

**CCD
STUDENT
HANDBOOK**

**20
24**



Mar Thoma Sleeha Cathedral

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Mission Statement

Bringing our children closer to Jesus is the primary aim of all our catechetical activity. Thus, students who attend the Cathedral catechism program and parents who send their children must aim at developing a Christ centered faith and spirituality. Catechists aid in this process through both lessons and witnessing the faith with their own lives. "Catechists catechize others by first catechizing themselves."

The intent of this handbook is to provide clear guidelines and responsibilities for the CCD program at our Cathedral parish. **Please note that the Cathedral CCD Program will follow the guidelines set in the "Echo – Catechetical Directory" from the Diocese. The Student Handbook below is intended for our Cathedral context.**

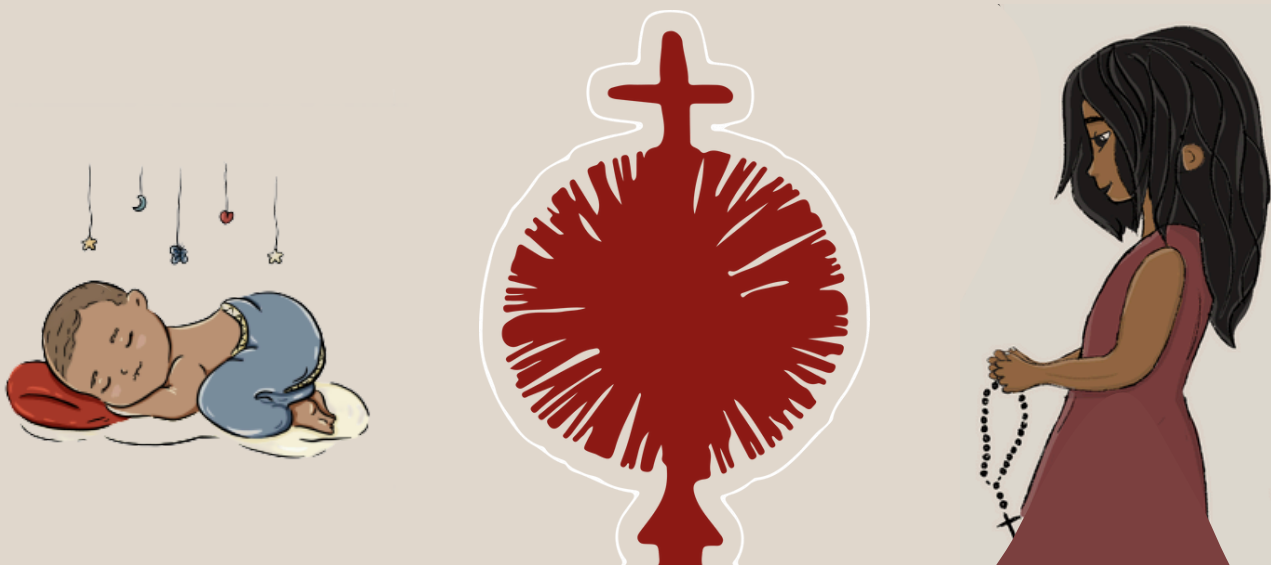


1. Faith Formation

Faith Formation classes are conducted from CGS Level 1 (Catechesis of the Good Shepherd: Bible Nursery & KG) through 12th grade. Classes commence along with the school year and continue every Sunday for a minimum of one hour preceded by or followed by the Holy Qurbana for children. In addition, special programs like Womb-Cat and Lap-Cat cater to kids who are too young to attend a class setting by actively using parent participation. Support resources for special needs children are also available during CCD hours.

Volunteers from the community are prayerfully selected by the Vicar to teach the children of various age groups. Catechists should follow the textbooks provided by the St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Eparchy (Diocese) of Chicago, while also using Holy Scripture, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and modern means of communication available to engage our children in learning the faith with great interest and enthusiasm. Based on the age group and considering span of attention for various age groups, Catechists use simple and fun ways of learning for lower grades and more interactive and visual means for higher grades.

Please refer to the [Syro Malabar Catechetical Centre \(smsmartcatechism.org\)](http://smsmartcatechism.org) for latest catechesis of the Syro-Malabar Church.



1.1 Admission

In order for a child to be registered for the Faith Formation program, a family must be registered and be active members of the parish. This requires the family to be committed to church attendance, parish stewardship, and support of the church. All registered members of Syro-Malabar Catholic Church can register their children in the Faith Formation program. New families must become registered members of the parish prior to enrolling their children into the Faith Formation program.



