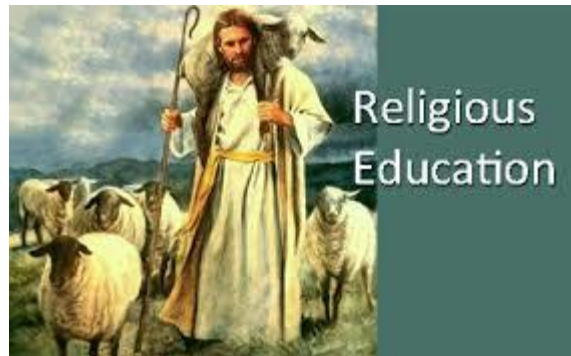


# *Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish*



## *Parent handbook*

*For*

*The Traditional Classroom setting  
Grades 1 - 8*

*&*

*Catechesis of the Good Shepherd  
Atria setting  
Grades PK-4 thru 6<sup>th</sup> grade*

# *Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish Children's Religious Education Programs*

1449 Wilcox Park Dr. S.E.  
Grand Rapids, MI 49506  
616-459-4662  
Fax: 616-458-4047



Parish Website: [www.stthomasapostlegr.org](http://www.stthomasapostlegr.org)  
Parish Facebook: [Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish](#)  
MyParish App: [Text "App" to 88202 for a link to download](#)

Director of Faith Formation  
Patti Reynolds  
616-459-4662 ext. 1209  
[pattireynolds@stthomasgr.org](mailto:pattireynolds@stthomasgr.org)

## Table of Contents

Welcome letter.....	page 3
Philosophy .....	page 4
Roles and Responsibilities .....	page 5
Religious Education & Faith Formation Staff .....	page 6
Prayers for Catechists & Parents .....	page 7
Policies and Procedures.....	pages 8
Discipline “Reasoning” Worksheet.....	page 11
Parent Notification Discipline Form.....	page 12
Sacrament Preparation Guidelines.....	page 13
Our Promises to You – Your Commitment to Us.....	page 14
Definition of “Active Parishioner Status” .....	page 15
Children with Special Needs .....	page 16
Curriculum for Traditional Classrooms, Grades 1-8.....	page 17
Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Program .....	page 19
“Remind” – one-way text messaging and email system .....	page 21
Special Religious Education Day school release form .....	page 22
Rel. Ed. Calendar for 2021-2022.....	page 23
RE Safety at Saint Thomas .....	page 25

# WELCOME ~

***“Let the children come to me; do not prevent them,  
for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”***  
(Mark 10:14)

Dear Parents:

Thank you for accepting the invitation to grow in knowledge, love, and service to God through participation in Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish Faith Formation Program. While it is the primary responsibility of Catholic parents to educate their children in the Catholic faith, all of the members of the parish have a responsibility from the Lord to reach out and to assist parents in every way possible in their task. Religious Education Classes for children at Saint Thomas exist for the purpose of helping parents in our faith community who are serious about their commitment to the parish and to the task of teaching their children to walk in the Way of the Lord and helping them find a spiritual home in the Catholic Church.

We would like to take this opportunity to introduce you to the policies, practices and expectations of this faith commitment. This handbook is designed to provide an overview of our Religious Education Program.

As a family and faith community united, we seek to nurture the faith you, as primary educators, have instilled in your children by teaching as Jesus taught. We ask for your prayers, your participation, and your continued support in this endeavor.

Classes meet on Monday evenings in the school building from: 6:15-7:30 PM

If you have questions concerning the Faith Formation Program for children please always feel free to contact me in the Parish Office at 616-459-4662 ext. 1209 or email: [pattireynolds@stthomasgr.org](mailto:pattireynolds@stthomasgr.org). Thank you!

May the Lord Give you Peace!

Patti Reynolds

## PHILOSOPHY

Our Parish Religious Education Programs are structured to provide catechetical instruction on the Catholic faith to all parish children who are attending non-Catholic schools.

Parents, by word and example, are the primary teacher of their children and teach them from birth throughout life. At Baptism, a parent undertakes the responsibility of providing for their child's Christian formation. The Religious Education staff of volunteer catechists is here to assist parents in the spiritual formation and ongoing moral development of their child through a formal program of continuous religious education.

Our programs seek to provide the catechesis and skills for each child to grow and mature in understanding, positive attitudes, and faithful practice of the Catholic faith and most importantly to encourage and model the importance of a deep relationship with Jesus Christ.

Through the process of catechetical instruction, we hope to deepen the faith and sense of belonging to the Catholic Church in the children, so that they will be moved to the sharing of their time, talent and treasure in the life of the Church, now and throughout their lives. We strive to assist children in committing themselves to a personal relationship with God characterized by a vigorous sacramental life, a lifelong pattern of prayer, Christian service, and growth in understanding the Catholic faith.

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Pastor – The Pastor is responsible for the overall spiritual well-being of the parish community.

Director of Faith Formation – is responsible for the overall administration of the Parish Faith Formation and Sacrament Programs.

