

St. Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic Church

Family Evangelization & Catechesis

PARENT HANDBOOK 2019-2020

TEMPORAL MATTERS

Attendance

The Office of Family Evangelization & Catechesis considers punctuality an integral dimension of any religious education program. Arriving late disrupts the class, and often causes students to fall behind in their formation. For these reasons, the following policies were written:

- A legal guardian will sign a child in **and** out of class each session.
- Students are considered late when he/she arrives more than 10 min after start time
- Students are marked absent if more than 20 minutes late
- There are 2 types of absences, excused and unexcused absences
 - 3 unexcused absences for the program year may result in a deferral of the sacraments.
 - Students that have a combine total of 6 or more absences for the program year may result in a deferral of the sacraments.

Excused/Unexcused Absences

Certain uncontrollable emergencies resulting in an absence will be considered excused (i.e. illness and vehicular malfunction). However, absences that are planned and avoidable will be considered unexcused (i.e. vacation, parent work schedules, athletics, extracurricular activities). With so few minutes to adequately form your children in the faith each week, we must be good stewards of the precious little we have.

Reporting Absences

- **Absence from class** - To report an absence and have it count as unexcused, send an email that states the **child's full name, grade, day of class, and reason for absence**. Emergency situations may make it impossible to send the email in advance. Attendance emails may be sent up to a week after the absence. **Phone messages and notes handed to the teacher will not be counted towards reporting absences.** Email youthformation@stacc.net to report an absence.
- **Absence from Retreats** - In sacramental years retreats are mandatory. If a serious emergency occurs, please speak with the Coordinator regarding the situation for possible consideration. If there is a significant uncontrollable event (i.e. wedding of close relative) that occurs on the same day, speak with the Coordinator at least *a month prior* to the retreat for possible consideration.

Homework

Students will be expected to complete all take-home assignments (including prayer and Scripture memorization challenges), should they be assigned. If a student comes to class unprepared, he/she may be marked absent. If parents have questions regarding their child's assignment, they should not hesitate to contact Anna Dice at adice@stacc.net or 623-935-2151 X214

Learning Challenges

If a child does have a documented learning challenge, it is imperative that the parent contact Anna Dice in the parish office for guidance. If the parish is unaware of the child's challenge, they will miss out on whatever assistance we may have to offer. You can reach her at adice@stacc.net or 623-935-2151 x214

Arrival and Dismissal

For the safety of our students, each family must follow all parish policies when dropping off and picking up their children. It is imperative that either mom or dad (unless otherwise stipulated in writing) sign their child "in" and "out." If someone other than a child's parent or guardian attempts to retrieve them at the conclusion of class, they will not be released to that person without having already completed an "Alternate Driver" form, which can be found attached in this packet. Also, if there is a family emergency and you will be late to class for any reason, please email Anna Dice in the Elementary Faith Formation Office at youthformation@stacc.net.

Classroom Behavior

All students are expected to be attentive and respectful of their catechist, fellow classmates and classroom surroundings. If inattentiveness, indifference and/or disrespect become habitual, parents will be notified and a tailored plan of action will be put in place in order to help the student grow in virtue. However, if at the end of the catechetical year certain behaviors persist, and the student is found improperly disposed to receive sacraments, it may be suggested that he/she defer for a period of time, so as to ensure some increase of spiritual maturity.

Appropriate Attire

Out of respect for the dignity of the human person, and that of the particular nature of the work we are engaged in, we ask that each child come to class appropriately attired – that is to say, modestly dressed. St. Augustine tells us, "In all your movements, let nothing be evident that would offend the eyes of another." And the *Catechism* expounds this principle: *"Modesty protects the intimate center of the person. It means refusing to unveil what should remain hidden. It is ordered to chastity to whose sensitivity it bears witness. It guides how one looks at others and behaves toward them in conformity with the dignity of person and their solidarity. Modesty protects the mystery of persons and their love. It encourages patience and moderation in loving relationships; it requires that the conditions for the definitive giving and commitment of man and woman to one another be fulfilled. Modesty is decency. It inspires one's choice of clothing. It keeps silence or reserve where there is evident risk of unhealthy curiosity. It is discreet"* (#2521, 2522).

Communication

The Elementary Faith Formation Office will communicate with parents by means of emails and text messages via Flocknote as well as through student handouts, and bulletin announcements.

Information specific to your child will be given to the child at the end of class as a take home note. Please follow up with your child each week to ensure that you have received all communications.

General Safety

Emergency Class Cancellations

-Public School Closures: If local schools are closed due to an emergency situation, religious education classes will likely be cancelled as well. If you have any questions about cancellations, please call 623-935-2151 x214 or before bringing your child to class.

-Inclement Weather

1. **Before** children arrive for their RE class:

i. If weather conditions are such that it becomes unnecessarily dangerous to venture out, please email youthformation@stacc.net.

2. **After** children have arrived:

ii. Parents or guardians will be contacted via Flocknote and children will be dismissed early.

Fire Safety: A map will be posted in each classroom with the exit route and gathering place outside of the building.

Safe Environment Requirement (Adults):

All catechists, aides and volunteers must be current with their Safe Environment requirement *before* setting foot in the classroom. Please feel free to inquire with Anna Dice should you have questions.