1.2 Registration

A new application should be submitted each academic year corresponding to the grade of the children and updated contact information should be provided. Our cathedral relies on online registration via ParishOnNet.

A student is not registered until the parents submit the completed registration form along with payment (as required by parish). **A discount will be applied for all early registrants (before an established deadline set by our Cathedral parish) and for families with more than 3 children.**



1.3 Transferring Students

New families moving into the Cathedral parish must have a letter stating the child's grade level in Sunday School from the Vicar, Pastor, or Mission Director of their previous parish/mission on their official letter-head, or a letter with their official title and contact information. The letter or a transfer certificate must indicate the last grade completed for each child. This document is then filed in the CCD Office.

1.4 Re-entering the Program

The Faith Formation program is designed for continuous attendance from CGS Level 1 through 12th grade. Any student who has not successfully participated in Sunday School at any Syro-Malabar parishes or missions, provided they have not been enrolled in a Catholic School, will be required to make up the content missed prior to joining the class. It should be emphasized that joining above 3rd grade level, without continuous religious education participation, will require a substantial investment of time and effort on the part of the student and family. If this situation applies to a student, the Vicar and Principal should be contacted as early as possible to discuss and implement a study plan.

1.5 Attendance

The Faith Formation program for CGS Level 1 through 12th grade closely follows the academic school year and continues throughout the school year. There will be a minimum of 25 classes in one year. Each class will start and end with a prayer. Any student who arrives 10 minutes late will be marked as tardy, arriving half an hour late will be marked as ½ (half-attendance), and absences will be recorded in the attendance register.

For exceptions granted by the Vicar (such as special needs, multiple hour travel time, etc.), the opportunity for parents to homeschool their children can be given. After it is granted, support resources can be provided by the respective grade level catechists.



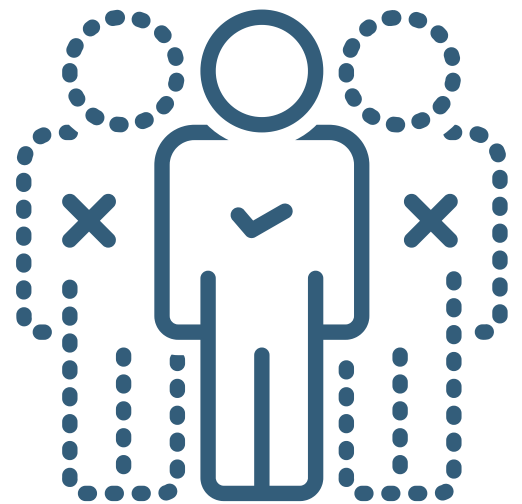
1.6 Absenteeism

Attendance in all classes and participation in all Faith Formation related activities are expected, unless parents provide timely notification for each excused absence. Because of the limited number of sessions, every session is important. While it is understandable that family events will mean an occasional missed session, these should be kept to a minimum. Three or more absences per year will be considered excessive. If a child is absent for more than two Sundays consecutively, the catechist must inquire with the parents about the child's well-being. If prolonged absence is unavoidable due to sickness or other family reasons, parents must submit their situation in writing to the Vicar and Principal and if reasonable, the parish will accommodate their needs.

Please note that for all grades at least 75% attendance is required as well as passing the final exam. If there are any concerns about the final exam or attendance, please contact the parish vicar.

The content of make-up lessons should be covered by the parent. It is the responsibility of the parents to make sure that the child completes make-up exams, should their child miss an exam day.

Frequent absenteeism should not be encouraged, and a parent-catechist conference will be called to discuss continuation in the program and any make-up work required. Sports and other cultural events and activities are not considered legitimate excuses for an absence or early dismissal. It is hoped that the parents show by their actions and their choices that faith (and faith formation) plays a central role in their lives.



2. Holy Qurbana

The Holy Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life” (CCC 1324). Illustrating this point is the primary objective of any Catholic faith formation program. In the same vein, our Syro-Malabar faith formation program aims to lead our children to love and enjoy the richness, meaning, and celebration of Syro-Malabar Holy Qurbana and spirituality in its fullness.

