

A stylized graphic in the background of the title page. It features a light pink cross shape. Inside the cross, there are three white silhouettes of people. One figure is at the top, and two are at the bottom, one on each side, with their arms raised as if holding the top figure. The text is overlaid on this graphic.

St. Agnes Parish

Catechist Handbook

**"Catechesis leads people to
enter the mystery of Christ,
to encounter him, and
to discover themselves and
the meaning of their lives in him"
(GDC no. 19)**

A Catechist's Prayer

Father of all families, you have called me to serve the family in truth and love as a catechist. May I be faithful to this call, rooted in your Word, and open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

May I use these gifts, especially the gifts of faith, hope, and love, to serve the family as a witness to you, who are love and life and the source and destiny of all families.

Let your Spirit enlighten my mind and strengthen my heart so that I can be a path of Christ's love to families, especially those in need, the homebound and aged, the disabled and disheartened.

Through the intercession of Mary and Joseph, I pray for the Church, the Bride of Christ, whose mission to build a civilization of love passes through the family. Amen.

WELCOME!

Parents, by word and example, are the primary teacher of their children and teach them from birth throughout life. At Baptism, the parent undertakes the responsibility of providing for their child's Christian formation. The St. Agnes Faith Formation Ministry helps parents keep this Baptismal promise through Whole-Family Catechesis and other inclusive events. Our goals are:

- To provide an environment where families and students will be welcomed and feel loved.
- To share with them the important elements of the Catholic tradition.
- To echo God's Word to them.
- To share the Catholic Christian faith with them.
- For students who are attending non-Catholic schools: We provide catechetical instruction on the Catholic faith for grades K-12 in both a community and family setting.
- For all students: We provide immediate sacrament preparation instruction for First Reconciliation, First Communion, and Confirmation in a community setting.

In all sessions of all ages, our goal is to provide the catechesis and skills for students to grow and mature in understanding, positive attitudes, and faithful practice of the Catholic faith. Through the process of catechetical instruction, we hope to deepen the faith and sense of belonging to the Catholic Church in our students, so that they can put their faith in action by sharing their time, talent and treasure in the life of the Church, now and throughout their lives. We strive to assist students 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 and living the Catholic faith. This process is achieved with the joint efforts of our parish staff, clergy, catechists, parents, students, and the entire parish community. Committed to this active partnership between parish staff, clergy, catechists and families, we place our efforts with confidence in God's loving hands.

A Synopsis of Faith Formation

K-5 Grade Faith Formation & Sacrament Preparation

K-5th grades - Our "Whole Family" format **coaches** parents in the spiritual formation and ongoing moral development of their children through a two-step process:

- 1) Monthly assemblies designed for the entire family which includes dinner, music, prayer, and classes by grade, including adults.
- 2) Weekly studies taught by parents in the convenience of their own home and family schedule with an online testing and reward system.

First Holy Communion preparation sessions are offered separately for those in their second consecutive year of Faith Formation in grades 2-5 using an even more hands-on "coaching" method with parents and students in the main hall for the entire session.

6-12 Grade Faith Formation & Sacrament Preparation

The Middle School and High School Youth Groups meet weekly. Youth Nights support teens in their physical, mental, spiritual & social challenges of learning & living their faith. We are sometimes the only consistent message of how to live a Christian life that parents can depend on. Parents can be involved through joining the Youth Group core team or one of the many subcommittees that support help the group succeed. We encourage all parents to join one according to their talent, time, and treasure.

First Holy Communion preparation is a minimum of two years:

Year 1 = attend at least 15 Youth Nights + 1 retreat.

Year 2 = attend at least 15 Youth Nights + 1 retreat, monthly sacrament preparation classes. Parents attend a separate class on this night.

Confirmation preparation is a minimum of two years:

Year 1 (9th grade) = attend at least 15 youth nights + 1 retreat.

Year 2 (10th grade) = attend at least 15 youth nights + 1 retreat + monthly youth-only sacrament preparation sessions.

Parents are required to attend orientation meeting(s) and some retreats (depending on its format.)

Catholic and Homeschooled children attend only the second year sacrament preparation classes for First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion.

Other Sacrament Preparation

Adults & Unbaptized (RCIA) – The RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) is the means by which adults who have not been baptized (or were baptized in another Christian tradition) become Catholic. The class is usually offered in Spanish and English.

RCIA Adapted for Children is the means by which children over age 8 who are not baptized become Catholic.

Both adult and children's RCIA groups meet weekly. The Easter Vigil is ordinarily when the Church receives her new members and RCIA sessions continue to meet until Pentecost.

