



**ST. AGNES**  
CATHOLIC CHURCH



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## **2017-18 Family Handbook**

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## Welcome!

Dear St. Agnes families, the clergy & staff of St. Agnes Parish welcome you to the Faith Formation ministry. Together we are forming a “50/50 Partnership” in the interest of your children growing up Catholic by coming to a mutual understanding of expectations, as follows:

### FAITH FORMATION 50/50 PARTNERSHIP

#### ST. AGNES CLERGY AND STAFF PROMISE TO...

- Make the Sunday Mass the focal point of parish life. We welcome any and all families—no matter their life situation—to actively participate.
- The “Question of the Week” is published in the bulletin about the current Sunday readings which you can review in preparation for Mass and reflect on as a family at home during the week.
- St. Agnes offers a quality faith formation curriculum that is approved by the local bishop and faithful to Catholic teaching. We promise to provide the necessary training for the catechists to present it.
- Whole-family assemblies and whole-community catechetical events are planned with meaningful prayer, reflection, and experiences to deepen your family’s connection to the Catholic faith. The parish will provide the necessary resources such as Bibles, grade-level workbooks, parent guides, handouts, and web sites to assist you with faith sharing and catechesis at home in order to complete any homework.
- St. Agnes promises to be a resource for those families whose children are preparing for the sacraments of First Reconciliation, First Communion, and Confirmation. This includes sessions, materials, rehearsals, and celebrations of these rites of initiation into the Catholic Church.
- St. Agnes provides various opportunities for your family to serve the ill, the poor, the rejected, and the suffering, both in and outside our parish family.
- In summary, St. Agnes Parish dedicates itself to you, the community of believers, so that all may experience conversion and growth in the Catholic faith.

#### PARENTS/GUARDIANS PROMISE TO...

- Actively participate in Sunday Mass and Holy Days of Obligation on a regular basis.
- Attend the whole-family assemblies and whole-community events in the spirit of cooperation to share in the prayer and learning experience. We promise to attend any additionally required meetings, rehearsals, and retreats necessary to our children’s faith formation and sacrament preparation. This includes keeping in communication with the Faith Formation office regarding tardiness, absences, illness and special circumstances.
- Set aside time to complete the homework themes as a family. For K-5<sup>th</sup> grades, at least once a week. For Youth Group, when assigned periodically.
- Seek ways to live and share our Catholic faith every day.
- Regardless of sacraments received or yet to be received (Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation) we promise to continue our family’s faith formation because we understand that faith formation is a lifelong process of ongoing conversion at every age.

This handbook defines our policy of mutual respect and cooperation. After reviewing the handbook, if you need assistance please call or come by the Faith Formation office and we will do whatever we can to support your family in the formation of the faith and celebration of the sacraments of the Church.

Peace,  
Ivy

Ivy O’Malley, Director  
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## **St. Agnes Parish Mission Statement**

St. Agnes is a Spirit-filled community that:

- Actively celebrates vibrant liturgies;
- Welcomes and nourishes people of all ages and cultures in the Catholic Faith;
- Connects with other faith groups and society to build a better community;
- Shares hope, bread and the Good News with all.

## **Faith Formation Mission Statement**

The Faith Formation Ministry strives to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit within the context of Diocesan standards to be a resource to all families for their catechetical and sacrament preparation needs.

## **Faith Formation Options**

Faith formation is a life-long experience. All students—regardless of sacraments already received or yet to receive—are encouraged to attend faith formation.

Grades K-5, Family Faith Formation is a whole-family faith formation program that meets September-May with these parts:

- 1) Monthly assemblies designed for the entire family which includes prayer and grade-level classes for both students and parents. Childcare for children under 6 is usually available. Kindergarten classes are optional and do not count toward the first year of sacrament preparation requirements.
- 2) Weekly studies taught by parents in the convenience of their own home and family schedule with built-in accountability and reward system. Additional workbook instruction sessions are available.
- 3) Families also attend whole-community events designed and planned to catechize the family such as special liturgies, celebrations, and other Catholic traditions of various cultures and spirituality throughout the year as announced in the bulletin.

