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## Parent Handbook 2026-27

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Guided by the principles found in the documents of the Church concerning the ministry of catechesis, the catechetical program of Our Lady of the Lake will include the following elements:

## Message

The story of scripture and the teachings of the Church will be communicated within the context of the faith story of each student and the signs of the times.

## Community

Efforts will be made to form Christian community among our students through interaction and faith sharing.

## Worship

The participants will experience many forms of Catholic prayer and worship to help them become prayerful people.

## Service

Participants will be called to service and justice, which is inherent in the message of Jesus and the teachings of the Church.

## Mission Statement

The Religious Education Program at Our Lady of the Lake Parish provides and promotes life-long opportunities for learning, community, worship and service which support the individual in seeking, encountering, and embracing Gospel values.

## Vision Statement

The Religious Education Program of Our Lady of the Lake Parish builds an inclusive stable environment fostering the Tradition and Values of the Roman Catholic Church through open and transparent communication.

## PROGRAM

### Program Goals

Our Lady of the Lake strives to be a Christian community faithful to the Gospel and the Catholic tradition. The parish is, in reality, a diverse, all united in the endless struggle and search to know, love and serve God, self and one another. The unique diversity of the parish offers at once a challenge and a rich resource for learning. The goals of OLOL's catechetical program are:

- Provide a program of formal religious instruction for people of all ages
- Support parents in their role as primary educators of their children
- Offer sacramental preparation to all who seek it
- Help students discover the richness and challenges of Scripture, teachings, and traditions of the Catholic Church

- Build a strong Catholic identity among the youth of the parish
- Deepen the prayer life of our members
- Motivate youth to live lives rooted in charity and justice based on the moral teachings of the Church
- Expose students to the liturgical and sacramental richness which is part of the Catholic Tradition
- Enable students to become responsible, self respecting, loving, and praying individuals
- Develop programs which meet diverse spiritual needs available to adults of the parish

## Role of the Parents

It is the role of the parish to assist parents in nurturing the faith of their children. Parents who enroll their children in the parish catechetical program will be assisted and enabled in their role as the primary educators of their children. Parents are encouraged to approach the staff with ideas to meet specific needs in raising healthy and holy Catholic children and youth.

At the same time, it is essential that parents cooperate with the parish and work with those who are designated leaders of the parish program. A parent who would like their child to attend the program:

- Must be registered as a member of a Catholic parish
- Is responsible for providing OLOL with information regarding the child's Baptism and other sacraments, if applicable.
- Attends Mass weekly with the child.
- Takes responsibility as primary educator.
- Collaborates with the catechists in the program by sharing faith with the child at home.
- Ensure the child does any required follow-up to the lessons taught in class.
- Teaches the child the traditional prayers of the Church at home.
- Maintains an open line of communication with the child's catechist.
- Ensure punctuality to and from Religious Ed classes.
- Makes sure the child enters the building where classes are held and goes to the classroom.
- Ensures their child is dressed appropriately, ready to participate.

- Attends parent meetings when requested.
- Is supportive of the catechist, especially in the area of discipline.
- Reads this handbook, completes and turns in the forms necessary for registration.
- Informs the religious education leader of the rights of the non-custodial parent in the case of divorce.
- Informs the religious education leader of any pertinent medical and emergency information.

## CODE OF BEHAVIOR

To share in the ministry of Christ is a great privilege as well as a tremendous responsibility. The privilege is the joy of sharing in the mission of Jesus Himself. The responsibility is acting in a way that conforms to the attitude and actions of Christ. As is evident in the Gospels, Jesus had a deep, abiding respect for each human being and never did anything that harmed or misled people in their personal or spiritual life.

The public needs to know that the Church is committed to protecting the children/youth who are entrusted to its care and to ensuring that those offering services are in right relationship with the children/youth receiving services.

There is a challenge in the Scriptures to “live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:1-3).

In this spirit, Personnel

- ❖ are expected to represent the Church in a faithful, authentic and loving way, supporting the teachings, disciplines and tradition of the Catholic Church;
- ❖ will exhibit the highest Catholic ethical standards and personal integrity in their day-to-day work and personal lives;
- ❖ will conduct themselves in a professional manner in both church and work environments, avoiding any flagrant or public misconduct;
- ❖ will hold one another accountable to conduct and standards appropriate to their respective roles;
- ❖ will foster the dignity of each person and be committed to the best interests of others;
- ❖ will respect the integrity of all individuals and protect the confidentiality of all information to which they have access;
- ❖ will not take advantage of any relationship with a child/youth for their own benefit;

- ❖ will not physically, sexually or emotionally abuse anyone;
- ❖ will not neglect a child who is in their care.