Intergenerational Events

St. Agnes also hosts monthly "intergenerational" events to enrich the entire parish community. Please attend these as much as possible and be inviting to others of all ages and backgrounds.

Catechist Expectations

Volunteer Application

- Complete volunteer packet, fingerprints, and attend Safe Environment training—If you have previously done this in the Diocese of Venice, you do not have to repeat unless your fingerprints are out of date. You will be notified by the parish office when your fingerprints have expired.
- Initial Discernment—In order to assess prior experience, grade level preference, and areas of growth needed an initial Teacher/Catechist/Classroom Aide Application is provided. There may also be a short interview to determine each catechist's skills and training needs.
- All Catechists have a "Catechist Checklist" on file—This record provides the Director with experience background as well as your agreement to this handbook. A copy of this form is included at the end of this manual.
- Evaluation—At the conclusion of the catechetical year, catechists and assistants will received an evaluation by the director. A copy of this form is included at the end of this manual.

Catechetical Training and Enrichment

- Attend monthly Catechist Workshops scheduled at St. Agnes.
- Familiarize yourself with the policies and expectations that are published in the parish Faith Formation Family/Student Handbook.
- Participate in at least two catechetical formation opportunities this year. Magazine subscriptions count as one formation opportunity. The Director will keep the catechist informed about all area catechist-training opportunities.
- "Into the Fields" is a program which is structured as a small faith-sharing group with ten meetings per year for a 3-year period. The content discussed in the monthly meetings fulfills the required topics for Basic Certification for the Catechist required by the Diocese of Venice. It is opened to all ministers of the parish or if you would just like to know more about the Catholic Faith. The Diocese also offers enrichment sessions every year. This year's calendar is on the next page.
- Parish events for everyone! We encourage you to participate and even volunteer at the parish events that interest you. Many are evangelical in nature and a good chance to invite friends and relatives, especially those considering returning to the Church or are new to the faith.
- The director will give you the schedule of classes and events at the beginning of each catechetical year. Records of completed coursework will also be kept on file in your Catechist folder. Catechists are urged to keep their own record of courses taken and certification levels achieved. Should a catechist request it, they may receive a copy of certification records from our office. St. Agnes parish will provide catechetical training at little or no expense to you.
- Find a substitute to take your place. Let us know the arrangements you have made. A list will be provided of approved substitutes and we welcome those you recommend to become volunteers in accordance with Diocesan policies.
- If you have an emergency last minute and cannot come to a scheduled session, contact the director or assistants as soon as possible by telephone. Do not email or call the office.

Christian Witness

- Attend Mass regularly. If you are not receiving Eucharist, we will support you in taking the necessary steps to resolve this.
- Greet the students and families as you see them in Church.
- Be aware of the language you use in all of your settings (work, home, social networking, other volunteering, church).
- Participate in other parish events as much as possible.

Interacting with the Students and their Families

- Wear your nametag to all parish functions.
- Get to know both the students and their families; try to learn some of their names.
- Share your personal experiences with the students and families.
- Let the Spirit lead the moment – if a child brings up a question or an experience that does not fall within your session plan, address it – it may be the Spirit at work!

IDEAS FOR SESSION MANAGEMENT

- **Be prepared.**
 1. Before planning a lesson remember to pray and ask the Lord for wisdom and guidance.
 2. Expect to spend no less than one hour preparing for each session.
 3. Be specific with planning your lessons. Write out prayers, how long things will take, etc.
 4. Use your catechist manual, homework themes, or handouts as a guide, but do not feel beholden to it. In each session strive to do something “experientially” to increase retention. Be imaginative! Ask for help from others in the creative process.
 5. Use **Catholic** website resources for supplement lesson plans and activities.
 6. Plan out and practice your lessons ahead of time, including how to use media equipment and be aware of your time limitations.
 7. Communicate with the Faith Formation office about supplies and copies needed several days prior to the assembly. Avoid those last-minute scrambles on the day of the event.
 8. Ask for guidance and wisdom; try team teaching with your assistants. The director is always willing to work with you on lesson plans or assist you in creative planning.
- **Plan to arrive at least 20 minutes** early so you can set up and organize yourself. If you are unable to be there, please arrange for someone on your team to arrive early to set up. If you need anything copied or are in need of specific supplies, please let us know ahead of time. Plan to join us in the main ballroom for dinner/gathering ritual each time. Classes will be dismissed one at a time from the main hall by catechist/assistant.
- **Never leave the teens unattended or unsupervised.** Do not allow them to wander off alone or in groups after sign-in. Cell phones need to be off or confiscated until after the session has ended.
- **Be realistic with time and activities.** Allow enough time so students are not rushed.
- **Interactive discussions are good!** Tip: Never say, “NO! Wrong answer!” to your student’s or parent’s answers. If their reply is not what you are looking for, encourage further sharing in the group by responding positively, such as, “that’s an interesting answer. Does anyone else have another idea?” or “That’s a good way to put it, is there another way to look at it?”