Grades 6-8, The Edge (Middle School Youth Group) meets on Thursdays 6:30-8:15pm in the Youth Room. Additional events are publicized in the weekly bulletin. Sacrament preparation students must attend at least 15 youth nights per year.

Grades 9-12, LifeTeen (High School Youth Group) meets on Sundays 6-8pm in the Youth Room (immediately following 5pm Mass in the main church.) Additional events are publicized in the weekly bulletin. Sacrament preparation students must attend at least 15 youth nights per year.

Catholic School and Home School Students who wish to receive their sacraments at St. Agnes Church, are required to attend sacrament preparation sessions only. (Their faith formation obligation is met through their school/home religion class.)

Non-Baptized school-aged children join the whole-family RCIA-Adapted for Children program for the first 2 years of faith formation. Parents should meet with the director before the registration deadline

Special Needs Students and their parents should meet with the director before the registration deadline to adapt faith formation or sacrament preparation accordingly.

## **Admission and Registration**

The St. Agnes Faith Formation ministry admits students in grade K-12 of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to all registered parishioners of St. Agnes Church. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, color,

national and ethnic origin in administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, tuition assistance, and other parish-administered programs. Registration for the next catechetical year for grades K-5 is open June 1-August 21 and for grades 6-12 is always open. Forms and calendars are available on the parish website; in the church narthex after all Masses; and in the Faith Formation office, M-F, 9-4pm. Sessions begin in August. Please include payment and a copy of your student's Baptism certificate if not already on file (unless baptized at St. Agnes.)

### **Attendance at Sunday Mass**

Sunday Mass (or Saturday evening Vigil) is a Holy Day of Obligation for all practicing Catholics. We know that not only does the future of the church rest with our children, but they are an important part of the church now. Active participation means that, in gesture, word, song and service, all the members of the community take part in an act of worship. It also includes the active experience of silence, stillness and listening (for instance, when listening to the readings or the homily, or following the prayers of the celebrant, and the chants and music of the liturgy.) These are experiences of silence and stillness, but they are in their own way profoundly active. In a culture which neither favors nor fosters meditative quiet, the art of interior listening is learned only with difficulty. Here we see how the liturgy, though it must always be properly enculturated, must also be counter-cultural.

### **Children's Offertory Envelopes**

It is important for students to participate in Sunday Mass as well as to experience the joy of giving and good stewardship from an early age. For this reason, we provide all enrolled students with their own special envelopes at the beginning of each catechetical year. First and last name must be neatly printed on the NAME line and finish the sentence "gave my TIME, TALENT, or TREASURE this week because this is how I show my love for God" by drawing a picture or writing a note about what they did and put it inside the envelope; a monetary donation is optional for children and youth. Your student's Mass attendance is tracked by envelopes received.

### **Prayers**

By praying with your child daily, you help deepen their relationship with our Lord, Jesus Christ. This is both a parental responsibility and privilege. Traditional Catholic prayers are printed in the back of the K-5 students' workbooks. A list of prayers that K-5 students should memorize is in the Family Guide.

### **Calendar**

At the beginning of the catechetical year a calendar is provided to families listing the dates for K-5<sup>th</sup> grade Family Faith Formation, 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade Youth Groups, sacrament preparation and other related events. Cancellations of sessions will be made for significant reasons such as dangerous weather conditions. The manner in which families and volunteers will be informed of the cancellation of sessions is via recorded phone message and/or email. We will follow the Collier County school board decisions in these situations.

### **Arrival and Dismissal**

Thank you in advance for arriving early/on time to sessions and for parking only in clearly designated parking spaces. Restrooms and drinking fountains are near the North entrance of the Parish Center. Please accompany your child to the restroom and drinking fountain before opening prayer. Sign-in for K-5 events is at the welcome desk and for 6-12 events at the youth room.