## Non-Custodial Parental Rights

**Catechists will be advised by the Religious Education leader of the non-custodial parental rights for each child from a divorced family. Catechists must recognize that occasionally children will miss religious education because of custody issues. Compassionate understanding is needed even when these situations cause absences. Catechists are expected to work with the custodial parent to ensure class work is kept current.**

## Admission Policy

Our Lady of the Lake's religious education program does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, national origin, physical or mental challenges.

Any family may enroll their children in the catechetical program. In order for their children to be admitted, the family must complete the appropriate registration and student information forms and indicate they have read and accept the policies in this handbook. These forms are available from the religious education office.

Parents are also required to fill out a health form on each of the children they seek to enroll in the program. Students are typically enrolled in the grade in which they are currently attending in school, unless other arrangements are made with the religious education leader. An exception to this may be necessary to meet specific requirements for sacramental preparation.

## Book and Materials Fees

Register during April, May or June - \$50.00 per student

Register during the months of July and August - \$60.00 per student

Register in the month of September or later - \$65.00 per student

## **Parents and Catechists**

Catechists who teach the classes in the religious education program are volunteers. The parish has made every effort to screen them and insure they are capable of handling the responsibility involved in this ministry. All catechists and support staff have received a PA State Child Abuse Clearance and a PA State Police Criminal Record Check or FBI Clearance. They have also attended a two-hour training session on child abuse and have signed the Diocesan Child Protection Policy. The parish also offers training courses, which increase the skills needed for the catechists to be successful. The religious education leader supervises the catechists in order to help them fulfill their responsibility. As parents you are asked to recognize the challenges involved in being a volunteer catechist and to support them in any way possible. If any problems arise, however, please first contact the catechist to discuss the situation. If that does not lead to a satisfactory resolution, please contact the religious education leader. All parishioners have the right to final recourse from the pastor of the parish.

### *CLASSES*

#### **Attendance**

Students who are enrolled in the parish catechetical program are expected to be in attendance for each scheduled class session. It is the responsibility of the parent(s) to insure their presence. Consideration is taken for those students who are not able to attend each week due to visitation with a non-custodial parent. If this situation applies to your child, you are asked to contact the religious education leader so accommodations can be made.

#### **Missed Classes**

Each class session builds on the material covered in preceding classes. Religious Education provides an alternative to completing homework for missed classes. By choosing from the events list provided at registration and available in the Religious Education Office, your child can 'make up' missed classroom time.

## Classroom Visits

Parents are permitted and encouraged to visit their children's classroom at any time. They are required to sign-in at the Religious Education Office before entering the classroom, with required clearances.

## Homework

Catechists are encouraged to send small assignments home for the students to do with their family. Parents are encouraged to ask their children about these assignments.

## Arrival and Dismissal

Classes are held in the Social Hall. Supervision will be provided for students during the stated class times. Children are to be picked up only by their parents or designee. Parents are to notify the religious education leader if someone other than the parent or designee is to pick up their children.

## Baptism certificates

Families with children who were not baptized at Our Lady of the Lake are requested to bring a copy of the Baptismal Certificate, along with any other sacramental records, when they initially enroll their child in the program. Children who have not been baptized will be accepted in the program provided the family intends to have them baptized.

## Confidential/Release Form and Emergency Information

All students must have a completed confidential/release form sheet on file. This must be updated annually by a parent or legal guardian.

## Curriculum

Weekly	
Children's Liturgy of the Word	Seeds, Pflaum Publishing
Grades K-5	Grades K-5 – Discover, St. Mary's Press
Grades 6-8	Edge, Life Teen
Grades 9-10	Purpose, Life Teen
Grade 11 &12	<i>Small Group and Mentoring</i>
OCIA	<i>Symbolon, Formed and Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>

## Meetings

### Weekly

Children's Liturgy of the Word: During 10:30 am Liturgy

Grades K-5: Wednesdays 4-5:30pm\*

Grades 6-8 Wednesdays 7-8:30pm\*

Grade 9 refer to religious education calendar for dates & times

Grades 10,11&12 refer to Faith Formation Director for dates & times

### OCIA (Order of Christian Initiation of Adults)

These classes are to prepare those who choose to receive any or all of the sacraments of Initiation, Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation.

