

Saint Margaret Mary Religious Education

Parent & Family Handbook



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Welcome to Religious Education!

Dear Religious Education Families,

Welcome to another year of growing in faith together!

At Saint Margaret Mary, we believe parents are the first and most important teachers of the Catholic faith. Our Religious Education program exists to support families as we help children grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ and learn more about the Catholic Church.

This handbook contains important information about our program, including schedules, safety procedures, communication, expectations, and opportunities for families to participate throughout the year.

Please take time to read through this guide. When families and the parish work together, we create a safe, welcoming, and faith-filled environment where children can encounter Christ and grow in their faith.

Thank you for allowing us to partner with your family.

God bless,
Saint Margaret Mary Religious Education Staff

Mission Statement

The mission of Saint Margaret Mary Religious Education is to build a foundation of faith, in partnership with parents, from which our children will continue to learn about God and the Roman Catholic Church.

Family & Parish Partnership

The family is the first place where children encounter God's love. The Church refers to the family as the **Domestic Church** because parents have the unique privilege and responsibility of sharing faith with their children.

Religious Education classes provide instruction and support, but the most important lessons about faith happen through the example parents give every day.

Families can help nurture their child's faith by:

- Attending Mass regularly.
- Praying together as a family.
- Talking openly about God and faith.
- Reading Scripture together.
- Serving others through acts of kindness and charity.
- Celebrating important moments in family life, including birthdays, baptism anniversaries, holy days, and other faith milestones.
- Creating a home environment where children feel comfortable asking questions and growing in their relationship with God.
- Sharing moments of gratitude, awe, and prayer with one another.
- Including religious items, prayer spaces, or reminders of faith within the home.

Parents are the primary catechists of their children. This is not only a responsibility but also a great privilege and opportunity to share faith in an authentic and personal way.
(See Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 2223 and 2226.)

Staff Contact Information

smmomaha.org

Director of Youth Formation

Job Smoot

jsmoot@smmomaha.org

Phone: (402) 558-2255 (x122)

Parish Office

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Pastor

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What Families Need to Know When Coming to Class

Class Schedule

Religious Education classes are held on **Wednesday evenings from 6:30 p.m. – 7:45 p.m.**

Our goal is to provide a safe, organized, and welcoming environment where students can learn about their faith and grow closer to Christ.

Before and After Class Supervision

For the safety of all students, please follow these arrival and dismissal procedures.

Arrival

- Students may enter through the main entrance beginning at **6:15 p.m.**
- Students should report directly to their classrooms when they arrive.
- Please do not drop students off before 6:15 p.m., as supervision is not available.
- Students who arrive early must remain with a parent or guardian until supervision begins.

Dismissal

- Classes end at **7:45 p.m.**
- Catechists will walk students to the lower circle drive for dismissal.
- Students must check out with their catechist before leaving.
- Students may only leave with a parent/guardian or another adult approved by the parent.

Thank you for helping us maintain a safe and orderly dismissal process.

Attendance & Tardiness

Regular attendance is an important part of your child's Religious Education experience. Weekly participation helps students build friendships, stay connected with their classmates, and continue growing in their understanding of the Catholic faith.

If your child will be absent from class, please notify the Religious Education Office as soon as possible.

Contact:

Phone: (402) 558-2255 (x122)

Email: jsmoot@smmomaha.org

If a student is marked absent and we have not received communication from a parent, we will contact the family to confirm the absence. This is an important safety measure to ensure that students arrive safely.

After three consecutive absences, the Director of Religious Education will contact the family to offer assistance and determine if there are any challenges we can help address.

If your family experiences difficulties with transportation, scheduling, or other circumstances affecting attendance, please reach out. We are happy to work with families whenever possible.

Early Dismissals

We understand that families have busy schedules and that occasional early dismissals may be necessary. However, because of limited staffing, we ask families to avoid picking up students early whenever possible.

If your child must leave early:

- Please contact the Religious Education Office ahead of time.
- The approved adult must come to the **main school entrance (northwest entrance)**.
- The adult will need to be admitted into the building before the student can be released.
- Students may only leave with a parent/guardian or an adult approved by the parent.

For the safety of all students, children will not be permitted to leave early without proper supervision.

Religious Education Communication

Communication is an important part of a successful Religious Education year.

The **RE Weekly Memo** is sent to families by email and includes:

- Upcoming events
- Important reminders
- Schedule changes
- Program announcements
- Information families need throughout the year

Please make sure your email address and contact information remain current.