Safe Environment Requirement (Children)

We offer one Called to Protect session each year for any students whose parents might wish them to attend. This year's classes will be held in October.

SPIRITUAL MATTERS

Overview

The goal of the Office of Evangelization & Catechesis at St. Thomas Aquinas is not only to confer sacraments upon those who are properly disposed, but more importantly to create space for families to come together and encounter Jesus Christ in a meaningful way. For if that encounter does not take place, the sacraments will yield very little fruit in the lives of those receiving them. We must come to know Jesus intimately! Therefore, in response to Our Lord's command in Matthew 28, St. Thomas Aquinas aims to make apostles of you and your children, in preparation for being sent out into the world.

First Reconciliation (Year 1)

According to the Restored Order of the Diocese of Phoenix, children are most often prepared for and

participate in the sacrament of Reconciliation at the age of reason, which is (commonly understood to be seven years of age). Preparation for the sacrament of Reconciliation starts in 2nd Grade. In addition to attending Sunday Mass and class weekly, we require that each student (with the assistance of his/her parent(s) or guardian) establish a daily prayer regiment, which should start with memorizing their basic Catholic prayers: the Apostles and Nicene Creed, Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be, Act of Contrition and the Ten Commandments. All of these prayers can be found attached within.

Confirmation & Eucharist (Year 2)

In order to receive the sacraments of the Church, proper (age-appropriate) preparation is an essential ingredient. Since the pastor is canonically responsible for determining the disposition of every child in his parish formation process, a realistic level spiritual maturity and appropriate knowledge-base must be demonstrated before its conclusion. To that end, the Office of Family Evangelization & Catechesis, under the guidance of the pastor, will conduct **Confirmation Interviews** with each student, in hopes of identifying important Signs of Conversion in the child. Parents will be given supplemental study materials at the beginning of the year to be used in preparation for the interview. We do suggest that you begin preparing them sooner, rather than later, so as to ensure proper disposition. By mid-October parents are to turn in the initial interview form. At this point the children are not expected to know any of the information. This is simply to establish a baseline for the child. This allows us to see if there has been progress from the beginning of the year. If a child is found insufficiently disposed, he/she may be asked to defer their sacraments for a time. Please keep in mind, this should not be viewed as a punishment in any way, but rather an opportunity to cultivate a deeper love of Christ and His Church. On the other hand, an appropriate amount of leniency will be granted those with learning challenges or other previously reported difficulties. With that said, it is incumbent upon parent(s) to make the Office of Evangelization & Catechesis aware of any challenges that may exist at the start of the catechetical year. Receiving the sacraments isn't all about head-knowledge, however it is necessary for one to understand (according to one's ability) something of God and His salvific plan.

Eucharistic Adoration

Once a month, students will have an opportunity to spend 10-15 minutes in quiet prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Should you wish to attend with your child – which is highly encouraged-- please consult the Elementary Faith Formation calendar (included within) for a complete list of dates. On designated Adoration days, please be sure to review “proper church behavior and attire” with your child before coming to class. Also, on days of Eucharistic Adoration, if a child arrives late, the parent is to accompany the minor child to the church and sit with him/her until returning to the classroom.

Mass Attendance

As the “source and summit” of the Christian life, the Eucharistic sacrifice must become for us all, the axis around which the whole of our Catholic faith revolves. Given this reality, it is imperative that, as parents, we do all we can to ensure that our children actively participate in Holy Mass each week, and all Holy Days of Obligation. If they do not begin establishing a habit of Mass attendance in conjunction with an ever deepening understanding of the Eucharistic celebration, their overall religious formation will inevitably languish. Therefore, it is necessary that each child

enrolled in religious education at St. Thomas Aquinas attend Holy Mass each Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation.

Our Lady of Guadalupe Festival

Even though the religious education calendar indicates “No Class” on the week of December 12th, attendance (and possible participation) is required at the annual Our Lady of Guadalupe Festival on December 12th. More information about the festival will be forthcoming.

Memorization

In addition to an appropriate level of spiritual maturity and understanding of their Catholic faith, students seeking sacraments will be expected to have memorized their basic prayers and the Ten Commandments. An exhaustive list can be found attached within.

Parent Classes

As the old saying goes: “We can’t give what we may not have, ourselves.” Keeping in mind that we parents are the primary educators of our children, we must do everything possible to ensure they discover in us a devouring love of Jesus Christ, a genuine desire for intimacy with Him, and an ardent zeal for bringing others to Him. However, if we are not yet at this point, not to worry; we have your back. St. Thomas Aquinas would like to offer all parents an opportunity to undertake an unprecedented spiritual adventure. We are requiring a parent class. You could attend REACH, a weekly adult formation program that is available to parishioners. REACH is held during your child’s class time. Starting the 1st week of October, please join us each week after dropping your child off at class, for ninety minutes of prayer, study, free food and fellowship en route to an authentic encounter with the Lord. Alternatively we will have a monthly parent class. These classes will be held in the church during your child’s class time. They will begin 15 min after your child’s class time to allow time to walk to the church and find a seat. In case of an uncontrollable circumstance, the sessions will be recorded and a makeup homework will substitute. Participation in one of the adult programs is mandatory.