In K-5 Family Faith Formation, all family members are invited to attend sessions. Parents and students should plan accordingly to attend the full session. Younger family members can either go to the play room or remain with their parent/guardian in their session. Older students (6<sup>th</sup> graders and up) who are

not enrolled in a class that meets at this time are encouraged to volunteer in one of the classrooms or remain with their parent/guardian in their session. Loitering in hallways or outside is not safe and is never permitted. The parent session is held at the same time as the student sessions. Please do not leave the premises prior to dismissal without the director's consent. Once parents are dismissed from their session they are to sign-out their children from their classroom teacher by initialing the attendance sheet. Only then can the student leave the classroom in the care of the parent/guardian or authorized substitute. The substitute must be someone designated on the "Parent/Guardian Consent to Release Minor to Third Party" form. If someone other than the parent/guardian or substitute is to pick up the child, this change must be given in writing to the director prior to the session in question. Early dismissals are highly discouraged from the classrooms out of respect for the teachers who have prepared the lesson for the full class period and to minimize interruptions. If the student must be dismissed early, the request should be given in writing by the parent/guardian to the director prior to the session. Parent/guardian should instruct their child that in an unforeseen event that the child is not picked up, the child should report this to the director and remain with the director until the parent/guardian arrives.

In 6-12 Youth Group: Student drop-off and pick-up is at the covered entrance doors (north side) with cars making a u-turn to exit (as not to endanger basketball players in the south parking lot.) Parking is permitted on the north side of the field just beyond the drop-off area. It is the student's responsibility to check themselves in at the Youth Room as soon as they arrive for attendance purposes. It is expected that they remain with the group until dismissal by the youth minister or core team member and participate in the activities to the best of their ability; they may not leave the premises at any time for any reason other than a medical emergency or release to the parent/guardian.

### **Homework**

Homework is provided to help your family combine home life and faith life, as well as engaging the parental privilege of being the primary educators of their children in the faith as promised at each child's Baptism. In K-5 Family Faith Formation, children complete one chapter per week at home with their parents/guardians as listed on the calendar. In 6-12 Youth Group, the homework will be periodically provided via email or handout and usually consists of a family discussion or simple project.

### **Attendance and Student Success**

For K-5 Family Faith Formation, Year 2 First Communion, and Year 2 Confirmation, a complete year consists of missing no more than one class, completing all homework listed on the calendars, and completing any makeup work. Late arrivals of 45 minutes or more will be counted as an absence. Makeup work must be completed and returned to the Faith Formation office within seven days.

For grades 6-12, a complete year of faith formation consists of attendance at 15 Youth Group sessions. Late arrivals of 45 minutes or more will be counted as an absence.

If absences continue to occur, we encourage you to make an appointment with the Faith Formation director to work out a plan for a successful year of learning. Excessive absences, incomplete homework, or lack of Mass attendance may delay reception of Reconciliation & First Communion at the discretion of the director. Stay in contact with the office regarding your situations that affect your participation so we can help in whatever way we can.

## **Behavior and Safety**

The following paragraphs define the expected behavior from all family members and guests at all parish events. No gum, candy, food, or drinks are allowed in the church, chapel, or classrooms. As a courtesy to those around you and the sacredness of the event, please silence and refrain from using your cell phones and any electronic devices until dismissal. Please note that profanity, shouting, public displays of affection, smoking, alcohol, knives, guns, drugs, and pornography are not allowed.

It is critical to take good care of church property. Any damage to church property must be repaired or replaced at the expense of the offender. Parent cooperation to teach respect for property, materials, furnishings, equipment and the building itself is vital. This applies to inside all church buildings and offices as well as the outside campus. There are specific areas of the church campus that are sacred places of prayer and meditation that deserve the utmost reverence, such as the Columbarium and Memorial Garden, Statues, Stations of the Cross and Mary Grotto, and all water features. Please refrain from horseplay and climbing especially in these areas so as to allow veneration at all times. These areas provide parents/guardians with teachable moments to their children about holiness and respect for God. Children must be supervised at all times, including using the restrooms and drinking fountain.

