

St. Margaret Mary Parish Religious Education Program

Catechist Handbook

Our Mission

As catechists, we help children and youth know, love, and follow Jesus Christ and grow in communion with Him and His Church.

Catechesis is centered on **Jesus Christ**. Our teaching should help students:

- Know Jesus.
- Love Jesus.
- Follow Jesus.
- Grow in prayer and faith.
- Live their faith in everyday life.
- Participate in the life of the Church.

As catechists, we are called to teach faithfully what the Catholic Church teaches while continuing to grow in our own faith.

1. Litany for Catechists

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Mary, Star of the New Evangelization, **pray for us.**

St. Joseph, patron of families, **pray for us.**

St. Paul the Apostle, patron of evangelists, **pray for us.**

St. Gregory the Great and St. Catherine of Alexandria, patrons of catechists and students, **pray for us.**

Sts. Charles Borromeo, Robert Bellarmine, and Francis de Sales, doctors and patrons of catechists, **pray for us.**

Sts. Thomas Aquinas, Jerome, and Ambrose of Milan, doctors and patrons of youth, **pray for us.**

St. Francis of Assisi, patron of families, **pray for us.**

St. Margaret Mary, patroness of our parish, **pray for us.**
All holy men and women, **pray for us.**

Christ the Teacher, **teach and guide us.**
Word of God, **teach and guide us.**
Jesus the Rabbi, **teach and guide us.**
Good Shepherd, **teach and guide us.**
The Way, the Truth, and the Life, **teach and guide us.**
Spirit of God, **teach and guide us.**

Open our hearts, Christ, **hear us.**
Strengthen our minds, Christ, **hear us.**
Increase our faith, Christ, **hear us.**

Help us bring our students into communion with You. **Christ, hear us.**
Help our students know You. **Christ, hear us.**
Help them love You. **Christ, hear us.**
Help them desire to grow closer to You. **Christ, graciously hear us.**

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, **have mercy on us.**

Jesus, teach us, like Your mother, to treasure the Gospel in our hearts. Help us proclaim it, celebrate it, live it, and pass it on to those who follow You.

Amen.

2. Important Information

School Wi-Fi

Network: SMM - Guest
Password: SMMWelcome20

The Religion Teacher Resource

Username: religioused@smmomaha.org
Password: Faith4all2!

Religion Teacher provides lesson plans, activities, videos, catechist formation, worksheets, and other resources through the parish group subscription.

3. What Makes a Good Catechist?

A catechist is someone who responds to God's call to pass on the Catholic faith.

A good catechist:

- Is a practicing Catholic and attends Mass regularly.
- Participates in parish life.
- Has a basic understanding of Catholic teaching.
- Has a personal relationship with Jesus and lives the Gospel.
- Prays and continues growing in faith.
- Knows Scripture and Catholic worship.
- Communicates well with children and youth.
- Understands different ages, abilities, and learning styles.
- Uses different teaching methods and activities.
- Works well with others.
- Shares his or her faith with students.
- Supports the Church and faithfully teaches Catholic doctrine.
- Treats every student with dignity, fairness, and respect.
- Completes required Safe Environment training.

The catechist is both a **teacher** and a **witness**. Students should be able to see the Gospel lived through us.

4. Primary Catechist Responsibilities

Catechists are expected to:

1. Teach the assigned grade level.
2. Prepare each lesson before class.
3. Follow the assigned textbook and appropriately supplement it.
4. Include prayer in every class.
5. Arrive at least **20 minutes before class** to prepare.

6. Email a lesson plan to the Director of Religious Education (DRE) before each class.
7. Attend required catechist meetings and formation.
8. Monitor student progress.
9. Communicate with parents/guardians throughout the year.
10. Continue personal faith formation.
11. Follow classroom and discipline policies.
12. Follow all Archdiocese of Omaha policies, including Safe Environment and sexual-abuse policies.
13. Arrange for a substitute if unable to attend.
14. Stay with students until they are safely picked up.
15. Never leave students unattended except in an emergency.
16. Report safety or abuse concerns according to required procedures.
17. Maintain student confidentiality, except when safety or abuse reporting requires disclosure.