If your contact information changes, please notify the Religious Education Office so we can continue communicating with your family.

Parent Volunteers

Religious Education is made possible through the generous support of many volunteers. We are grateful for parents and parishioners who share their time and talents with our students. Families are encouraged to participate in volunteer opportunities throughout the year. We ask each family to complete at least **three volunteer opportunities** during the Religious Education year.

Volunteer opportunities may include:

- Classroom assistance
- Special events
- Service projects
- Parish activities
- Other program needs

Your involvement helps create a stronger faith community for all of our children.

Safe Environment

The safety and well-being of our children is our highest priority. All adults who work with children through parish ministries must complete Safe Environment training through the Archdiocese of Omaha.

Information about Safe Environment training can be found here:
<https://www.smmomaha.org/parish-life/safe-environment>

If you are unsure whether your training is current, please contact:

Jim Varner
jimvarner@smmomaha.org

Training sessions are offered regularly throughout the Omaha area. Information and training opportunities are also available through:
<https://archomaha.org/safe-environment/>

The Archdiocese of Omaha requires Safe Environment training for adults who have contact with children in parish ministries, including religious education, athletics, school activities, Scouts, and youth programs.

This training helps volunteers become informed, responsible leaders who create a safe and welcoming environment for children and vulnerable adults.

Circle of Grace

An important part of Safe Environment education is the **Circle of Grace curriculum**. Circle of Grace is a program developed by the Archdiocese of Omaha in response to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.

Circle of Grace is taught annually to students in grades Kindergarten through 12th grade in Archdiocesan schools, Religious Education programs, and youth ministries.

The program helps children understand their dignity as children of God and teaches them how to recognize, respect, and maintain healthy boundaries.

Dress Code

Students and families are asked to use good judgment regarding clothing and appearance.

Student attire should:

- Be appropriate for a faith-based learning environment.
- Allow students to participate comfortably.
- Avoid distracting from the learning environment.

Parents and guardians are encouraged to help students make appropriate choices.

Building Security Procedures

The safety of our students is very important.

The following procedures are in place:

- Students should report directly to their teachers upon arrival.
- Students may not be on the playground without supervision.
- School doors remain locked during Religious Education classes.
- All parents, visitors, and volunteers must sign in at the main entrance.

Thank you for helping us maintain a safe environment for all students.

Student Health & Safety

Health Awareness

Please notify the Religious Education Office and your child's catechist of any health concerns that may affect your child's participation in Religious Education.

This includes, but is not limited to:

- Allergies
- Diabetes
- Seizures
- Hearing concerns
- Medication needs
- Other medical conditions

If your child has a medical action plan, please provide a copy to the Religious Education Office along with any necessary supplies listed in the plan (such as an EpiPen or medication).
For the safety of all students, please do not send snacks containing nuts or peanut butter.

Communicable Diseases

To protect the health of all students and families, children who may have a contagious illness should remain home until they are no longer contagious.

Students should remain home for conditions including, but not limited to:

Fever

Students should remain home until they have been fever-free for **24 hours** without the use of fever-reducing medication.

Vomiting

Students should remain home until **24 hours after the last episode**.

Diarrhea

Students should remain home until **24 hours after the last episode**.

Infections

Students should remain home for at least **24 hours after beginning antibiotics**, unless otherwise directed by a medical professional.

Chickenpox

Students may return once all sores have scabbed.

Some illnesses may require additional guidance or documentation before a student returns to Religious Education.

Thank you for helping us maintain a healthy environment for all children.

Parental Concerns & Resolution Process

We value the partnership between families, catechists, and the Religious Education Office. If a concern arises, we encourage families to follow these steps so concerns can be addressed respectfully and effectively.

Step 1: Speak with the Catechist

The first step is to contact your child's catechist to discuss the concern and work together toward a solution.

Our catechists generously volunteer their time and care deeply about their students. Often, a conversation can resolve questions or misunderstandings.

Step 2: Contact the Director of Religious Education

If the concern cannot be resolved with the catechist, families are invited to contact the Director of Religious Education.

The Director will listen to both sides and work to help find a resolution.

Step 3: Pastor Involvement

If a concern remains unresolved after working with the catechist and Director of Religious Education, the pastor may be asked to assist in resolving the situation.

Our goal is always to communicate openly, support our students, and maintain a positive faith community.

Visitors & Volunteers

Parents and visitors are welcome to visit Religious Education classrooms.