Every faith formation program class starts (7th-12th Grade) or ends (CGS Level 1 - 6th Grade) with a Holy Qurbana. **Every Sunday School student MUST participate in the Holy Qurbana every Sunday.** The Diocese heavily recommends **English** as the preferred language for the Holy Qurbana for children and youth. Syro-Malabar Church mandates the following 6 Holy Days of Obligation and the parents and children should make every effort to attend the Holy Qurbana those days:

1. Christmas (Dec. 25)
2. Epiphany (Jan .6)
3. Peter and Paul (June 29)
4. The Ascension of Our Lord (the sixth Thursday after Easter)
5. St. Thomas (July 3)
6. The Assumption of Bl. V. Mary (August 15)



2.1 Administration of Sacraments

Admission to faith formation programs in the parish requires children to submit their proof of baptism. The Syro-Malabar Church expects all children to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation (Confession), Solemn Holy Communion, and Chrismation (Confirmation) if not received before grade 4.

The parish faith formation program can include at their own discretion, any children from any grade (if they haven't received any of these sacraments in their joining of the faith formation program).

Administering the sacrament of Chrismation (Confirmation) at grade 8 is not a practice among the Syro-Malabar Rite. Diocesan expectation is that by Grade 4, all children should have received this Sacrament.



2.2 Sacrament of Penance

Jesus entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to the Church. The Sacrament of Penance helps us stay close to the truth that we cannot live without God, as our relationship with God is the most important relationship we have in this life. The Cathedral parish has set aside a certain day/time for children to go to confession at least monthly. This is Night Vigil (First Fridays) at our Cathedral parish. Parents and catechists should encourage children to go to confession on a regular basis and teach them the necessary prayers for confession.

2.3 Prayers & Devotions

Families are encouraged to pray together every day. Apart from Holy Qurbana, parents and children participate in adoration. Adoring our Lord in the Eucharist will help develop a personal relationship with Him. Children are required to learn certain prayers by heart, especially common family prayers such as the Angelus, Regina Cali, prayer to those in purgatory, Holy Rosary, Divine Mercy chaplet, Salve Regina (Hail Holy Queen), Memorare, Act of Contrition, etc. (check with your CCD catechist for prayer expectations in each grade).

3. Curriculum & Class Activities

The purpose of our curriculum and classroom teaching is multifold, and goes beyond textbook based instruction. A multitude of activities are emphasized and encouraged: learning and participating in different church activities, praying at home, participating in ward prayers, learning the different prayers, reading the Bible, learning about the lives of the saints, etc. Students from grades 10 through 12 are encouraged to attend discernment camps, youth retreats, community services activities. This includes attending missionary works, and volunteering at shelters or soup kitchens.



3.1 Materials for the Class

Each student must come to class prepared with a pen or pencil with an eraser. They may take the textbook home for studying, but must bring it back each Sunday for classroom use. A catechist may give reading or homework assignments where it is necessary to take the textbook home. If so, it is the student's responsibility to bring it back the next Sunday. Students are encouraged to use a school bag to store textbooks and other class related materials. Catechists may request students to bring the Holy Bible to Church as needed. The student should follow The New American Bible (Revised Edition) or the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).



3.2 Homework

Homework is a meaningful activity which supplements and reinforces work covered in the classroom. Students should be encouraged to reserve time each week at home for faith formation related work and review of the curriculum. Catechists may reward them for bringing homework completed and also credits offered towards their evaluation and final awards. Students are expected to complete all assigned work on time. Parental guidance and help are expected in reinforcing what is taught weekly in the classroom.

Holy Qurbana participation, daily prayer, living the Beatitudes, obeying the 10 Commandments, attending retreats, going to Confession frequently, and following Catholic social teachings are all considered homework. Parents are required to oversee the completion of all assigned work. It is expected that parents will take an active role in their child's religious education. Catechists should make every effort to inform parents about their children's activities and participation and grades achieved, in a positive way, to reap immediate or future benefits for the student.

3.3 Dress Code

Modesty is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and "Teaching modesty to children and adolescents means awakening in them respect for the human person" (CCC 2524). Students should dress comfortably according to the weather, but modesty in dress must always be maintained. Short shorts, bare midriffs, dresses that are strapless, tank tops, and t-shirts with inappropriate images or words are not permitted. Clothing that exposes undergarments or body parts in a way that is indecent or vulgar are not allowed. Since it is impossible to encompass every potential dress code violation, the Principal reserves the right to judge the appropriateness of any student's style of dress in accordance with the guidance of the parish priest.