## **Classroom Discipline**

Respect and cooperation is expected from everyone. Catechists have the right to keep a student after the session for additional instruction in the case of misbehavior or lateness up to 15 minutes. Repeated misbehavior justifies removing the student from the class if:

- it is believed that the student would benefit significantly in a smaller group or 1-on-1 model;
- the student's behavior is inhibiting the learning of others;
- temporary removal for persistent disruptive or disrespectful behavior.

For misbehavior in grades 6-12 youth group, the parent/guardian may be called immediately to pick up their student or arrangements may be made at their expense to send the youth home.

## **Dress Code**

Members and guests of all ages are asked to observe modest dress and its effect upon the sacred environment. Good taste is knowing where and when to wear the appropriate clothing and accessories. Since the parents provide the funds, guidance, and upkeep of the children's clothing worn at church, it is the responsibility of the parents to see that grooming reflects the modesty and good taste expected at all church functions. Safe footwear shall be worn at all times; no rubber flip-flops or bedroom slippers. No bare skin should be exposed at the waist, abdomen, back, cleavage or shoulders. Shoulder straps must be at least two inches in width. Halter tops, strapless tops, muscle shirts are not appropriate. The length of skirts/dresses and shorts should be to the knees. Costumes, sleepwear, hair color or style, or other clothing/adornment that creates a distraction from the sacredness of the event is not permitted. Shorts and pants must be fitted or cinched so as to not slip or reveal undergarments. Intentionally altered clothing or unbuttoned and ill-fitted garments are not acceptable. Ill-fitted garments include, but are not limited to, garments that are too small so as to reflect immodesty or too large so as to appear to be falling off the body. Transparent, mesh or see-through clothing may not be worn without other appropriate clothing underneath. Clothing cannot be offensive, suggestive, indecent or associated with gangs; as identified by the Florida Gang Intent Act of 1990; nor wear items which encourage the use of drugs, tobacco, alcohol, violence, weapons, or support discrimination on the basis of color, disability, national origin, marital status, race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. Hats or other head coverings shall not be worn in the church buildings, except for those that are worn for religious purposes. Body piercing in any visible body part other than the ears should not be displayed if it presents a health/safety issue, reflects poor taste, or creates a distraction from the sacredness of the event.

## **Communication**

Communication to parents/guardians is in writing. Session reminders and absentee communications may be e-mailed or phoned as a courtesy. Please inform the office if your contact information changes.

## **Records**

Parents/guardians have the right to inspect their child's records; no one else—except appropriate parish authorities—have access unless written parent/guardian permission or a court order is presented. Student records are kept for seven years.

## **Emergency Procedures**

We make every effort to insure the safety and well-being of everyone at all parish and diocesan events. Since parents/guardians attend faith formation events with their children, in the case of a child's injury or illness the parent is immediately called out of the parent classroom by the teacher or director. Otherwise, the contact information in the child's registration folder will be used for notification by the director. Fire drills will be reviewed with the Catechists and aides at the beginning of the year along with the students and parents on the first day of class.

## **Medical Conditions and Parent Authorization Forms**

Please be sure to notify the teacher and/or director if your child has a special medical condition which could flare up in the classroom or which could affect the teaching/learning environment (e.g., allergies, asthmas, auditory or visual impairment, possibility of seizures, learning disability, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, etc.) Only the pastor, director, and director's assistant have access to student files including medical disclosure.