For the safety of our students:

- All visitors must sign in at the main entrance.
- Visitors must wear appropriate identification while in the building.
- Visitors should check in with the Religious Education Office before entering classrooms.

Thank you for helping us maintain a safe environment for our children.

Dismissal Procedure

The dismissal bell will ring at **7:45 p.m.**

Each catechist will walk their class to the lower circle drive for dismissal.

Important reminders:

- Students must check out with their catechist before leaving.
- Students may only leave with a parent, guardian, or approved adult.
- If your child will leave with someone other than a parent/guardian, please notify the Religious Education Office.

For the safety of all students, children will not be released to another adult unless we have received permission from a parent or guardian.

Student Expectations & Discipline

Our goal is to provide a positive learning environment where every student feels welcomed, respected, and able to grow in faith.

Students in the Saint Margaret Mary Religious Education program are expected to follow three simple rules:

Rule #1: Respect Yourself, Others, and Things

Students should treat themselves, classmates, catechists, volunteers, and parish property with respect.

Rule #2: Contribute to the Learning Environment

Students should participate, listen, and help create a classroom where everyone can learn.

Rule #3: Follow Parish and Classroom Procedures

Students should follow directions and cooperate with classroom expectations.

Discipline Process

Discipline is intended to help students learn responsibility and make positive choices.

When a student chooses inappropriate behavior:

1. The catechist will provide a reminder and opportunity to make a better choice.
2. If the behavior continues, the catechist will speak with the student and help the student rejoin the class successfully.
3. If the behavior continues again, the student may be sent to the Religious Education Office to speak with the Director.

If a student is sent to the office more than once during the year, parents may be contacted and asked to attend class with their child.

Our goal is always correction, growth, and reconciliation.

Suspension

Saint Margaret Mary reserves the right to suspend in-class instruction when there is reason to believe attendance may place the student or others at risk of physical or emotional harm.

Suspension decisions are made by the Pastor and Director of Religious Education.

A suspension may be related to behavior that occurs:

- During Religious Education classes
- At parish events
- Outside of the parish setting when appropriate

During a suspension, students and families will receive support and materials to continue faith formation at home until the student is approved to return.

Curriculum

Saint Margaret Mary Religious Education uses a variety of resources to help students grow in their understanding of the Catholic faith.

Our curriculum includes:

Grades 1–5

Finding God by Loyola Press

Grade 6

Be My Disciples

Ascension Press Bible Timeline for Youth

Grades 7–8

Chosen by Ascension Press

Our catechists use these resources along with prayer, discussion, activities, and opportunities for students to deepen their relationship with Christ.

Calendar

The Religious Education calendar is published annually and includes:

- Class dates
- Holidays
- Sacramental preparation events
- Special activities
- Family opportunities

Dates and events may occasionally change due to parish needs or unforeseen circumstances.

Families will receive notice of any changes whenever possible.

The most current calendar information can also be found on the Saint Margaret Mary website.

Resources

Families are encouraged to continue growing in faith beyond the classroom.

Helpful resources include:

- Saint Margaret Mary Parish website
- Weekly Religious Education communications
- Family prayer resources
- Mass and parish opportunities
- Catholic Scripture and devotional materials

Emergency Procedures

The safety of our students is always our highest priority. Emergency information for each student is kept on file in the Religious Education Office and must be kept current throughout the year.

Please notify the Religious Education Office if there are any changes to:

- Emergency contact information
- Phone numbers
- Medical information
- Allergies
- Medications
- Other important health concerns

What You Need to Know in Case of an Emergency

In the event of illness or injury:

- Parents will be contacted whenever necessary.
- Parents or guardians are responsible for arranging transportation home.
- If a parent cannot be reached, emergency contacts listed on the student's registration form will be contacted.

In the event of a serious emergency requiring immediate medical attention, emergency services may be contacted. If transportation by ambulance is necessary, expenses are the responsibility of the student's family.

Evacuation Procedures

Catechists are trained to provide a quick and safe evacuation of students during emergencies such as:

- Fire
- Severe weather
- Security threats
- Other emergencies requiring evacuation

Evacuation procedures are posted in each classroom.

During an emergency:

- Students will remain with their catechist.
- Parents should check in with Religious Education staff before their child can be released.
- Students will not be released directly from the classroom during an emergency.

These procedures help ensure that every child is accounted for and safely reunited with their family.