3.4 Classroom Expectations & Conduct

The faith formation program encourages spiritual growth and Christian behavior is expected from students and catechists in all situations. In all dealings with students, deep respect and concern for one another should be the driving force. The day-to-day discipline of the class will be handled by the catechist. Disruptive behavior includes, but is not limited to: the use of cell phones or other electronic devices in the classroom, sustained or excessive show of disrespect to the catechist or other students, any behavior which repeatedly distracts the other students or the catechist. If disruption in the class is continuous or becomes serious, a conference is held with the parents, the catechist, Principal, and Vicar. If disruption is continuous, it may be required for the parent to sit in during CCD class. The vicar's decision is final.

3.5 Bullying: Creating a Safe Environment

In our Faith Formation program, we emphasize the importance of treating each other with kindness and respect. Bullying in any form—whether through verbal threats, physical attacks, name-calling, exclusion, rumors, or harassment—is unacceptable and contradicts our call to love one another as Christ loves us. Any behavior that undermines the dignity of God's children will not be tolerated. Instances of bullying will be addressed promptly, and appropriate consequences will be implemented to ensure the safety and well-being of all students. These consequences may include counseling, disciplinary actions, or other measures deemed necessary to correct the behavior and support a positive learning environment. Let us follow Christ's example by showing compassion and standing against any actions that harm others.



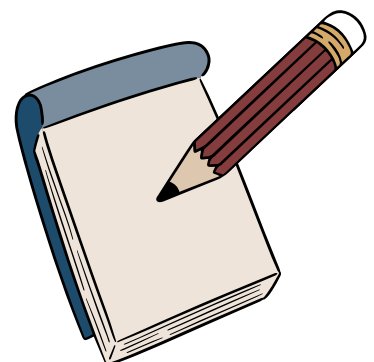
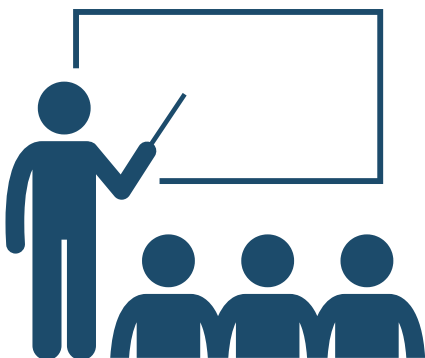
3.6 Personal Possessions

Electronic devices such as cell phones, tablets, games, etc. are not allowed during CCD classes or at Church during Holy Qurbana. If your child must have a cell phone, it must be turned off until after the classes or Holy Qurbana. In case of emergency, students may make phone calls outside of the classroom under the supervision of a catechist. Students should not bring money or valuable items to class, unless it is for a designated fundraiser or some other CCD program. The parish is not responsible for the loss of money or valuables.



3.7 Student Responsibilities

1. Students are to come directly to their assigned classroom on class days unless given directions to go elsewhere for a specific purpose. For the best utilization of instructional time, it is important that students be on time.
2. Each student is expected to have their textbook and a pen or pencil with eraser for each class period.
3. Every student is encouraged to have the New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE) Bible or the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NRSV). Children from 4th grade should participate in the Diocesan Bible Quiz, Dei Verbum.
4. Students must make up class work if they missed a class.
5. It is the responsibility of all students to maintain a clean and welcoming instructional setting, conducive to learning.



6. Students are responsible for the proper care of all books, supplies, furniture and equipment. Any damage to property or equipment will require payment for replacement or repair. If the student loses a textbook, a replacement book will be available for purchase.
7. Students must respect the space and all properties of the parish.
8. Students must not chew gum, eat candy, or consume other foods during class or inside the church.
9. Students must attend and participate in the Holy Qurbana on Sundays and on Holy Days of Obligation.
10. The church is the temple of God. The student must observe reverence of the sacred space and avoid excessive socialization and other unnecessary activities.
11. Students should bow down when facing the Tabernacle, and when entering and leaving the church.
12. Cell phones should be silenced and put away during the Holy Qurbana and CCD class.



4. Special Needs

Children with disabilities are an essential part of the Body of Christ and should feel welcomed in our catechetical program. When possible, they are placed along with their peers and are allowed to take part in all catechetical activities of the parish. Catechism for children with disabilities is adapted in content and method to their particular situations with sufficient support from their parents and volunteers if available. The Cathedral parish provides available resources to provide the child with an appropriate program that is sensitive to their special needs.