Catechist – This fully initiated Catholic person is called upon to be teacher and model of the Catholic life for their students. To insure their faithful and effective ministry, catechists need to commit themselves to ongoing growth in their understanding and practice of the Catholic faith, as well as deepening their catechetical skills. They are assisted in their ongoing development by their parish and diocesan religious education staff and the periodic training programs offered.

Co-Catechist, Aide – This volunteer may be a college young adult or a Parish adult who is willing to support the classroom catechist in the classroom. The time of commitment involves presence at regularly scheduled classes, plus room preparation and clean up immediately before and after class. Typical responsibilities include assisting students needing individual attention, helping students – especially in the primary grades – with arts and craft projects, individual help with learning prayers, small group discussion or work projects, etc.

Parent Volunteers – Catechists are urged to take every opportunity to communicate with and involve their students' parents. Catechists may wish to invite grandparents or other extended family members to come as guests or speakers (e.g., a grandparent is asked to share their memories of first sacrament reception, celebrating lent or advent, etc.).

- All catechists and aides have taken the Diocesan mandated class “Protecting God’s Children” to be trained in the VIRTUS program and have met all ministerial qualifications.
- Parent Volunteers should also consider taking this class. We strongly recommend it for working with children over the course of their school years. Please visit [www.virtus.org](http://www.virtus.org) for more information. The Faith Formation Director will also be able to give you instructions on how to sign up for the “Protecting God’s Children” class at a time and location convenient for you.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION STAFF

**Pastor:** Father Jim Chelich

Deacon Dean Vernon

Faith Formation Director: Patti Reynolds

Parish Life Coordinator: Pam Strobel

### Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Catechists

Nikki Macedo	Level I Atrium (grades PK-4-K)
Diana Brand	Level I
Sue Hieshetter	Level II Atrium (grades 1 <sup>st</sup> -3 <sup>rd</sup> )
Hanna Grant	Level II
Elizabeth Chlebek	Level II
Mary Ann Bridge	Level III Atrium (grades 4 <sup>t</sup> -6 <sup>th</sup> )
Michelle Bryk	Level III

### Children's Traditional Classroom Catechists

Paula Veneklas	1 <sup>st</sup> Year of Formation
Robyn Young	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year plus First Holy Communion
Mary Davis	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year
Phil Delrue & Jenna Dills	4 <sup>th</sup> Year plus Reconciliation Celebration
Jen Zimmerman & Gabe Hawley	5 <sup>th</sup> Year
Joe Hogan	6 <sup>th</sup> Year
Theresa Skipp	7 <sup>th</sup> Year
Youth Minister & Carol Dills	8 <sup>th</sup> Year plus Confirmation

## PRAYER FOR CATECHISTS

Loving God,

You continually call men and women, so that helped by your Holy Spirit, they may teach others to know, love, and serve you. We place under your loving care our catechists who so generously have responded to your call. Enlighten them with your wisdom, set their hearts on fire with your love, and strengthen them to give witness to your Son by their teaching and deeds.

Grant us that, as a faith community, we may be a living witness and a source of inspiration and support for all catechists so that they may respond to the invitation to know your Son more fully, so that others, in turn, may recognize the presence of Christ in their lives. As they catechize those you gave to them, may they too grow more fully in communion with you, through your Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

## PRAYER FOR PARENTS

Heavenly Father,

We thank you for the children that you have entrusted to us. We want to cooperate with you fully in helping them grow into free and responsible persons and mature in the faith received at Baptism.

Grant us the grace to be able to guide them in the practice of virtue and the way of your commandments---by the good example of our lives, and by the loving observance of your law and that of your Church.

Most of all guide them with your Holy Spirit so that they may know the vocation you will for them and be open to genuine self-giving and true Christian love. We ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son. Amen.



## POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Arrival/Dismissal Times – Our catechists are volunteers and their gift of time and creative effort to plan each class is no small sacrifice of love and concern. They, together with the Pastor and Director of Faith Formation, ask a serious commitment of attendance from all who enroll in the program. Parents are asked to make the attendance of their children a first priority above other activities on Monday evenings. We would hope that your children would miss no more than two or three instructional classes during the school year. If a child has a prolonged illness, we ask that the parent/guardian contact the individual catechist to report an absence. Should a child's un-excused absence exceed three consecutive weeks, we will request that the parent work with their child at home.

We expect students to be on time for class each week. Parents should refrain from dropping students off too early (no earlier than 6 pm) since we do not allow students in the classrooms without a catechist or classroom aide present.

To ensure the safety of our children parents are asked to comply with the following arrival and dismissal guidelines:

Children in the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Program* Levels I & II, as well as girls and boys in the first three years of the traditional classroom formation, must leave the classroom accompanied by a parent or older sibling.

Parents are asked to inform Patti Reynolds and/or Catechists if another authorized person is to accompany their child to and from his/her class.