Security Plan

Saint Margaret Mary Parish has a security plan designed to help protect all members of our parish community.

Security measures include:

- Cameras located throughout campus entrances and other strategic areas.
- Locked exterior doors during Religious Education classes.
- Specific emergency procedures for staff and volunteers.

Religious Education classes will follow all parish safety procedures when needed.

Weather Cancellations

Saint Margaret Mary Religious Education follows the weather cancellation decisions of **Omaha Public Schools (OPS)**.

If OPS cancels classes or evening activities due to severe weather, Religious Education classes will also be canceled.

Occasionally, weather conditions may worsen after OPS has made its decision. In these situations, Religious Education classes may be canceled later in the afternoon or evening.

Families will be notified through:

- Email
- Text message
- Other parish communication methods

Parents should always use their best judgment when deciding whether travel conditions are safe for their family.

The safety of our students and families is our greatest concern.

Registration Procedures

Admissions

Saint Margaret Mary Religious Education welcomes students and families from our parish community and beyond.

The Religious Education Program does not discriminate on the basis of:

- Race
- Ethnic background
- Religion
- Sex

We welcome members of other parishes and other Christian denominations who wish to participate.

Enrollment Policy

Students in grades 1–8 who:

- Live with a registered parishioner, and
- Do not attend a Catholic school

are invited to enroll in Saint Margaret Mary Religious Education.

Families are also encouraged to participate in parish faith formation opportunities for younger children, including Sunday School programs.

All parish families are encouraged to take advantage of the opportunities offered through Saint Margaret Mary.

Students who are not enrolled in a regular religious education program may be required to participate in additional formation before receiving sacraments such as:

- First Reconciliation
- First Eucharist
- Confirmation

Tuition

Tuition and fees are established by the Pastor and Finance Committee.

Tuition may be paid in the following ways:

1. Payment in full at the time of registration.
2. Payment of the registration deposit followed by remaining payments according to the established schedule.
3. A special payment arrangement made with the Director of Religious Education and Pastor.

If your family has financial concerns, please contact the Religious Education Office. We are happy to work with families whenever possible.

Tuition Refunds

A full tuition refund may be requested before the beginning of the Religious Education year.

For withdrawals after the first class, the refund amount will have the following deducted:

- Cost of instructional materials
- Administrative processing fee
- Tuition for classes already attended

Refunds are calculated based on the portion of the Religious Education year completed. No refunds will be issued after **March 1**.

Miscellaneous Policies

Bicycles, Roller Blades, and Skateboards

A bicycle rack is available on the west side of the school.

Saint Margaret Mary Parish is not responsible for bicycles, roller blades, skateboards, or other personal property brought onto parish property.

Field Trips & Off-Site Activities

Students participating in activities away from Saint Margaret Mary must have written permission from a parent or guardian.

All activities must follow:

- Safe Environment requirements
- Archdiocesan guidelines
- Parish policies

The safety and well-being of students remain our highest priority during all activities.

Rights of Non-Custodial Parents

Unless a court order specifically restricts access, non-custodial parents may request student records and program information.

Program administrators may assume that a non-custodial parent has the right to access student information unless documentation states otherwise.

Any court documents restricting access must be provided to the Director of Religious Education.

Required Meetings & Sacramental Events

Some grade levels have required meetings and events as part of sacramental preparation.

Families should plan to attend the following:

Second Grade

- First Reconciliation & Communion Parent Meeting
- First Eucharist Retreat
- First Communion Celebration

Seventh Grade

- Confirmation Parent/Candidate Meeting
- Confirmation Candidate and Sponsor Meeting

Eighth Grade

- Confirmation Candidate and Sponsor Meeting
- Confirmation Retreat
- Confirmation Celebration

Special Dates & Family Opportunities

Throughout the year, Saint Margaret Mary offers opportunities for families to gather, pray, and grow together.

Examples include:

- Mass and Ice Cream Social
- Living Rosary
- Advent Family Night
- Advent Prayer Service, Nativity Play, & Celebration
- Ash Wednesday Mass
- Lenten Service Project
- Stations of the Cross Play
- End-of-Year Mass and May Crowning

Families are encouraged to participate in these events as part of their child's faith journey.

Thank You for Being With Us

Thank you for choosing Saint Margaret Mary Religious Education and for allowing us to walk alongside your family in faith.

Together, we can help our children grow in their knowledge of God, deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ, and become active members of the Catholic Church.

We look forward to a wonderful year together!

