and meaningful and surrounded in prayer. The candidate will complete a reflection sheet at the completion of the service. Examples of service include: cleaning home or cooking meals for a sick relative; organizing a neighborhood food drive; preparing for and running a charity race, etc. The corporal and spiritual works of mercy can be a guide to discerning how the candidate might live out the call of the Gospel. With this self-directed service, we remind families that the candidate will get out of the service what is put into the service.

In recognition that we cannot pass on what we do not have, parents will be invited to attend to their own faith formation, which sometimes gets pushed to the side in focusing on our children's faith. Parents are invited to complete the *Symbolon – Living the Faith Session 1: Baptism and Confirmation* video series and the *Symbolon – Knowing the Faith Session 7: The Holy Spirit and the Life of Grace* video series on the Formed.org web site.

The date for Confirmation is set by the Bishop's Office. Once set, we will inform all those registered for preparation. We will also set dates for Reconciliation and rehearsal.

### **CHRISTIAN SERVICE & STEWARDSHIP**

The Religious Education program cannot succeed without the help of more than 100 volunteer missionaries, who have answered the call of God to serve his children. Parents of Religious Education students are encouraged to consider serving as a Religious Education missionary in classroom and non-classroom positions, including: catechist, assistant catechist, substitute, special needs buddy, hall monitor, office help, nursery attendant. For more information, contact Therese Stahl in the Religious Education Office.

St. John Neumann is a stewardship parish. This means that we share the money we take in with all ministries and people in need. We do not ask families to donate money or goods. Therefore, we do not ask our disciples or their families for donations beyond special stewardship projects. One such project is this year's Thanksgiving Food Baskets.

### **SAFE ENVIRONMENT AND CHASTITY INSTRUCTION**

Catechists present materials on Christian chastity and safe environment in January or February of each year for grades preschool ages 4-5 through grade 8. The material is from the "[Diocese of Rockford Formation in Christian Chastity and Safe Environment Program](#)," and mandated by the diocese. We offer the program as part of our ongoing commitment to create and maintain a safe environment for our children and to protect them from sexual abuse, and to instruct them in the integrity of their persons and bodies.

Prior to teaching the safe environment curriculum each year, the diocese requires that we offer a meeting for parents. Parent attendance is optional. By attending, parents can further understand the concepts of this program and how it will be incorporated into our religious education classes.

Parents have the right to choose whether their child participates in this instruction. They may “opt out” by submitting a signed form to the RE Office and keeping their child home on the day of instruction.

## PROGRAM POLICIES

### SESSIONS

- Preschool ages 3-4, 4-5, and Kindergarten: Sundays 10:30-11:30am
- Grades 1-5: Sundays 9am to 10:15am or Wednesdays 4:15-5:30pm
- Grades 6-8: Wednesdays 6:45-8pm
- Sacrament Class (for children older than Grade 2 preparing for First Reconciliation and First Communion): Sundays 10:30 am to 11:45am
- High School Confirmation Preparation: Onsite classes to be determined based on registrants and High School Youth Ministry

### CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Registrations are taken on a first come, first served basis. In early September, our office will send a letter to every family who has registered, relating each child’s classroom assignment. It is important that at any time during the year you not bring your child to or allow children to attend a class they are not assigned to.

### ATTENDANCE

Parents are asked to call the RE Office to report any absence. If a child is absent, the child’s catechist will prepare a “We Missed You” homework assignment sheet and attach the missed chapter. It is the parents’ responsibility to make sure that any work the child missed is made up. We ask parents to make a commitment to bring their children to class each week, since regular attendance helps in the child’s comprehension of the material, adjustment to class, and growth within the community of faith.

### HOME STUDY

Home study is available for Grades 1 through 8 and High School Confirmation preparation. Home study expectations are as follows:

- (1) Parents walk through the student book with their child, according to a calendar provided by the RE Office.
- (2) The child completes Unit Assessments by due dates throughout the year. If this requirement is not completed, the family will not be eligible for home study the following year.

- (3) Home study parents are invited to intentionally work on their own faith formation because “we cannot pass on what we do not have!” This is the same expectation that our classroom catechists are given.
- (4) Home study families with children in Grades 1 through 5 also participate in Family Faith Gatherings.
- (5) Families pay all material fees and tuition for each child enrolled in home study.

## **FAMILY COMMUNICATION**

The majority of our communication with parents will take place through e-mail. Please keep us up to date on your current e-mail address. Parents should also read the Religious Education section in the parish bulletin to keep informed about all events.

The RE Office e-mails a parent letter along with a monthly calendar to our families. These contain religious education ideas and list important events of the month.

Each young disciple in the program receives a free folder. These folders are sent back and forth, church to home, each week. The folder will contain notes for parents, fliers given to students, etc., along with the torn-out chapter covered that week (except middle school). We send home the chapter covered to allow parents to have a well-informed conversation with their child about what they are learning. This reinforces the fact that parents are the primary religious educators of their children, both in word and in action. Occasional homework activities will also alert the family to what is being taught in the classroom and help parents reinforce concepts and doctrine at home.

Catechists are asked to send home a letter to all parents of their learners at the start of the year and at least once a month during the school year.

## **BEHAVIOR**

The staff, volunteers, students, and families in our program are expected to act in a respectful manner toward each other. During registration, parents are asked to sign and review with their children a Religious Education Covenant of Expectations, which sets out rights and responsibilities of Religious Education families, including students, parents, volunteers and staff.