Parish Support

The parish will provide:

- Textbooks and teaching resources.
- Required training and workshops.
- Orientation and support.
- Babysitting as necessary.
- Two Bi-Annual **\$250 stipends** for a full-time catechist; part-time is prorated.

5. Catechist Aides

Aides Should:

- Be practicing Catholics and active in parish life.
- Have a basic understanding of Catholic teaching.
- Be people of faith who enjoy working with children/youth.
- Be willing to learn and follow directions.

- Arrive **15 minutes before class**.
- Complete required Safe Environment training and background check when applicable.

Aide Responsibilities

Aides:

- Greet students between **6:15–6:30 p.m.**
- Help with attendance.
- Turn in attendance information.
- Walk students to classrooms at 6:30.
- Help individual students and small groups.
- Support the catechist with discipline.
- Collect homework.
- Help with notes, records, and classroom activities.
- Follow the catechist's directions.

Aide Support

The parish provides orientation and training and an annual **\$200 donation** for attending all sessions; part-time is prorated.

6. Class Schedule and Classroom Procedures

Arrival and Dismissal

- Students arrive **6:15–6:30 p.m.**
- Class begins at **6:30 p.m.**
- Class ends at **7:45 p.m.**
- Catechists walk students outside for dismissal.
- Do not leave until every student has been safely picked up.
- Students who depend on rides must not be left stranded.

Attendance

Attendance is taken through Flocknote by the secretary and classroom teacher.

Before Class

Arrive at least 20 minutes early to:

- Prepare the room.
- Arrange materials.
- Set up technology.
- Review the lesson.
- Prepare activities.

After Class

Before dismissal:

- Students put away materials.
- Desks and boards are cleaned.
- Windows are closed.
- The classroom is returned to its original arrangement.
- Treat parish/school facilities as good stewards.

7. Basic Classroom Expectations

At the beginning of the year, establish a few simple, consistent rules.

Students are expected to:

- 1. Respect themselves and others.**
- 2. Contribute to the learning environment.**
- 3. Follow classroom and Religious Education procedures.**

Additional sample rules:

- Listen when someone is speaking.
- Take turns speaking.

- Leave the room only with permission.
- Treat people and property with care.
- Cooperate with others.
- Complete homework.
- Leave the room as you found it.
- Follow dismissal and emergency procedures.
- When in doubt, ask: **“What would Jesus do?”**

Praise positive behavior and correct problems consistently and calmly.

8. Teaching and Lesson Planning

Every class should include:

1. **Introduction and objective**
2. **Presentation of Catholic teaching**
3. **Discussion/sharing**
4. **Activities that reinforce the lesson**
5. **Prayer**
6. **Connection to everyday Christian life**

Activities may include:

- Prayer services
- Scripture
- Discussion
- Music
- Art
- Projects
- Videos/media
- Service activities
- Small-group work

Before the Lesson

Read the material at least one week ahead:

- Student text
- Teacher's guide
- Parent pages
- Related resources

Know the main message and be able to state the objective in one simple sentence.

Make the lesson **student-centered**. Students should be doing, thinking, discussing, praying, and responding—not simply listening to the catechist.

Connect the lesson to:

- Students' real lives.
- Current events and experiences.
- Their faith journey.
- A social justice theme when appropriate.

Suggested Lesson Flow

1. Experience

Begin with something familiar to the students.

2. Christian Message

Connect that experience to Scripture and Catholic teaching.

3. Lived Response

Help students decide how they can live the message in everyday life.

Pacing

Plan carefully and vary activities regularly. As a general guideline, change the pace or activity about every **10 minutes**, recognizing that some activities may take longer.

End-of-Lesson Evaluation

Ask:

- Did students understand the objective?
- Was Catholic teaching clearly presented?
- Did students connect the lesson to everyday life?

- Did they identify a way to respond to God's love?

9. Lesson Plan Template

Name: _____
Date: _____
Grade: _____
Room: _____
Chapter/Pages: _____

Objective

What is the most important thing students should know?

Opening Prayer

Teaching Steps

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____

Materials

Assessment

How will I know students understand the objective?

Home Assignment

Prayer Booklet Review

Prayer #1 / #2 / #3 / #4 / #5

How will I reinforce this prayer?