Security – ALL students (of Traditional Classroom & Catechesis of the Good Shepherd), parents, catechists, classroom aides and visitors are to enter the school building through the main door of the school (east side of building). Parents choosing to remain during class time are asked to check with the director for available space. The main school door will be locked 5 minutes after class begins and will be unlocked 5 minutes prior to end of class. There is a doorbell at the main school door, located at the upper right-hand corner if entrance is needed during the time when the door is locked. PLEASE NOTE: You will not be able to enter through any other door than the main school door. The Grace Street and parking lot doors to the Ministry Center will always be locked so you must enter through the main school door.

Attendance – Please call either the class catechist or the director with absentees. Or you may e-mail the director at [pattireynolds@stthomasgr.org](mailto:pattireynolds@stthomasgr.org). Call 616-459-4662 ext. 1209 before 4:00 pm. If you need to connect after 5:30 p.m. please send an email. If a child is absent more than two consecutive times, parents may be asked to meet with the Director of Faith Formation. Excessive absenteeism may result in needing to repeat a class year.

**School Building Usage Rules** – It is the responsibility of each catechist to faithfully enforce the following building usage rules. The catechist should review these rules with their students at the beginning of the year, and secure cooperation.

- Food is not allowed in the classrooms because of the “School Allergen Policy”; due to the limited class time and children with life threatening airborne allergies, we do not allow snacks brought in by students.
- Students are not to touch items found in the classroom desks as well as class projects displayed in the halls.
- Students are not allowed to run in the halls.

**Class Cancellations** - When *Saint Thomas School* is closed due to severe weather conditions, or classes are dismissed early because of the weather, Religious Education classes are automatically canceled. Information about cancellation and/or early closures can be made available through calls/email to the Faith Formation Office, 616-459-4662, ext. 1209 as well as checking local radio/TV stations. We also have an email and one-way text messaging or email option through “Remind”. See Page 21 of this Handbook on how to sign up if you so choose.

**Expectation for Participants’ Behavior** – Every person is worthy of being treated with care and respect fitting one made in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, classroom behavior needs to be characterized by genuine Christian care, mutual respect, and honesty.

Participants in the Religious Education Programs will behave appropriately, showing respect for other students and catechists/aides, as well as for the regulations established for the program. Repeated failure to show respect or to observe classroom rules will result in disciplinary action.

If a student is disrespectful of the catechist, fellow students or church property, the following steps will be taken:

- The catechist will give the student a warning.
- If a second correction is needed during the same RE session, the student is sent to the school office with their textbook to do current work. Student will complete a Discipline “Reasoning” Worksheet (page 11).
- Catechist will complete a Parent Notification form and give this to the Faith Formation Director. A copy of the student discipline reasoning worksheet and the parent notification form will be sent to the parents (page 12).
- If a student is sent to the office a second time during a six-week period, parents will be asked to meet with the Director of Faith Formation and the Catechist for dialogue.

### Religious Education Program Regulations ~ Please...

- Arrive at least five minutes before the start of scheduled sessions so that class can begin on time.
- Each student is to treat others with respect. They are to:
  - Be courteous in speech ~ inappropriate language is never acceptable,
  - Be courteous and respectful in action ~ inappropriate physical contact such as shoving, pushing, etc. will not be tolerated;
  - Maintain a noise level in the halls and stairs that allows others to work undisturbed in classrooms;
  - Walk; never run, in the halls and on the stairs so that everyone's safety can be assured.
  - Students are required to follow the classroom rules formulated by their catechists and classmates.
- The cleanliness and care of the building is the responsibility of all. Students and parents will be held responsible for any damage to school/parish property.
- Personal property belonging to teachers and/or students in the school has a "hands off" policy.
- Gum chewing is not allowed in the building.
- Items that could prove to be harmful to others are never permitted on parish premises.
- Parents are asked to not allow their child to carry cell phones or other communication devices to class. Office phones are available if needed.

Medical Emergencies ~ In an event that a child is unable to continue to participate in the classroom activities, the catechist/aide should bring the child to the office so that the parent may be called. If the parent cannot be reached, the Faith Formation Director will call the person listed as the Emergency Contact.

Parent-Catechist Communication ~ In addition to the normal communications that originate from the Faith Formation Director, catechists are urged to stay in touch with their students' parents.

Student Textbooks ~ Each student enrolled in our "Traditional Classroom" Religious Education Program will receive a grade level student textbook.

Visitors to Classrooms ~ All visitors are asked to check in at the office. Catechists may invite parents or guest speakers. The Faith Formation Director should be notified of these plans.

St. Thomas the Apostle Religious Education

Discipline "Reasoning" Worksheet

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. Why was I asked to leave the room?