The Covenant also sets out an expected Student Code of Conduct. Each catechist will discuss with students the specific behavioral expectations for their class. Most misbehavior will be addressed at the classroom level. Catechists will contact parents and RE Office staff if the student’s behavior impacts classroom instruction. If a student’s behavior continues to impact the class, the RE Office staff may choose to meet with student or with the catechists, parents, and student in a dialogue.

More serious infractions can result in required meetings between RE Office staff and the Pastor and parents, students, and catechist, or can result in movement from an on-site class to the home study program. These infractions include but are not limited to:

- Bullying, fighting, threatening or harassing
- Vandalism of parish property, stealing, smoking, using drugs or alcohol
- Possession of drugs or alcohol on parish grounds
- Possession of a weapon on church grounds or at parish sponsored events

## **SUBSTITUTES**

It is sometimes necessary for our catechists to miss a class. For such an instance, catechists are given a list of parishioners who have agreed to substitute in class.

## **ARRIVAL**

Catechists are asked to arrive 15 minutes before class begins. Please do not drop your children off before then. At a minimum, all arriving learners need to be walked to the doors of the building. Parents of children in preschool through Grade 5 are asked to walk their children to the classroom.

At arrival time, pull into a parking space, and walk with your child to the building. Vehicles may not pull up to our curb and let children out into the parking lot due to safety concerns. When learners arrive in the building, they should go directly to the classroom. Please refer to communications from the RE Office sent with class assignment information regarding locked and unlocked outside doors during Religious Education classes.

## **DISMISSAL**

All learners, preschool through grade 5, wait in their classrooms until a parent or other adult arrives to pick them up. These children are not to leave the building without being accompanied by an adult. Students in grades 6-8 can exit the building on their own and meet their parent or other adult on the sidewalk outside of the building.

At dismissal time, everyone should park in a space in the parking lot. Vehicles must not block the fire lanes, any exit, or handicapped spaces. Please do not enter the classrooms to pick up students until the class has ended. Until then, simply wait in the hallway.

Catechists bring to the RE Office any children preschool through grade 5 who are not picked up after most of the children are gone. Grades 6-8 children should be told by their parents to go to the RE Office if the pick-up is late. We will supervise all these children and will attempt to contact parents via home and cell phones. If the parents cannot be contacted through these initial calls, the emergency contact that parents provided upon the registration form will be contacted.

The first few weeks of class will be critical to establishing the dismissal routine for the year. If a child grade 5 or under tells his or her catechist that a parent expects them to walk to a car on their own, the catechists have been asked to walk the child to the RE Office instead. The RE Office will supervise the child until a parent comes into the building for pick up.

No child is to be picked up early from class without the parent presenting the catechist with an Early Dismissal Pass. Parents can pick up a pass card at the RE Office and have it signed by office staff. Parents will need to present their drivers license to the RE Office to complete this card. The parent should present this card to the catechist before the learner is released.

## **CUSTODY**

The Religious Education Office presumes divorced or separated parents both have legal access to their children. If there are other custody arrangements, a copy of such agreement must be on file in the parish Religious Education Office.

# SAFETY

## **EMERGENCY PROCEDURES**

Each classroom has posted a chart with one possible escape route to be used in the event of an emergency. We will have at least one fire drill during the school year, usually in October. The Fire Department may be here during the drill to assist us.

Catechists have also been instructed on what to do in the event of a tornado warning or other dangerous weather and what to do in the event of a lockdown.

For any emergency, should reentry into the building not be an option, rescue personnel will direct us to a holding area where parents can pick up their children. Should this happen, parents must physically sign out for their children so that we can track who was picked up and by whom. Such sign out may be required after a tornado warning or other emergency as well.

## **FIRST AID**

If anyone is in a life-threatening situation, catechists have been instructed to call 911 from the nearest landline or cell phone, and then inform the RE Office. For your information, there is an emergency phone that provides an outside line on the lower level next to the elevator. Catechists have been asked to bring to the RE Office any person who requires basic first aid or any student who becomes sick during class. No volunteer or staff member can dispense medication to a child.

Anyone who witnesses an accident involving an adult or child on Church property will need to complete the "Catholic Diocese of Rockford Incident Report" at the Religious Education Office.

The AEDs are located in the following areas:

- In the Hermes-Media Center
- In the hallway across from the restrooms outside the Hoffman Center
- In the Lower Level hallway by the elevator

## **FOOD IN CLASSROOMS**

We do not allow food or drinks in the classrooms unless directed by the curriculum and with the approval of the Director of Religious Education. This is because of the increased number of young children with health issues, such as diabetes, asthma, allergies or intolerance to wheat flour, gluten, food dyes, peanut products, and more. Catechists have been asked to use nonfood incentives or rewards in their classrooms. Please do not send in food treats with your children.

## **CANCELLATION OF CLASS**

Should classes need to be cancelled due to severe weather, we will try to send an e-mail to all of our families. The closing will also be posted to the Chicagoland Emergency Closings Web site if possible.

## **SAFE ENVIRONMENT FORMS**

The Diocese of Rockford has outlined several forms that need to be completed by each parish volunteer working with children and kept in files at the Diocese and/or the Parish.