Announcements

Closing Prayer

Question of the Night

What question can I ask students as they leave to check their understanding?

10. Lesson Preparation Checklist

Before class, make sure you have:

- Prayed and reflected on the lesson.
- Prepared a lesson plan.
- Reviewed the connection to previous lessons.
- Identified the main learning objective.
- Included prayer.
- Gathered all supplies and materials.
- Planned activities that actively involve students.
- Connected the lesson to students' lives.
- Prepared both factual and thought-provoking questions.
- Considered sharing an appropriate personal faith story.
- Previewed videos or other media.
- Confirmed that technology works.
- Prepared to adjust the lesson if necessary.

11. Prayer Booklet

Students are expected to learn the prayers in their prayer booklet.

Set aside several minutes during each class to practice prayers.

When a student has learned a prayer:

1. Put **two chairs in the hallway** so the Prayer Person knows you are ready.
2. The Prayer Person will come to the classroom.
3. Send **one student at a time** to be checked off.

12. Homework and Parent Communication

Homework should be moderate and should help students and families continue the lesson at home.

Homework can:

- Reinforce the lesson.
- Encourage family discussion.
- Help students practice prayers.
- Connect faith to family life.

Sacramental preparation includes an important role for parents.

Catechists should communicate with parents throughout the year through:

- Phone calls
- Email
- Letters
- Special activities
- Progress reports

For homeschooled students, parents should be contacted every **4–6 weeks** to:

- Check progress.
- Share news.
- Offer assistance.

A report should be given to the DRE.

13. Textbooks and Materials

Students receive assigned textbooks at the beginning of the year.

Textbooks may:

- Go home weekly, or
- Remain as a classroom set.

Highlight home-activity pages during assignment time and send homework assignment sheets home.

Families are responsible for replacing lost textbooks or bags.

Request copies and supplies from the Religious Education office ahead of time whenever possible.

14. Safety

Catechists are responsible for students' safety from the time students are delivered to Religious Education until they are safely dismissed.

Safety Rules

- Weapons, including knives, are prohibited.
- Fighting is not permitted.
- Threatening or abusive behavior must be addressed.
- Students must be supervised.
- Students with physical or mental impairments must receive appropriate care and consideration.
- Fire and severe-weather procedures must be followed.
- Students must be safely dismissed.
- Catechists must never knowingly put students in danger.

Injuries

Rubber gloves are provided in the catechist binder and must be worn when assisting a child who is bleeding.

First-aid supplies are available in the supply box and Religious Education office.

15. Discipline

Discipline should be:

- Loving
- Fair
- Consistent
- Respectful
- Focused on helping students develop self-control

Physical force should be avoided except in an unusual emergency when necessary to protect someone from serious harm.

Never use physical punishment.

Never:

- Cruelly punish or confine a child.
- Deprive a child of food, clothing, shelter, or care.
- Leave children unattended.
- Leave a child unattended in a vehicle during a field trip.
- Engage in abusive, neglectful, sexual, or exploitative behavior.

When Problems Occur

Step 1: The catechist addresses the behavior.

Step 2: If needed, contact the parent/guardian or use a Time Out Form.

Step 3: If the problem cannot be resolved in the classroom, send the student to the RE Office.

The office will:

- Discuss the situation with the student.
- Create a Disciplinary Action Plan.
- Return the student to class with a copy for the teacher and parents.

Second office referral: Parents will be called for a conference.

If serious or repeated behavior cannot be corrected, the DRE may recommend expulsion in consultation with the Pastor.

Parents will receive written notice and information about the appeal process.

An expulsion may be appealed in writing to the President of the Catechesis and Faith Formation Board within **7 days**.

The appeal committee makes a recommendation to the Pastor. **The Pastor makes the final decision.**

Serious Misconduct

Immediate disciplinary action may be appropriate for:

- Serious disruption of instruction.
- Abusive, threatening, rude, or seriously disrespectful behavior.

- Sexual or sexually explicit behavior.
- Harassment or discriminatory name-calling.
- Physical harm or threats.
- Property damage.
- Fire or false fire alarms.
- Terroristic threats.
- Possession of dangerous weapons or substances.
- Unauthorized presence in restricted areas.
- Behavior that creates moral danger for other students.
- Incurable behavior.
- Serious violations of parish/program policies.