2. What behavior on my part contributed to this?

3. I will do the following so that my time in religious education class will be more beneficial:

St. Thomas the Apostle Religious Education  
Discipline Notification Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Description of Behavior: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this notice, please contact:

Catechist Name:

Phone/E-mail:

\_\_\_\_\_

Director of Faith Formation:

Patti Reynolds, 616-459-4662 ext. 1209 / [pattireynolds@stthomasgr.org](mailto:pattireynolds@stthomasgr.org)

## SACRAMENT PREPARATION GUIDELINES

**Please note:** St. Thomas Parish policy requires that children preparing to celebrate the Sacraments must be in a Religious Education program at least one full year prior to immediate year of preparation for a Sacrament.  
e.g. 1<sup>st</sup> grade + 2<sup>nd</sup> grade = First Holy Communion prep, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade + 4<sup>th</sup> grade = the full catechesis of Reconciliation, and 7<sup>th</sup> grade + 8<sup>th</sup> grade = Confirmation preparations

### **Eucharist**

The Sacrament of Eucharist traditionally occurs in second grade. Children must be baptized and have received the Sacrament of Penance. Parent(s) must be a registered member here at Saint Thomas the Apostle, register as a visitor (if non-parishioners), or have dual-membership. Parent(s) and children must be regularly attending weekly Sunday Mass.\* Children must participate in one academic year of Religious Education (1<sup>st</sup> grade) prior to the year of Sacramental preparation for Eucharist (2<sup>nd</sup> grade). Parent(s) and children must participate in all of the Sacramental preparation determined by the Director of Faith Formation. Preparation consists of classroom instruction, parent meeting with children and an all-day retreat with the children from Saint Thomas the Apostle School, Religious Education, and Home-Schooled programs.

### **Reconciliation**

Children are properly catechized for the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to First Eucharist. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is received prior to the celebration and first reception of Eucharist. Variation of this norm occurs on an individual basis and after deliberate consultation between the Pastor and individual parent(s).

Father Jim Chelich has offered Reconciliation to the children in grades 1-3 under "Form B" and in grades 4-8 under "Form A". "Form B" simply means that students gather as a class with Father Jim. Father Jim reads to the children from the Word of God and then leads them through an examination of conscience, which is age appropriate. The children then approach Father Jim individually for confession, then receives individual absolution, and is given a penance. Students in the 4th grade receive a complete and total catechesis of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Students in grades 4-8, under "Form A", are taught "the art of examining one's conscience" which simply means the individual prepares his/her own examination of conscience, they make their confession, receive absolution and are given a penance.

### **Confirmation**

The Sacrament of Confirmation takes place in the eighth grade. Candidates for Confirmation must be Baptized.

They and their parent(s) must be a registered member of St. Thomas the Apostle Parish. Parent(s) and Candidates must regularly attend weekly Sunday Mass.\* Your child must have participated in one academic year of Religious Education (7<sup>th</sup> grade) prior to the year of Sacramental preparation for Confirmation (8<sup>th</sup> grade).

Candidates must participate in all the Sacramental preparation determined by the Director of Faith Formation. Preparation consists of classroom instruction, parent meeting with Candidates, Sunday sessions with Candidates and their Sponsors, and an all-day retreat with Candidates from both Saint Thomas the Apostle School, Religious Education, and Home-Schooled programs.

### **Rite of Christian Initiation of Children**

Occasionally, for many different reasons, there are youth who have not celebrated the Sacraments in the usual order. Arrangements will be made for any child who has not previously celebrated the Sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation.

Parent(s) need to inform the Director of Faith Formation if they have a child who has not already celebrated these Sacraments. Children should, however, be registered for their appropriate grade level class. If you have any questions, please call Patti at the Parish Office, 616-459-4662 ext. 1209 or email [pattireynolds@stthomasgr.org](mailto:pattireynolds@stthomasgr.org).

- If a child is transferring from another School or Religious Education program, parent(s) need to submit a letter from the previous Parish, verifying what preparation your child has completed for the Sacraments.

## **Our Promises to You – Your Commitment to us...**

### **Fearless Faith – We are Unapologetically Catholic.**

Our faith is living and vibrant and permeates all we are and do. Each part of the Monday night Religious Education is an active response to faith:

We gather as catechists for evening prayer before Religious Education begins. The catechists pray with the children as well each time they meet together in the classroom and atrium. Our Catholic faith is interwoven into every aspect of our curriculum, our discipline and our culture.

We celebrate throughout the year with classroom visits from Father Jim, Reconciliation, teaching Masses, Sacrament Retreat days and Sacrament celebrations, as well as visits to the Eucharistic Chapel.

### **Your Commitment -- Bring your child to Mass on Sundays.**

### **Catechetics -- We are dedicated to providing your children the best possible catechetical and spiritual experience:**

We affirm the gifts of each student.

We offer open lines of communication between you and your child's catechist, as well as with Patti Reynolds, Director of Faith Formation, and Father Jim Chelich.

After your child's Confirmation in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, it is Father Jim's hope and desire that this is not viewed as "graduation" but just the beginning of their journey in the Church. We offer a weekly Sunday evening Youth Ministry opportunity for high-schoolers so that they are able to continue their faith journey with their peer community here at Saint Thomas.

Our Catechists are committed to making sure that they themselves are formed and informed as catechists to help pass the faith along to your child.

### **Your Commitment – Ensure that your child attends weekly Monday night Religious Education and that any homework is completed to the best of their ability, and they have opportunities of quiet times of Prayer and Scripture reading.**

### **Peaceful climate – We believe the root of discipline is to "Disciple."**

We teach our students to examine their words and actions in light of their faith and take responsibility to be what God created them to be:

We remember Saint Paul's teaching, "Be devoted to one another ...Honor one another above yourselves."

