

Dear Family,

Welcome to our parish catechetical program. The purpose of this program is to follow Christ's call "to proclaim the Good News everywhere in the world and to hand his message on to successive generations by professing, living and celebrating the faith..." (*National Directory for Catechesis* #15)

In our parish, the pastor, working with parents and those in catechetical ministry, plans and carries out this catechetical mission. This handbook has been designed to provide general information, dates, and requirements for participation in the parish program. The parish reserves the right to amend this handbook as necessary. Parents will be notified, in writing, if changes are made to any procedure or information contained in this handbook. We hope this serves to enhance communication, and provide a clear presentation of expectations and responsibilities of students and their families. In the long run, we hope it makes family life easier!

In the *National Directory for Catechesis*, the U.S. Bishops remind us that it is in the parish that the faithful are "energized to carry out Christ's mission." It is here that the "spiritual, moral and material support for the regular and continuing catechetical development of the parishioners" is provided. (*NDC*, #60)

We thank you for your support and cooperation, and look forward to working together with you this year. It is in working together that we are the Body and Christ and carry out His mission.

May the Lord bless our efforts,

Father Robert Fulton

Suzette Taylor

Pastor

Parish Catechetical Leader

Mission Statement

The mission of the catechetical program of Our Lady of the Gulf Parish of Gulf Shores, Alabama, is to help all participants and their families develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and to live out their Catholic faith in ways that draw others to Christ and the Church. We seek to carry out this mission through catechesis, sacramental preparation, liturgy, and service.

*Objectives of our Parish Catechetical Program**

- ❖ To present a comprehensive and systematic formation in the faith, that integrates knowledge of the faith with living the faith
- ❖ To center on initiation into the life of the Triune God
- ❖ To be appropriate to the age level, maturity, circumstances, language and ethnic background of each participant
- ❖ To involve all members of the parish community, particularly the parents
- ❖ To focus on the symbols, rituals, and prayers of the Church
- ❖ To enable the believers to live out their faith in their everyday life

* from the *National Directory for Catechesis*, 2005

The parish catechetical program admits students of any sex, race, color, or national and ethnic origin to all rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to students in this catechetical program. Where possible, our parish program strives to make accommodation for children and youth with disabilities.

Special Catechetical Programs

Liturgy of the Word for Children (LWC)

Liturgy of the Word for Children celebrates the Word of God using the Lectionary for Children. Children in three-year old Kindergarten through second grade (pre-communion) are invited to join adult leaders in hearing the Word of God proclaimed in child-appropriate language. The program is held during the Liturgy of the Word portion of the 10:00 a.m. Sunday Mass.

A profession of faith and intercessory prayers conclude the program and the children return to their families for the Liturgy of the Eucharist in the church. For more information, contact: Suzette Taylor.

Vacation Bible School (VBS)

Vacation Bible School may be held during the summer. Themes would vary each year, however at the center would always be the goal of bringing participants to a living faith. VBS is for Grades K - 6. Youth in grades 7-12 could participate by acting as teen guides, performers and catechist aides.

Adult Faith Formation (AFF)

Our parish sees each parent/guardian as having an important role in their child's faith development. We welcome your involvement in the program as a volunteer and/or catechist. We depend on your assistance in helping your child learn their prayers and participate in the parish catechetical program and other enriching activities of parish life. Equally important is your commitment to enriching your own faith life. The parish bulletin lists the dates and times when adult faith formation opportunities are offered.

Volunteers

The parish catechetical program welcomes and needs volunteers to assist in some of the activities and service projects throughout the year. Anyone interested in volunteer service such as clerical and office help, babysitting, catechist, aid, monitor, etc., should contact the Parish Religious Education Office or the Parish Catechetical Leader (PCL).

****NOTE:** In the Archdiocese of Mobile, all volunteers who have substantial contact with children and youth under the age of nineteen (19) are required to complete the CAPP training and have a background check. This can be arranged by contacting the PCL.

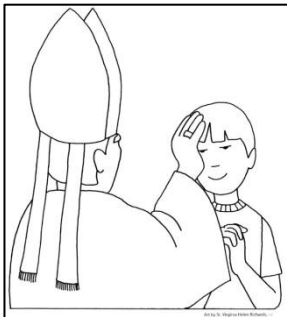
Sacramental Preparation Guidelines

Baptism

Arrangements for Baptism can be made by calling or coming by the office. You will be sent a form detailing the requirements. This information must be in the office at least one week before the chosen date.

First Reconciliation & First Holy Communion

Children in second grade who have attended 2 years of catechetical instructions are eligible to celebrate the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. This (remote) preparation takes place in the parish catechetical program, the Catholic School, or home settings. Special (immediate) preparation classes are held in the fall for Reconciliation, and the spring for Eucharist. It is expected that the students attend Mass weekly.



Confirmation

The sacrament of Confirmation will be offered for students in Grades 7-8. To be eligible for this sacrament the student must: (1) either be enrolled in our parish catechetical program or Catholic School; (2) have regularly attended class for at least two years prior to reception of the sacrament; and (3) participate in the immediate preparation including classes, retreats, service hours, written letter to the Archbishop. It is expected that the candidates attend Mass weekly.

RCIA Adapted for Children

This Rite is designed to meet the needs of individuals who are eight years old or more, but not yet adults and want to be baptized and/or come into full communion with the Church. Please see Father Fulton for more information.