- **No eating or drinking is permitted in the Church or Chapel.** Keep classroom parties, snacks, and candy to a minimum. Treats are great for end-of-class-and-out-the-door rewards.
- **We will remind parents to supervise their children** during the first and last parts of the assemblies including restroom breaks.
- **Two adults are mandatory** in a closed classroom at all times. Parents should accompany their own children to the restroom before class begins. Make sure all your interactions are in line with Safe Environment policies.
- **Get to know your families and/or students by name.** As they come to the sessions greet them, ask them how they are and how their day was.
- **Stay connected and focused on the families & students.** Avoid excessive talking with assistants or other teachers while they are doing an activity. Students tend to get disruptive and distracted from lesson.
- **Observe the departure of your families & students** to ensure they are going to the next station correctly. Do not allow the teens to leave the meeting space once they have signed in. Middle Schoolers are to wait at the Chapel drive-through for pickup. High Schoolers will be dismissed out the back of the Church nearest the eastern-most handicapped parking area. When both HS and MS kids are being picked up in the same car, the High School student goes to the MS pick-up area. Students should not be wandering anywhere else on the Church campus or buildings unless supervised by a Core Team member.
- **Communicate with the Faith Formation office** for all your needs or student's needs such as if something breaks or gets used up or special student needs or situations of which we may not be aware.
- **Clean up** when you are finished so that the space is ready for the next used. Get your students to help you if necessary.

KEYS TO POSITIVE BEHAVIOR

- **Become familiar with the Behavior and Dress Code** in the Student & Family handbook. Tell the students your expectations, but be realistic. Go back to the set of rules and remember to be consistent with enforcing them.
- **Never yell** to get a students attention, instead wait in silence until the group is quiet. Try to maintain a quiet tone of voice to maintain class. **Never strike**, shake, or yell at a student. Try a small bell or chime as an attention-getting device.
- **Never force a student to apologize** in front of the group or do anything to embarrass or humiliate students.
- **Do not punish the whole group** for one student's behavior. Shame can be a poor motivator for improved behavior.
- **Be proactive.** Try to "nip things in the bud" at the beginning. Don't allow incidents to build up so that you lose your cool and blow up.
- **Praise good behavior** at all times. Example: "I like the way that Julie is helping out Sara. Wow! That is very thoughtful of you, Julie."
- **Take time to speak to a student privately** about misbehavior or have the director or priest do it. Remember to let them tell their side of the story.
- **Above all, maintain a sense of humor.** When something funny happens, laugh. Laughing is a true sign of us being human.
- **Make sure you are familiar with families & students who have special needs.** This is listed on your class roster. Students with ADD, Asperger's autism, or similar conditions may be viewed or labeled as disruptive if you do not know this initially. Please talk to the director or to the parents about what particular needs this student may need or ways that may assist the student in learning. For instance, some things may be too difficult for a student to do in the session, but may be better to do at home. Also use your assistants or the director for this.
- **Maintain confidentiality about families & students.** That includes family situations or something that is shared in the group by the family or student. Do not discuss this type of information outside of the group.
- **Discipline issues should be reported to the director as soon as necessary.**

FAITH FIRST FOR FAMILIES (K-5) ASSEMBLIES SPECIFICS

- Evening Agenda:
 - 5:45 pm (Fri: 6:45 doors open) Dinner in the main hall
 - 6:30 pm (Fri: 7:30 pm) Opening song and prayer service
 - 6:50 pm (Fri: 7:50) Announcements and children's dismissal to classrooms by grade/teacher
 - 7:00 pm (Fri: 8) Classroom activities begin
 - 7:45 pm (Fri: 8:45) Parents are given the homework sheet at this time and may sign out their student at the classroom.
 - 8:00 pm (Fri: 9) All students should be signed-out and teachers/assistants are dismissed.

- Each classroom will have its own supply cart labeled by grade containing art and learning supplies. You will be sharing this box with the other grades that meet on the other days. If you have a specific supply need, feel free to come by or call ahead to locate the supplies you'll need. If we have them, we'll be happy to share with you. As items run low, please let us know right away so the next class be shorted.

- Each teacher will have a folder at the front table containing your attendance sheet. If you requested photocopies, they will be in your folder as well as catechist and student handouts.