~ Romans 12:10

We establish expectations for classroom behavior, and student's conduct from the first night of Religious Education.

We catechize and evangelize using approved texts and methods from Loyola Press, the YOUCAT, Decision Point from Dynamic Catholic, and Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, and we share our own personal encounters with God.

### **Your Commitment – Ensure your child's mind, soul, and heart are ready for each week of learning and sharing.**

### **Empowered Community – We Partner with Our Families**

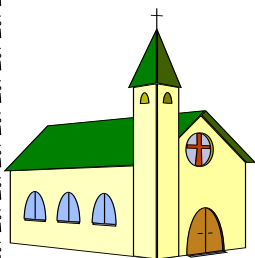
Parents are their children's first and primary teachers:

We welcome and encourage family involvement.

We value our volunteers' time, talents, and gifts.

### **Your Commitment – The more parents are involved in the catechesis and evangelization process, the better their children will do in Religious Education.**

*Thank you for all you do. It is an honor and a privilege to minister to your children.*



## SAINT THOMAS THE APOSTLE PARISH

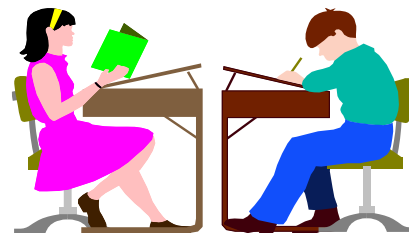
### DEFINITION OF “ACTIVE PARISHIONER STATUS”

In order to maintain “Active Parishioner Status” one must be registered at Saint Thomas and actively support the parish in the following ways:

- ⇒ By weekly worship as evidenced by the regular use of offertory envelopes. However, no specific amount is required.
- ⇒ By a commitment to follow the Gospel and live a Catholic life,
- ⇒ By supporting our parish community’s works and ministries with an investment of your prayers, time and talent,
- ⇒ By supporting the parish with a financial commitment. The recommended level of financial contribution for parishioners is a tithe of at least 5% of your household income to Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish and 5% to other charities. However, no amount is required.

From the students who attend or participate in:

- ◆ Saint Thomas the Apostle School
- ◆ Catholic Central High School
- ◆ West Catholic High School
- ◆ Saint Thomas Youth Ministry Program
- ◆ Saint Thomas Religious Education Program



We expect:

- ⇒ Your Regular presence at weekend Mass at Saint Thomas\*,
- ⇒ Your cooperation with catechists, staff and volunteers, as well as your personal best performance,
- ⇒ Your sincere interest in Saint Thomas the Apostle as your parish home and your involvement in the parish according to the guidelines mentioned above.

*\*If however you are non-parishioners but registered here at Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish for Religious Education, at Saint Thomas the Apostle School, and for any of the Sacraments, please note that we will need a letter from your home parish priest to give his permission that the child/ren is/are here for Religious Education, an education in our Parish School, and to receive First Eucharist or Confirmation here at Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish with classmates.*



## CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish offers a warm welcome to persons of all abilities in our Religious Education Classes. We are committed to working with parents/guardians to make necessary accommodations in programs that will allow your son/daughter to participate as fully as possible in the life of the church.

Children with special needs benefit the most when parents and catechists form a partnership. In order to assist our children in their faith formation, our volunteer catechists need to be informed about their special needs whether they have a cognitive, developmental or learning disability; physical limitations due to a long-term or even a short-term illness, vision or hearing loss, autism, add/adhd, or emotional challenges. Welcome to our program!

When informed, our parish catechetical programs have the ability to modify lessons plans or to recruit support personnel. Parents are asked to provide us with all helpful information about each child by completing the individualized student information form before classes begin.

We will work with parents to create a plan utilizing the resources Saint Thomas can reasonably offer. We believe that all members of Christ's body have gifts to share.

# “TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM” CURRICULUM

## For

### First through Eighth year of Faith Formation

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#### 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> Years of Faith Formation

The catechetical series, *Discover: Finding Faith in Life*, and published by Saint Mary's Press, is used. The founder, Saint John Baptist de La Salle, believed that God's word is powerful in touching hearts. We still believe that today, which is why we've created a faith formation program that puts The Catholic Children's Bible at the center.

Each child receives their own Discover! Kit, containing everything they need for their exciting faith journey. Children will dive into Bible stories in their own Catholic Children's Bible to encounter Jesus through the stories and people of scripture. Then, they get out of their seats for a built-in energetic learning activity that helps build a meaningful lesson. Next, they connect the Bible story and hand-on activity with Catholic doctrine through age-appropriate prayers, puzzles, and challenges in their Activity Book. Watch as they connect the dots and transform a learned faith into a joyfully lived faith!

When they are done with the day's discoveries, everything gets packed up in their own backpack until it's time for the next adventure!