16. Time Out Procedure

A Time Out is **not intended as punishment**. It gives a student time to calm down, think, and reflect.

Use it after reasonable classroom interventions such as:

- Proximity
- Gestures
- Verbal reminders

Procedure

1. Student goes to the designated Time Out area.
2. Student completes the top portion of the form.
3. Teacher briefly discusses the issue and signs the form.
4. Student takes the form home.
5. Parent and student discuss the issue and sign it.
6. Student returns the form the following week.
7. If it is not returned, the catechist contacts the parent.
8. Repeated failure to return the form results in referral to the Director.

Copies:

- White → Parent
- Yellow → DRE mailbox
- Pink → Catechist

17. Abuse, Neglect, and Confidentiality

Catechists must take student safety seriously.

Confidentiality does **not** prevent reporting when there is reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused or neglected.

Abuse or Neglect Includes:

- Endangering a child's life or physical/mental health.
- Cruel confinement or punishment.
- Depriving a child of necessary food, clothing, shelter, or care.
- Leaving a child unattended in a motor vehicle under circumstances prohibited by law.
- Sexual abuse.
- Sexual exploitation.

Mandatory Reporting — Nebraska

Under Nebraska law, a person who has reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused or neglected, or is in circumstances likely to result in abuse or neglect, must report it **immediately**.

A report may initially be made by telephone to:

- Law enforcement, or
- Nebraska Department of Social Services.

The original handbook lists the Nebraska Department of Social Services number as:

1-800-652-1999

An oral report must be followed by a written report containing available information such as:

- Child's age and address.
- Custodian's information.

- Nature and extent of suspected abuse or neglect.
- Evidence of previous abuse/neglect.
- Other information that may help identify the cause or perpetrator.

Failure to report may result in criminal penalties.

Archdiocesan Reporting

In addition to required civil reporting, Archdiocesan personnel must report suspected sexual abuse according to Archdiocese of Omaha procedures, including verbal and written notification to the appropriate Archdiocesan authority.

When in doubt about a safety or abuse concern, immediately contact the DRE/Administrator and follow mandatory reporting requirements. Do not attempt to investigate the allegation yourself.

18. Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment

The Archdiocese of Omaha requires that:

Sexual behavior, verbal or nonverbal, is inappropriate in any ministry setting.

Catechists must maintain appropriate boundaries with students.

Sexual Abuse Can Include:

- Sexual touching, fondling, kissing, or other sexual contact.
- Sexual acts involving a child.
- Sexualized behavior toward a child.
- Voyeurism or exhibitionism.
- Sexual comments, jokes, names, or slurs.
- Violations of a child's privacy or personal boundaries.
- Using a child to meet an adult's emotional or sexual needs.

Sexual Harassment Can Include:

- Sexual propositions.
- Sexual jokes or comments.
- Inappropriate physical contact.

- Sexual gestures or looks.
- Sexual offers or innuendo.
- Other unwelcome sexual behavior.

“I was only joking” is not an acceptable excuse for behavior that is offensive or unwelcome.

All students and adults deserve dignity and respect.

Safe Environment training is required.

19. Equal Dignity and Respect

Every person is created by God and deserves dignity and respect.

Catechists must treat students fairly regardless of:

- Sex
- Race
- Color
- National origin
- Disability
- Other protected characteristics

No abusive, offensive, derogatory, defamatory, or discriminatory language or behavior is acceptable.

Instructional materials should not contain inappropriate or derogatory content unless specifically approved for legitimate educational purposes.

20. Negligence

Negligence means failing to take reasonable care or doing something a reasonable person would not do.

A catechist can be responsible for physical, emotional, psychological, or mental harm.

For negligence to exist legally, generally there must be:

1. A duty.
2. A violation of that duty.
3. A contributing/proximate cause.

4. An injury.

Best Protection

Use reasonable care and follow all Religious Education rules and procedures.

Never leave students unsupervised.

21. Copyright

Religious education materials are protected by copyright.

Educational use does not automatically make every copy legal.