5. Parental Involvement



Parents are asked to take an active part in the catechesis of their children, so as to fulfill the promise they made at their child's baptism. Parents are requested, at a minimum, to participate in Holy Qurbana on Sundays and Holy Days; to discuss each week's Sunday School class material with their child and to go over the related questions and answers in the textbook; to ensure that they learn the prayers and engage their child in conversation about the Sunday School classes. Parents may also consider briefly discussing the readings and homily with their children each weekend. These conversations are where the faith truly grows, as parents are the first catechist. Inappropriate student conduct may be discussed with parents as well. Continued disruptions may require disciplinary actions, such as the parents sitting in for the CCD class.

5.1 Report of Progress

Progress reports will be distributed to the students twice a year: in midyear and at the end of the Sunday School year. Parents are expected to discuss the report with their child and to follow up, if necessary, with their catechist. These reports may be distributed online.

5.2 Parent Catechist Meetings

An open house (opening day) for parents of Sunday School students from each class will be held at the start of the school year. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss curriculum, importance of church attendance and participation, progress made so far, any suggestions or recommendations from parents, learning prayers by heart, safe environment training, dropping and picking up of children, responsibilities of parents etc. Parents are strongly encouraged to attend this session to be prepared for the upcoming year.

5.3 Field Trips

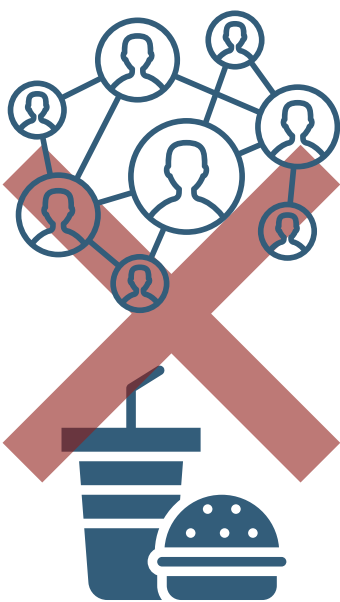
All field trips must be approved by the Vicar. Permission slips with pertinent information must be completed by parents and returned promptly.



6. Church Etiquette

As Catholics we believe that the Church is the House of God, to which He invites all His children, where they may give thanks, prayers and worship to God. Like any house to which one is invited, there is always some sort of basic etiquette, and God's house is no different.

- Students are expected to keep silent while in church. Once you enter the church space, it is not the time or place to socialize excessively with those around you.
- Students are expected to sit in their designated spots with their CCD grades during Qurbana. They should not sit in the balcony area, even if they come late.
- The discipline of fasting one-hour before receiving Holy Communion should be observed.
- No food and drink in the church. Exceptions would be drinks for small children, water for the priest or choir (if discreet), and water for those who are ill. Bringing a snack into church is not appropriate.
- Students should bless themselves with Holy Water from the fonts at the entrances, as they enter and leave the church.
- Students should not chew gum in church. It breaks the fast, it's distracting, and it is considered impolite in a formal setting.