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Year – First Holy Communion, Additional Curriculum

“Go, Seek, Find”, Eucharist & Reconciliation preparation, by Saint Mary's Press

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Year – Additional Curriculum

The “You Cat” (Youth Catechism) and various other resources, plus Father Jim's teachings on understanding the complete and total catechesis of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

#### 5<sup>th</sup> Year – Liturgy, Additional Curriculum

The catechetical series is used throughout the year. Much of the students' class time is devoted to preparing for the role as Altar Servers. Much of the class time is spent in the church as students learn about the Mass, the church environment, the articles and sacred vessels used at Mass, as well as the role and responsibilities of an altar server.

## 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Year of Faith Formation

The catechetical series, “Catholic Connections Handbook”, for Middle Schoolers is used alongside the “Breakthrough! Bible for young Catholics”, published by Saint Mary’s Press, is used.

6<sup>th</sup> grade students will study the Old Testament, the Trinity, and the Mission of Christ.

7<sup>th</sup> grade students will study the New Testament, the Church, and the Sacraments, and

8<sup>th</sup> graders will study Christian Morality and Prayer, and the Sacrament of Confirmation

In Breakthrough! Young teens will see that God has big plans for them today. Tweens will be empowered by biblical heroes who listened to God’s call and realized that they too could make a difference in this world. This resource, written for young people ages 10-13, will encourage students to discover how God continually breaks through to show His love and constant presence.

## 7<sup>th</sup> Year - Additional Confirmation Prep Curriculum

This 7<sup>th</sup> year is a preparation year for the Sacrament of Confirmation. The curriculum of our junior high students is adapted to meet the diverse experiences in the life of the adolescent, along with the YouCat (Youth Catechism). During the summer months after they have left 7<sup>th</sup> grade, it is asked that the students complete a “Confirmation Preparation Survey”, do some “Saintly Summer Reading” in preparation for getting to know some of the Saints they may want to use as their guide and Patron Saint name, as well as completing a “Sponsor Research and Declaration”.

## 8<sup>th</sup> Year - Additional Confirmation Curriculum

The curriculum for our eighth grade students focuses primarily on Christian Morality and Prayer, as well as the Sacrament of Confirmation. Our adolescents are confirmed at the end of their eighth grade year. Anointed in the Spirit, published by Saint Mary’s Press, is the additional text resource used with our students. The YouCat (Youth Catechism), “and other resources are used. These resources prepare candidates with lessons that include celebrating ritual, reflecting on Scripture, exploring Catholic doctrine, and making connections between faith and life.

All of our parish 8<sup>th</sup> grade Confirmation Candidates also participate in monthly session with their Sponsors as well as three in-house sessions with their sponsors and Father Jim.

## *“CATECHESIS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD” A Montessori-based Program for students: PK-4 through 6 grade*

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a way of religious formation for children that is quite different from published programs. It does not use a catechetical series of books or take place in a traditional classroom setting. In this approach there is an especially prepared room for the children in which every object in the space is a help to knowing God. It is a place of simplicity and order, prayer, work and community. Everything in this room, known as the atrium, is intended to be appropriate to the ages and sizes of the children who gather there. It is the religious needs of the girls and boys that guide the catechesis (instruction). The atrium allows the children to come into contact with scripture, the liturgy of the church and the whole of sacred history.

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd began in Rome in 1954 and has roots in the beginning of the twentieth century. The foundation of the catechesis is the work of two women. The first is Sofia Cavaletti, a Catholic laywoman who lived and worked in Rome, a Hebrew and biblical scholar. She was also a writer, an educator, a lecturer and a catechist. Gianna Gobbi is her collaborator. She is a Montessori educator, a trainer of teachers and a catechist of children.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is based on the belief that young children can and do experience God. The aim of the Good Shepherd program is to create an environment in which children can develop spiritually. The Gospel is proclaimed through age-appropriate lessons, prayers, music and liturgical events. Hands-on materials are used to help both children and adults reflect together on the great mysteries of the Christian faith.

### **Atrium Space**

*In the early church there was a special room called the atrium, generally adjoining the church, which was used for the training and instruction of catechumens. It was a sort of anteroom to the church, both in the literal and metaphorical sense. The atrium would be set apart for the preparation of children for their full participation in the life of the church. It would not simply be a question of teaching them their catechism, but something much broader and deeper. This room would be a place where the religious sentiment would be born and nurtured, where the children would be free in the expression of their religious instincts. Through the various activities of the atrium, children are helped to know “the great realities of life as a Christian.”*

The life of the atrium expresses the life of the church. The many ministries of the parish surrounding the atrium are connected to it in numerous ways. Above all, the liturgical life of the church gives rhythm and substance to the work and prayer of children. As the liturgical year unfolds, children change the cloths and candles in the atrium to the appropriate color. Even the presentations given to them are seasonal, and each age level's three-year curriculum can be matched to the Lectionary, so that some of the prophecies, narratives and parables heard on Sunday might also be pondered in the atrium.

In the atrium children prepare for fuller and more conscious participation in the liturgy. They start to recognize words and gestures of the priest and assembly. They become able, through many repetitions of atrium "works," to prepare the cruets, wash the hands of the priest and even dress the altar table. The communal prayer of the older ones is patterned from the Liturgy of the Hours. The children listen for and recognize themes familiar to them from the atrium in the hymns that are sung at the Eucharistic celebration.