## Retreats

The retreat experience is an important component of Religious Education. Retreats offer time to deeper explore a theme of our faith and build community among the students. Students in grades 2-11 are required to participate in grade level retreats each year, when offered.

## Celebration of Liturgy and Liturgical Year

In an attempt to help children and youth understand more deeply the power and mystery of the sacred liturgy, they will be given the opportunity to celebrate the seasons of the liturgical year. Youth will also be given opportunities to plan and celebrate Para liturgies (prayer service) and Eucharistic liturgies (Mass).

### *SACRAMENT PREPARATION*

Our Lady of the Lake follows the diocesan policies for sacrament preparation.

## Baptism

Call OLOL Religious Education Office for information, 734-3113 x102.

## First Reconciliation

Conducted during regular class times.

Religious Education Leader prepared materials and curriculum.

Parents must attend any retreats or parent meetings and participate in home study with their child.

This applies even if your child is home schooled.

Celebration of First Reconciliation - typically celebrated during the Lenten season.

## First Eucharist

Conducted during regular class times.

Religious Education Leader prepared materials and curriculum.

Parents must attend any retreats and or parent meetings, and participate in home study with their child.

This applies even if your child is home schooled.

Celebration of First Eucharist - typically celebrated in the Easter Season.

## Confirmation

Youth begin a three-year preparation process in the fall of their 7<sup>th</sup> grade year. **Students are required to fully participate in grades 7, 8 & 9 by way of regular attendance at scheduled classes and weekend Mass to be considered to receive the Sacrament.**

Celebration of Confirmation - Confirmation is usually celebrated during the Easter Season on a date set by the Bishop. The sacrament of Confirmation is celebrated with surrounding parishes.

### *CATHOLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS*

Parents of students in Catholic schools who wish to receive a sacrament at OLOL need to meet with the religious education leader.

## DISCIPLINE

Everyone involved in the program is challenged by the words and example of Jesus to respect each person's right to be treated not only with dignity and respect but also with love. In order to provide for a safe and well ordered program, in which students and catechists can learn to follow Jesus' call to love, some rules for behavior are necessary. Students are expected, by their behavior, to make classes safe

and positive experiences for themselves and their classmates. The program exists for student growth and in turn students are expected to carry out the following responsibilities...

- Show respect to catechists, other students and program personnel
- Treat the property, good name and physical safety of others with respect
- Be present only in the areas of the building for which they have permission at a specific time
- Act in a safe manner in and around the building
- Use voice and display actions in a manner appropriate for a classroom
- Be respectful of the study time of others

Good discipline is self-discipline and is always aimed toward growth. We recognize children may make mistakes and the role as a catechist at times will be one of guiding and correcting those mistakes in a positive manner. These corrections will always be done with the best interest of the child in mind. At no time will Our Lady of the Lake accept the demeaning or intimidation of children in the name of discipline.

## Disciplinary process

At the time of the first correction, the student will be warned.

If student behavior continues to be disruptive, dismiss the child to the religious education leader.

The religious education leader will speak to appropriate parties and determine whether to contact the parents.

Continual disciplinary issues will result in a conference with the Pastor, religious education leader, Catechist and family.

Anything not covered in the rules, falls under the jurisdiction of what is called the **“The know right and do right rule”**. It is understood the term **“right”** is extended to mean what is best for the student, Religious Education program and the Parish.

## Child Protection Policy

OLOL's pastor and religious education leader and catechists are considered mandated reporters, and are required by the PA Revised Code and Diocesan Policy on Child Protection to report suspected or actual child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. All other staff members of OLOL, both paid and volunteer, are bound by Christian conscience to report suspected or actual child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. All parish staff and volunteers who work with children are required to have clearances from the State Police (Criminal Record Check-PA Act 34) and the Department of Public Welfare (Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance-PA Act 151). All staff, paid and volunteer, participates in an in-service training on child protection, identification of child abuse, and reporting procedures.

## Weapons Policy

In order to ensure a safe and Christian environment, it is forbidden for anyone to possess a weapon or any object/material/substance that could be used as a weapon or confused with a real weapon by any reasonable person in the buildings, or within the geographic boundaries of Our Lady of the Lake, or in any location used by the parish to conduct any catechetical activity, or in any conveyance providing transportation to or from any activity related to the religious education program.