Parish Programs for Children and Youth

Kindergarten through Grade 8

The Faith and Life series is used in Grades K through 8. This series focuses on specific faith themes and content in each grade and/or sacramental preparation, and has been found in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* by the U.S. Bishops. The *Faith and Life* religious education series presents Catholic teaching using time-tested methods of catechesis and faith formation, in a beautiful, student-friendly, comprehensive format. We encourage parents to become familiar with their child's catechetical textbook. Learning the faith begins at home and our program is designed to assist you in your role as primary educator of your child.

They will meet on Wednesdays from 6:00 until 7:00. K-6 classes meet in the Religious Education building. 7-8 grade class meets in the "Youth House"

High School

These students meet on Wednesdays at 7:00 at St. Thomas by the Sea Parish in Orange Beach. Through a cooperative effort by Our Lady of the Gulf Parish and St. Thomas by the Sea these teens will be challenged, entertained and guided by youth director, Martha Henderson.

Phone: (251) 981 - 8132

Address: [26547 Perdido Beach Blvd. P.O. Box 1190
Orange Beach, AL 36561](mailto:26547%20Perdido%20Beach%20Blvd.%20P.O.%20Box%201190%20Orange%20Beach,%20AL%2036561)

Website: <http://www.stthomasbythesea.org>

Parish Catechetical Policies

Attendance Policy

Students and parents should make every effort to attend the catechetical sessions and/or parent meetings offered at the parish. Parents are expected to have their children there on time, and to pick them up promptly.

Arrival and Dismissal

Please bring your child to class on time (preferably 5 minutes before the start of class), and pick your child up at dismissal time. Children, in 4th grade and under, must be collected by the custodial parent (or their designee who has been identified to the PCL).

Communication

Since the catechist has the most direct contact with your child, parents should discuss any classroom problems with the catechist first. If the problem cannot be resolved at this level, parents should speak with the PCL. If still unresolved, the problem may be brought to the pastor.

Comments, suggestions and ideas are always welcome. Please share them with the PCL by email (ccd@ourladyofthegulfal.org) or in a written form.

Emergency Class Cancellation

If local schools are closed due to an emergency situation, catechetical classes will generally be cancelled. If you have any questions about cancellation, please email or phone the PCL or your child's catechist (see Page 3 for Personnel information).

Fire Safety and Disaster Preparation

Procedures for fire or disaster evacuation are posted in each room. Each catechist will instruct the class on their evacuation procedures, and conduct at least one drill per year.

Health Concerns

Health information is collected on the Catechetical Registration Form. Catechists and other personnel are not allowed to dispense or administer medication to students.

Student Behavior and Expectations

- Students will be expected to show respect to their teachers and classmates. Disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Classroom rules are posted in each classroom. At the first disruption, the child will be referred to classroom rules. After the second incident, the child will be sent to talk with the PCL. If inappropriate behavior continues, the parent/guardian will be contacted.

- All students are expected to share in the faith learning experience of the parish program. They are also expected to complete assignments and participate in group projects.
- The Archdiocese of Mobile has a detailed ***Field Trip Policy***. This policy, its regulations, and permission forms will be used for all field trips, service projects, retreats, etc.
- Students attending parish catechetical sessions are expected to regularly attend Mass every Sunday and on Holy Days, and celebrate sacraments in *this* parish. Parents or guardians are also encouraged to do so.
- **Cell phones, iPods, handheld video games** and all other personal electronic devices are not appropriate in Religious Education classes. They distract the students and disrupt the class. These items should be left at home or in the car. Any personal electronic device being used in the classroom may be confiscated, the device will be turned over to the PCL or pastor who will return it to a parent.

Sexual and other types of harassment

Harassment, racial slurs, fighting, smoking, drugs, or other inappropriate conduct among students will not be tolerated. Violations of this rule will warrant immediate notification of parents/guardians of the child involved, and may warrant suspension or even dismissal of the involved from the program.

Weapons

In the unlikely event a student is suspected of possessing a weapon or drugs while on parish premises or as a participant in catechetical program or a youth ministry event, the Parish Catechetical Leader (PCL) or Youth Ministry Leader (YML) will immediately notify the parents of the child. The proper civil authorities may also be notified.

General Expectations

It is expected that each family become actively involved in the parish and in the catechetical program so that by their participation they model a living, conscious and active Christian faith, and reinforce the values and attitudes for living that faith. The family and their children are expected to embrace and live these values and attitudes.

Before a student will be permitted to participate in the catechetical program their parent or guardian must sign the Parent Consent Form at the end of this handbook stating that they have read these rules and policies, and that they agree to be governed by them.

Child & Adolescent Protection Policy

In a pastoral effort to respond to a heightened need for the protection of our children, the Archdiocese of Mobile requires a catechesis be given to children and youth in all grades of Parish Programs and Catholic Schools. It is recommended that this yearly catechesis be done during Respect Life month which is in October.

A letter will be sent to each family, notifying parents of the dates of the classes.

All priests, deacons, school administrators, teachers, youth ministers, parish catechists, support personnel, coaches, and other volunteers having “substantial contact” with children are required to attend training in the prevention and recognition of all forms of abuse against

children. This program is provided by the Archdiocese. All persons who work with children in the Archdiocese of Mobile will be required to have background checks as part of the CAPP training.

Pursuant to state law, we are required to report suspected child abuse, and we will also follow all Archdiocesan policies on such matters. If you have questions, feel free to contact the Archdiocesan Office of Child Protection.

Phone: (251) 434-1559

Email: childprotection@mobilearchdiocese.org