Many of the liturgical presentations in the atrium (the gestures of epiclesis, offering/doxology and peace; the preparation of the cruets and chalice, the washing of the priest's hands, the Last Supper, the liturgical colors) give the child an interest in and even longing for the Mass. Hunger for Eucharist may begin to grow very early. Usually, when young children who have developed an interest in the Mass do attend, they do not pay attention for the whole time. But because of the atrium work, they now have some linking points to watch for and enjoy.

~Taken from: The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd in a Parish Setting.

The formation and learning ability of the child participating in the Good Shepherd Program continues to build on the presentations from one week to the next. For this reason it is very important that children who participate in the program are present each week.



Mrs. Reynolds would like you to join  
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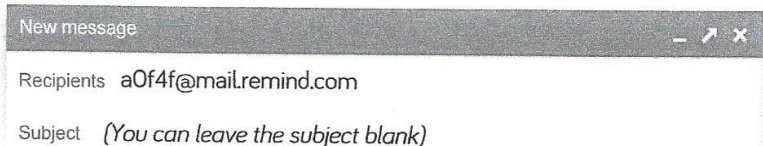


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PUBLIC SCHOOL RELEASE/PERMISSION FORM  
FOR SACRAMENT RETREAT DAYS

**This is a form requesting release for participation in a religious activity. Use this form or a hand written note to inform your child's school of your request.**

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:**

**RE:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Child's Name)

**SCHOOL:** \_\_\_\_\_

**GRADE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**In accord with Sec. 732 of Act 269, PA 1955, as amended by Act 270, PA 1964 being MCLA Par. 340.732; MSA 1968 Rev. Vol. Par. 15.3732 and subsequent administrative rules, I am requesting that my child named above be released from public school classes for a special religious education day of prayer and preparation for the Sacrament of \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ from 8:15 a.m. until 3:15 p.m. hosted by St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Grand Rapids.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Dated**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**(Signature of Parent or Guardian)**

## Saint Thomas the Apostle Religious Education PARENT Calendar 2021-2022

### SEPTEMBER

- Sept 13 Opening RE Night for Parents & Children, 6:15 pm, please meet in Church.  
Sept 20 RE  
Sept 27 RE (1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> grade visits from Father Jim)

### OCTOBER

- Oct 3 Confirmation Parent/Sponsor/Youth session with Father; 6:30 pm, in Church  
Oct 4 RE (3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> grade visits from Father Jim)  
Oct 11 RE  
Oct 18 RE (5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> grade visits from Father Jim)  
Oct 25 RE

### NOVEMBER

- Nov 1 RE  
Nov 8 RE (Teaching Mass for 4-8<sup>th</sup> graders)  
Nov 15 RE  
Nov 22 RE  
Nov 29 RE (1<sup>st</sup> grade Reconciliation with Father Jim)

### DECEMBER

- Dec 6 RE (2<sup>nd</sup> grade Reconciliation with Father Jim)  
Dec 13 RE (3<sup>rd</sup> grade Reconciliation with Father Jim)  
Dec. 20 Christmas vacation. NO RE  
Dec. 27 Christmas vacation. NO RE

### JANUARY

- Jan 3 RE  
Jan 9 Confirmation Parent/ Sponsor/Youth session with Father, 6:30 pm  
Jan 10 RE (CGS Level I & II visits by Father Jim)  
Jan. 17 MLK Day. NO RE  
Jan 24 RE (CGS Level III visit by Father Jim)  
Jan 31 RE

### FEBRUARY

- Feb 6 First Communion Parent & Child session with plate-making option, in the Church and lower level social hall, 2:30-4:30 pm  
Feb 7 RE (Teaching Liturgy for 1-3<sup>rd</sup> graders)  
Feb 14 RE  
Feb 21 Winter break. NO RE  
Feb 28 RE (8<sup>th</sup> grade Reconciliation with Father Jim)



## MARCH

- Mar 6 Confirmation Sponsor & Youth session with special guest, 6:30 pm  
Mar 7 RE (7<sup>th</sup> grade Reconciliation with Father Jim)  
Mar 14 RE + 4<sup>th</sup> grade Reconciliation Retreat during the school day (8:15-3:15) with the Reconciliation Celebration in the evening (6:30-8:30)  
Mar 21 RE (6<sup>th</sup> grade Reconciliation with Father Jim)  
Mar 28 RE (5<sup>th</sup> grade Reconciliation with Father Jim)

## APRIL

- Apr 4 Spring Break. NO RE  
Apr 11 RE  
Apr 18 RE  
Apr 22 First Communion Retreat Day, 8:15 am – 3:15 pm in the Church and lower level social hall  
Apr 24 First Holy Communion Mass I, 3:00 pm  
Apr 25 RE

## MAY

- May 1 First Holy Communion Mass II, 3:00 pm  
May 2 RE  
May 9 Closing RE Mass (& Ice Cream Social), 6:30 pm

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### 8<sup>th</sup> Grade CONFIRMATION RETREAT & MASS:

I am hopeful and planning our Retreat this year at Aquinas College, and with a session on Prayer for students, with Father Jim.

