

Dear Parents,

Good news! St Mary's Religious Education will be returning this fall for the 2020-21 year. In order to do so responsibly we have come up with an exciting, modified approach for this year's classes. Instead of the traditional weekly-in-class program, this year we are going to be adopting a once-a-month integrated Family Religious Education Program.

How This Year's Program Will Work

The new Family Program will be a hybrid of in-class instruction and at-home learning. Instead of just the students coming for class each week, the entire family will participate in at-home weekly activities and then come once a month (the second Wednesday of the month) to an all-families meeting. At this once-a-month meeting, the parents will be guided through the teaching of the up-coming month's content in Gallivan Hall, and the students will go to their individual classrooms for additional instruction and a review of materials covered at home. And not to worry, busy parents: your at-home time commitment does not have to exceed what you already set aside last year to ensure your child attended weekly classes at the parish.

We will be using the Family of Faith Program from Sophia Institute Press. It is an exciting and innovative program in which the whole family learns and studies the same subject matter each month together, with workbook and breakout enrichment activities at individual, age-appropriate levels - including adult enrichment material. Learning about the rich heritage of our Catholic faith and church history is a life-long privilege. Each family will receive one Parent's Guide as well as separate Student Workbooks for each of their enrolled children.

The Benefits of the Family Program

The reason we are using this new approach is threefold. 1) We are trying to minimize the time that students have to spend in the classroom due to Covid-19 concerns. 2) The new program can easily go 100% online while maintaining full continuity of instruction. Last year we were caught off guard and missed the last few months of Religious Education, and this year we want to be fully prepared for whatever may come our way. 3) While it might at times be intimidating or perhaps even burdensome for parents to take on a larger role in catechizing their children, countless studies have shown that parents are the first and *most effective* teachers of their children, and involving them in the passing on of the values that will ensure their happy and fulfilling life should be worth making the time and effort to do. We're confident that as a parish family, with proper encouragement and support, we can transition to this more effective model of transmitting a saving faith in Christ Jesus to our children.

What about Sacramental Preparation?

Since parents are already going to be teaching the main program's lesson to their children each month, the additional sacramental preparation lessons specifically for 2nd grade students (preparing for First Communion) and 8th grade students (preparing for Confirmation) will be presented using pre-recorded video lessons. Students in these grade levels will be able to stream

these videos at home each week and follow along with a Student Workbook. Students will then get the chance to review these additional Sacramento-specific lessons for the month with their teacher and classmates during the usual once a month classroom time.

2020 has brought us many challenges, but in each challenge lie many opportunities for growth. As a parish, we are excited to present you with a new religious education program that will give you the tools, guidance, support, and accountability that you as a family need to make the religious education of your children safe, accessible, and even more fruitful and effective than ever. We know there will be growing pains, but we urge you to expect them and work with us to make this program the success it can and will be - with your help!

Please look for further communications in the coming weeks as we begin implementing this wonderful parish family religious education program. And thank you for continuing to make St. Mary's the spiritual home of your entire family.

Common Concerns or Questions

I'm not a teacher and wouldn't even know where to start instructing my child.

We should first remember that the vast majority of our Religious Education teachers are not trained teachers, either. They are simply parishioners and parents who have volunteered to help catechize the children of the parish. There is no requirement to be an expert in order to help a child learn. Additionally, St Mary's and the whole Religious Education community will be supporting you and providing the resources necessary to instruct your child with confidence, fielding questions and concerns, sharing best-practices from other families, and handing you the tools you need to find your own path to family success.

My child doesn't listen to me and requires an outside presence to learn.

This is a very common feeling as a parent, but rest assured that while it sometimes *feels* this way, when it comes to transmitting an authentic faith in Christ and living as a true disciple, the opposite is actually true. Statistically, the number one factor influencing how a child comes to know and love Jesus Christ and his Church is the example and influence of the child's parents. Great religious education teachers can be helpful and even influential, but nothing is as important to the child's future faith life as their parent. Even when it seems like they are not listening to you, your children *are* listening and watching and absorbing everything you say and do. So embark on this adventure with confidence!

Do both parents need to attend the monthly sessions?

While at least one parent is *required* to attend the monthly Wednesday meeting, we highly encourage both parents to attend whenever possible. This practice will help to avoid having the responsibility of lesson implementation falling solely on one parent: the role of catechizing one's children is best shared by both parents, and families will find it much easier and much more enriching if both parents are as involved in the program as possible.