- Return these folders at the end of the session with the completed attendance. Mark as follows:
 - "P" for Present
 - "L" for Late
 - "E" for Picked-up Early
 - Leave blank for absent

YOUTH GROUP (6-12)

- Familiarize yourself with the policies and FAQs of the Youth Group.
- Most of the supplies and forms are stored in the Youth Minister's office. You may want to come by during the week or call ahead to have him locate special supplies you'll need.
- Dismissal. Youth will be dismissed from WEST entrance by the volleyball court. Parents can park in the South parking lot by the playground or form a car line on the North side under the canopy entrance. Any high school students who are driving themselves home should park at the South lot. At least two adult volunteers must supervise the students to ensure that everyone has a safe ride home.
- **Lock up & clean up when you are finished.**

RCIA

- Journey of Faith is the series that is used to catechize the RCIA group at St. Agnes. It is easy to use and beautifully written. Be sure to take the time to familiarize yourself with the introduction pages of the Teacher's Guide and participants materials.
- The "Inquiry" period usually lasts from early Fall to Advent depending on how early Easter comes. After the Rite of Welcoming the participants who wish to continue in the preparation process will enter the "Catechumenate" stage. They will be dismissed by the priest after his homily with their catechists to the Chapel. Adults meet in the Bride's Room of the Chapel. RCIA adapted for Children meet in the Conference Room with parents. If parents need to complete their sacraments, they prepare alongside their children in the Bride's Room. At the beginning of the catechetical year, we will assess the needs of the catechumens to determine the Breaking Open the Word process.
- Supplies will be in an "RCIA cart" in the closet in the Parish Hall classroom. Supplies are also stored in the bottom left cabinet of the Bride's room. Including the prayer candle and matches. The key is hidden on top of the telephone in the Bride's room.
- For Breaking Open the Scriptures ...arrangements will be made for Catechists to receive communion each week and break for a snack at the end of the 9 or 1 Mass. **No eating or drinking is permitted in the Church or Chapel.**
- Please put supplies back where they belong and clean up when you are finished.

Catechist Checklist

Catechist Name _____

- 1 Volunteer or Employee Application Completed
- 2 Job Description (if applicable) Completed
- 3 Fingerprinted Not Completed Completed Date _____
Rescreening Date _____
- 4 Safe Environment Training Completed Date _____

If *NOT* done in the Diocese of Venice in Florida, then where: _____

Supporting paperwork included in file if training was done from a diocese other than the Diocese of Venice

5. Signed Attestation of Good Moral Character Date _____
6. Signed Receipt of the Policy and Procedural Guidelines Relating to Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults Date _____
7. Signed Code of Conduct for Volunteers working with minors Date _____
8. Catechist Handbook Received Date _____
Catechist Training
Into the Fields Year 1 Year 2 Year 3
 Catechist Certificate
Check one Basic Advanced Professional Date _____
9. Copy of Drivers License (if applicable)
10. Any other supporting documentation _____

NOTES:

All documents must be maintained in volunteer's personnel file.

DIOCESE OF VENICE IN FLORIDA
Catechist EVALUATION FORM

Catechist:
Position:

Reviewed by:
Date:

1. Quality of Work:

Consider the following characteristics of the catechist's teaching ability: Accuracy to teaching plan, timeliness with the liturgical year, thoroughness of the topics according to grade-level, and satisfaction of students.

Needs Improvement Acceptable Above Average

2. Quantity of Work:

Does the catechist arrive to class and meetings on time? Is the catechist frequently absent? Does the catechist follow the approved lesson plans and current teachings of the Church?

Needs Improvement Acceptable Above Average

3. Dependability:

How reliable is the catechist with regard to fulfilling expectations, meeting deadlines, and following through on commitments?

Needs Improvement Acceptable Above Average

4. Judgment:

Consider the logic and thought process the catechist uses in arriving at decisions, suggestions, and conclusions, as related to her task.

Needs Improvement Acceptable Above Average

5. Willingness to Serve:

Does the catechist display a willingness to satisfy the needs of parents, students, peers, and staff?

Needs Improvement Acceptable Above Average

6. Creativity/problem solving:

Has the catechist evidenced imagination and ingenuity in solving the problems that accompany her teaching responsibilities?

Needs Improvement Acceptable Above Average

7. Teamwork:

How successfully does the catechist maintain the spirit of cooperation when working with other team members?

Needs Improvement Acceptable Above Average

8. Initiative:

Consider the catechist's talent for taking independent action to identify and perform teaching-related duties, and her willingness to try new approaches to existing problems.

Needs Improvement Acceptable Above Average

OVERALL RATING: Needs Improvement / Acceptable / Above Average

Principle Strengths and Weaknesses:

Goals for the Year:

Catechist Signature

Date

DRE Signature

Date