The Sacrament Mass will be held either at the Cathedral of St. Andrew or St. Thomas,  
Date & Time: –TBD- Spring, 2022

Sponsor & Candidate: three (3) in-house sessions:

Sunday, October 3 (including parents) with Father Jim, 6:30-8:00 pm,

Sunday, January 9 (parents are invited) with Father Jim's "Fishbowl Discussion",  
6:30-8:00 pm, and

Sunday, March 6 (parents are invited) with one of our Seminarians or newly  
Ordained Priests, 6:30-8:00 pm.

There are also monthly bookwork and online sessions for Sponsors and Candidates to do together.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade FIRST HOLY COMMUNION MASSES: April 24 & May 1.

Parent and Child prayer service, instruction, and commemorative  
plate-painting opportunity: Sunday February 6, 2:30-4:30 pm

Retreat Day: Friday, April 22, 8:15 am-3:00 pm

### 4<sup>th</sup> Grade RECONCILIATION CELEBRATION:

Parent and Child prayer service, and instruction: Sunday, January 23, 2:30-4:00 pm

Retreat Day: Monday, March 14, 8:15 am -3:00 pm

Reconciliation Celebration: Monday, March 14, 6:30-8:30 pm

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Patti Reynolds, Director of Faith Formation

Parish Office: 459-4662 x1209; [pattireynolds@stthomasgr.org](mailto:pattireynolds@stthomasgr.org)

Monday evenings after 5:30 pm, during RE, please email me

## **Religious Education Safety at Saint Thomas**

**Fire** – The students leave the building quickly and quietly. All classes line up behind the church. In the event there was a real fire emergency you would get a text or email from Patti Reynolds via Remind.com telling you a location to pick up your child. This will most likely be the Saint Thomas Gym or Family Fare Grocery Store. (Depending on where the fire is located, and for ease of traffic flow)

**Severe Weather** – Students will move to the lower level of the church through the basement tunnel. They are gathered in the social hall and are counted. If there was severe weather, such as a tornado, happening at pick-up time you would be sent a text or email from Patti Reynolds via Remind.com letting you know that we will dismiss students as soon as the weather warning has expired. At that time you would pick up your child in the regular areas.

**Shelter in Place** – This is what we are to do if a dangerous person is near or in the building. Students quietly move to the safe location in their locked classroom as designated by their catechist. If the danger makes it necessary to move the students out of the building they would go to the Saint Thomas Gym, Holland Home, Family Fare Grocery Store, or Aquinas College, depending on the location of the danger. In this event you would receive a notice from Patti Reynolds via Remind.com letting you know what is going on and when/where to pick up your child.

### **Back To Religious Education (COVID-19 Delta variant) Protocol Information**

**(Updated 8.10.21)** - Given that all of the mandates from the Health Department have expired, we turn to recommendations to keep our community safe. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) recommends layers of defense in schools to reduce transmission of the COVID-19 virus. As the community transmission fluctuates, these layers can increase or decrease. They also recommend that decisions be made with consideration to the local school and community. Below are the layers currently planned for the start of the 2021-22 RE program.

#### ➤ Vaccinations

- The CDC encourages vaccinations for all eligible individuals.
- The COVID-19 vaccine is not listed on the School Required Vaccination list and, therefore, will not be a requirement for RE attendance.  
([https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdhhs/School\\_Req\\_for\\_Schools\\_553548\\_7.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdhhs/School_Req_for_Schools_553548_7.pdf))

#### ➤ Facial Coverings

- CDC and MDHHS recommend that all students, educators, staff, parents and visitors wear masks indoors in K-12 buildings. Saint Thomas the Apostle Catholic School and Saint Thomas the Apostle Religious Education programs will follow these guidelines and recommend that all individuals in the building wear masks.

- COVID-19 Screenings, Testing and Contact Tracing
  - Staff, students and parents are encouraged to monitor health conditions closely and stay home if you are sick or having COVID-19 symptoms.
  - We encourage students and staff to get tested for COVID-19 if having symptoms or identified as a close contact of an individual with COVID-19.
- Parent and Guest Procedures
  - All parents and special guests should self-screen for symptoms before coming to the school and will be required to check in and complete a health screen at the office.
  - Volunteers are able to come into the building for specific volunteer assignments.
- RE Evening Routines
  - Catechists, staff, parents and students will continue to sanitize hands in and out of rooms.
  - Catechists will continue to keep rooms well ventilated.
  - Classes will continue to regularly sanitize desks and common surfaces.

**THANK YOU** for using the main school brown door **ONLY** for coming into RE, and when leaving RE feel free to use which ever door is convenient for you, making sure that your child knows which door is your departure location. We need to remember that the fall and winter darkness will arrive soon enough and we do not want children running into the parking lot upon their departure.

Please note that the main school brown door is locked at 6:20 pm and unlocked again at 7:25 pm.

If your child will be arriving after 6:20 or picked up earlier than 7:25, please ring the Doorbell located on the upper right-hand side of the door.