In our effort to insure the safety and well-being of everyone at all parish events, we ask that families refrain from bringing food/snacks to sessions without permission because some children may have medical restrictions or allergies to certain ingredients. No medication of any kind will be given, or taken by, the student during the sessions unless the parent/guardian is the authorized administrator or the parent/guardian provides it in a labeled humidity-proof container with the exact instructions as prescribed and with the youth's full name, to be kept with a designated adult at all times. The student is responsible for notifying the designated adult of the correct time and for taking the medication in the presence of the designated adult.

All student files must contain a "Medical Authorization for Minor" form and an "Authorization for Release and use of Student Image in photo, videotape, or other media" form which must be reviewed every year and bear the original signature of the parent/guardian. Parents are asked to notify the faith formation office when contact information changes. Any changes to the record should be made in writing by the parent/guardian on a new form. Optionally, a "Parent Consent to Release Minor to Third Party" should be submitted when the parent/guardian needs to grant permission for another adult to pick-up their child. This form must be given to the director before the student is released from class to the designated third party. In addition, for those in Youth Group, a Code of Conduct and Trip and Event form signed by the parent or guardian must be on file.

## **Custodial Right of Parents/Guardians**

The director of Faith Formation should be informed by the custodial parent/guardian of the rights of the noncustodial parent/guardian as these pertain to the student's participation in the program. Legal documentation should be provided and will be kept securely in the student's file.

## **Visitors**

No unauthorized persons are allowed in the parish center when catechetical sessions are taking place. The parent/guardian and their guests should remain in the parent session until dismissal. All other visitors should go directly to the faith formation office or welcome desk for assistance.

## **Child Abuse/Safe Environment**

St. Agnes Parish is in compliance with the Diocesan Safe Environment Policy:

As Christian adults, we have a moral and legal responsibility and are entrusted by God with the spiritual, emotional and physical well-being of minors and vulnerable adults. As they participate in activities within or sponsored by our diocese, it is our commitment to provide an environment which is safe and nurturing. Therefore, the mission of the Safe Environment Program is:

- To provide required education for all employees (clergy, religious and laity), those volunteers and others regularly involved with minors, and parents, as to the issue of abuse of children including the detection, prevention and reporting of child abuse.
- To provide required training programs for children and young people in our Catholic schools and religious education programs. This includes age appropriate materials pertaining to personal safety and information about improper touching and relationships. Children are not expected to be fully knowledgeable about child abuse or of the laws governing care of children but they need to know when they should seek assistance from a trusted adult.
- To thoroughly screen and evaluate the background of all diocesan employees – clergy, religious and laity – and those volunteers who work with children and young people.
- To hold those who minister in the name of the Church of Venice – all diocesan employees (clergy, religious and laity) and those volunteers who work with children and young people – to Christ-centered and professional codes of conduct.

## **Safe Adults**

All parish staff and clergy in the Diocese of Venice are Safe Environment trained, fingerprinted, and background checked. Only volunteers who have a green photo ID badge are Safe Environment trained, fingerprinted, and background checked. All others that are not known to your child should be considered a stranger, especially since the facility—including the church—is a public place. Children should be supervised at all times at parish events for their safety and the consideration of others.

## **Volunteers/Catechist Training**

Our catechists are ministry volunteers, giving generously of their time and talent. All have been through Diocesan Safe Environment training. They are fingerprinted and background checked every 5 years. Most of our volunteers continue in personal faith enrichment or have become/in the process of becoming Certified Catechists for the Diocese. We welcome others who hear God's call to join this important ministry. Please see the director for more information. The Catechist Appendix contains additional information that catechists, teachers, and assistants need to know in addition to the Family Handbook before volunteering.

## **First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion Appendix**

Policies on preparation for the Sacraments of Reconciliation (Penance, Confession) and First Holy Communion (Eucharist) are in a separate appendix to the Family Faith Formation Handbook. Copies can be picked up from the Faith Formation office or printed from the website.

## **Confirmation Appendix**

Policies on preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation are an appendix to the Family Faith Formation Handbook. Copies can be picked up in from the Faith Formation office or printed from the website.