When deciding whether copying is fair use, consider:

1. Purpose and character of the use.
2. Nature of the copyrighted work.
3. Amount used.
4. Effect on the market/value of the original.

Use parish-provided materials and follow copyright restrictions. When unsure, ask the DRE before copying or distributing copyrighted material.

22. Substitute Catechists

If you cannot teach:

1. Arrange for an approved substitute.
2. Notify the DRE **at least one week in advance whenever possible.**
3. Provide the substitute with:
 - Teacher's manual.
 - Lesson plan.
 - Materials.
 - Classroom procedures.
 - Emergency procedures.
 - Supply locations.

- Important information about students, including allergies when applicable.

Give the DRE:

- Date of absence.
- Substitute's name.
- Copy of the lesson plan.

For emergencies, notify the DRE as soon as possible and make materials available.

Substitutes must follow the same professional, Safe Environment, safety, and conduct standards as regular catechists.

23. Emergency Procedures

Catechists should review emergency procedures with students each semester.

Fire and tornado drills will be practiced.

Fire Drill

Signal: Continuous fire alarm.

1. Close the classroom door.
2. Take the attendance list if possible.
3. Teacher leads the class.
4. Aide follows the last student.
5. Go to the assigned outdoor location.
6. Keep the class together and face the building.
7. Take attendance.
8. Immediately report missing students to the Director.
9. Walk in single file and remain quiet.
10. Return only when the regular bell signals that it is safe.

Fire Drill Locations

- **Religious Education Door → Blacktop:** Grades 7–8 and Extended Day Care
- **Middle Door → Sidewalk/Blacktop:** Library and Grades 3–6

- **Main Entrance → Blacktop:** Grades 1–2
- **East Auditorium Door → Blacktop:** Auditorium
- **Northwest Gym Exit → Blacktop:** Gymnasium

Tornado Drill

Signal: Announcement stating that a tornado drill is beginning.

1. Close the classroom door.
2. Take attendance sheet and flashlight.
3. Follow the catechist to the Tunnel using the Main Stairwell.
4. Aide follows at the end of the line.
5. Students sit on the floor.
6. Remain quiet.
7. Return to class only when the Director gives the signal.

24. Crisis Procedures

Bomb Threat / Evacuation

The announcement will be:

“Would the faculty and students please go to church for our prayer service now!”

- Quietly walk to the church.
- Students who are outside the classroom should return as quickly as possible.
- If a student from your class is missing, notify the appropriate person or retrieve the student if directed and safe to do so.

Intruder / Lockdown

The announcement will state:

“An intruder is in the building.”

Teach students the procedure before a drill occurs.

If an intruder is announced:

1. Bring students into the nearest safe classroom.
2. Bring students from the hallway into your room if possible.
3. Students in the restroom should enter the nearest classroom.
4. Turn off lights.
5. Close and lock the door.
6. **Do not open the door.**
7. Move students to the designated concealed area.
8. Students should remain low, quiet, and out of sight.
9. Remain in lockdown until directed otherwise.

25. Field Trips and Special Activities

Field trips, guest speakers, and special activities must be approved by the DRE.

Before an off-site trip:

- Obtain required permission slips.
- Complete required driver/insurance forms.
- Follow all Archdiocesan safety requirements.

26. Catechist Professional Standards

Remember that you represent St. Margaret Mary Parish and the Catholic Church when working with students.

Always:

- Model Christian behavior.
- Maintain appropriate adult/student boundaries.
- Protect student dignity and confidentiality.
- Follow Safe Environment requirements.
- Use appropriate language and behavior.
- Be prepared and punctual.

- Treat every student fairly.
- Communicate respectfully with parents.
- Follow parish, school, and Archdiocesan policies.
- Ask the DRE when you are unsure about a procedure.

27. Final Catechist Reminder

Your most important preparation is not simply knowing the textbook. **Pray, prepare, know the faith, love your students, and trust the Holy Spirit.**

The textbook is a tool. The catechist is a living witness to the faith.

Our goal is not merely to teach information. Our goal is to help every student encounter Jesus Christ and grow in a lifelong relationship with Him.

Pray. Prepare. Teach. Listen. Encourage. Witness. Love.

May St. Margaret Mary and all the saints pray for our catechists and students.

Amen.