Use of, or possession of illegal drugs, alcohol or tobacco is strictly prohibited. Such items will be seized and parents notified immediately. The child will be immediately removed from the environment. In the event a 'controlled substance' has been seized, law enforcement will be notified immediately.

Any student who violates this policy will be subject to immediate police intervention as well as any parish disciplinary action over and above any civil/criminal action brought by injured parties.

The student will be expelled from the religious education program.

## Harassment

Respect for the dignity and worth of each individual is a basic precept of Catholic doctrine and therefore of OLOL parish. Each person is entitled to work in an environment free from discriminatory practices such as any form of harassment based on race, sex, creed, color, age, or disability including sexual harassment. Parish leadership wishes to be vigilant regarding harassment whether between or among catechists and/or parish leaders, among students or between catechist/parish leaders and students. Such behavior will not be tolerated and if repeated harassment occurs, the disciplinary policy will be invoked.

The term 'harassment' refers to behavior which is not welcome, is personally offensive or fails to treat others with dignity and respect. It includes treating someone unfavorably because of his/her race, sex, creed, color, age, or disability. Harassment may take the form of discrimination, unwelcome or critical comments or action. Harassment on the basis of sex may include unwelcome sexual advances, requests, or demands for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct, including, but not limited to:

- Verbal conduct such as epithets, derogatory jokes or comments, slurs or unwanted sexual advances, intimidation, or comments
- Visual contact such as derogatory and/or sexually oriented posters, photography, cartoons, drawings, or gestures
- Physical contacts such as assault, unwanted touching, blocking normal movements, or interfering with work, studies or play because of sex
- Retaliations for having reported or threatened to report such harassment
- Parents who become aware of incidents of sexual harassment should report them immediately to the pastor or to the religious education leader.

- THIS IS A ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY

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- *WEATHER AND OTHER EMERGENCY*

- *SITUATIONS*

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- **Cancellation of Class**

- Classes may be cancelled from time to time due to inclement weather. You will be notified **ONLY** via our Parish app. To access the app;

- Text **APP** to **88202** to download our Parish app
- 1) Download myParish app
- 2) Select our Parish after opening
- 3) Turn on Notifications

- **Safety Procedures for Fires and Other Emergencies**

- There are safety procedures in each room for fire and tornado emergencies. Catechists will instruct the students in these procedures. In case of fire or tornado, attendance will be taken after an emergency evacuation. No child will be dismissed without their parent or guardian.
- Parents must check with the catechist before leaving with their child to avoid unnecessary search and rescue operations.

- *SICKNESS AND INJURY*

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- **Sickness**

- Should a student become ill while in class, parents will be contacted according to the information provided on the student medical form. If the parent is unavailable, attempts will be made to reach the backup person listed. The religious education leader will make every effort to keep the child comfortable until he/she is picked up. Medications will **NOT** be administered to a student.

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- **Injury**

- Catechists are asked to report any injury to the religious education leader immediately. If any injury occurs, first aid will be administered in strict accordance with the *Blood-borne Pathogens* regulations of the Diocese of Erie. Parents will be contacted. If the injury requires immediate medical attention, the religious education leader will call the appropriate emergency services, followed by a call to the parents. A first aid kit is available on each floor of the social hall.

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- *FIELD TRIPS*

If a field trip is planned, parents will be notified at least two weeks prior to the event. All activities or field trips will have a catechetical purpose. For each scheduled 'off campus' field trip, a permission slip signed by the parent and a confidential release form will be required for each student participating. If cars are used, drivers must be over 25 years of age. A copy of the driver's license must be obtained and certified to be current along with proof of current insurance. Diocesan guidelines concerning student/chaperone ratios will be followed.

*PICKING UP CHILDREN*

*It is standard procedure that at the end of class, parents with children in grades K-5, are to come in and wait in the social hall for your child's class to conclude. It is of utmost importance for Religious Education personnel and/or catechists to see who the students leave with.*

*PARKING LOT*

Park in the large parking lot between the church and the social hall when picking up your children. This is especially important for those children who attend the Wednesday afternoon session. It is imperative that we keep the circle drive area clear of parked cars for the safety of our students.

## **Safe Environment Training**

- Our Religious Education/Formation program is mandated by the Bishops of the United States to provide Safe Environment training to all youth annually. Your child/children will receive this training sometime during this catechetical year. If you DO NOT want your child/children to participate, please contact the Religious Education office in writing. Your child/children will be withheld from the program when it is presented. Thank you.