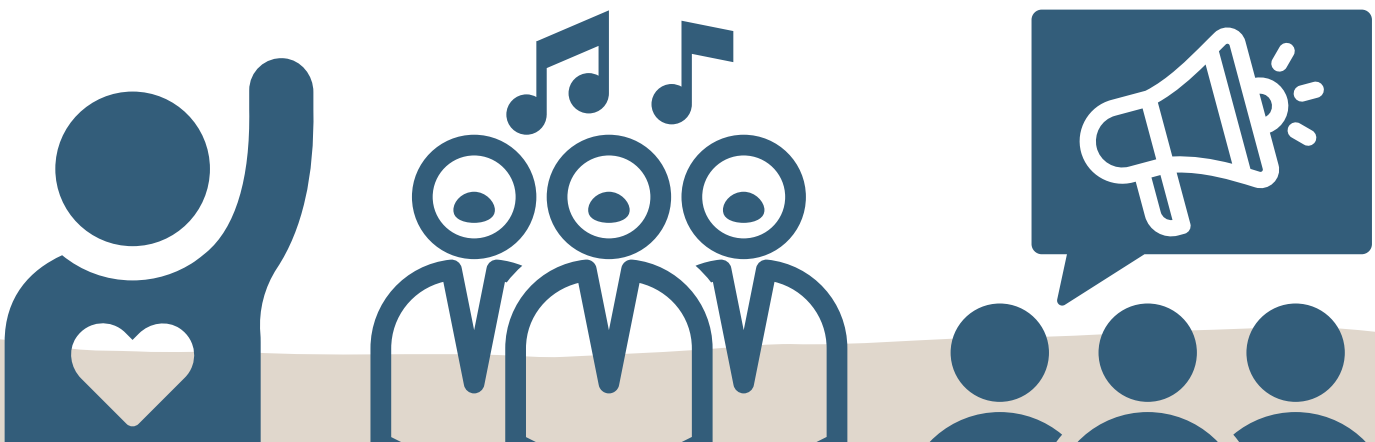


- Students should show up at least five minutes early. Getting to Holy Qurbana early allows one to pray and prepare for the Holy Qurbana.
- Cell phones or other electronic media should never be used during Holy Qurbana for calls or texting. CCD catechists reserve the right to keep the phone away from students for the duration of the Holy Qurbana if they do not comply after a warning. If a cell phone is removed by a Catechist, the parent must come in to retrieve it. For emergencies, please leave the church to attend to your cell phone.
- When entering and leaving Church, genuflect toward the Tabernacle.
- Unless due to medical reasons, then the student must sit, stand, and kneel when required.

Parents should discuss with their children proper etiquette in the church. Chewing gum, drinking of any liquids, and bringing any food or snacks are not allowed inside the church, as the holiness of the place must be respected. Parents must insist that once inside the church, children should not excessively socialize. Socialization is not permitted at all during the Holy Qurbana. Parents should ensure that children go to restrooms, drinking water etc. before they come to Holy Qurbana. Children should be discouraged, to the extent possible, from going to bathrooms/water breaks etc during the Holy Qurbana.

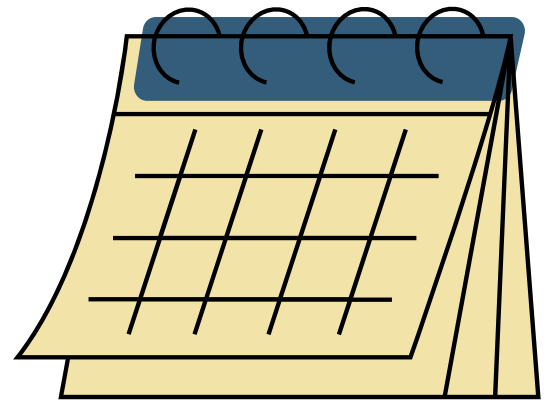
7. Pious Associations

Children should be encouraged from a very early age to be part of pious associations, societies or organizations. Some of these include Holy Childhood Association (Thirubalaskyam), CML, altar service, choir, and pro-Life groups. Membership to such associations will foster a Christian life, love for the church, a promotion and defense of Catholic doctrine, and exercising other works such as evangelization, works of piety, and works of charity.



8. Academic Calendar

The Cathedral parish has provided an academic calendar prior to the beginning of the academic year. This will assist with the parents and children to schedule their vacations and other activities without affecting the faith formation activities.



9. Record Keeping

Our parish catechism office collects and maintains hard-copy/digitized copies of every child's sacrament administration records as part of the admission process.

The parish Catechism office also maintains a record of each child's registration, attendance, grades, catechist application forms, and any certificates issued, including the 12th grade certificates issued by the diocese, transfer certificates, the Solemn Holy Communion or Chrismation (Confirmation) certificates. This can include the attendance participation and exam grades. Special character/observation notes made by catechists about the student can be confidentially recorded and can be made used for proper pastoral care and for the well-being of the student. Student and family privacy policies are maintained and kept with proper care.

Records of each year's faculty assignments and catechist service logs are maintained as well, in accord with safe environment auditing policies.



10. Safe Environment Training for Children

- When children register for admission to the CCD program, parents have the privilege to opt out from Safe Environment training. If a parent chooses to opt-out, certain forms must be filled with the local site administrator. Parents should receive the opt-out package, and the record with the parent's signature should be filed. The parish office keeps an exact record of opt-out students.
- Children receive age-appropriate training every year and an accurate record is kept of this training in the VIRTUS database.
- The parish uses proper training material provided for educators by VIRTUS and uses only resources approved by USCCB and the diocesan authorities.

10.1 Mandated Reporter Training

Each state has a specific requirement regarding the child abuse and neglect tracking procedure. The parish priest, Principal, and the Local Site Admin attend Mandated Reporter training and the certificate are kept on file.



10.2 Reporter Requirements

- Any incident where a child is physically or emotionally hurt while involved in a church activity or as an extension of such a relationship should be reported to the pastor or the executive director.
- Mandated reporters should do so based on state laws and paperwork saved.
- Any child sexual abuse issues should be reported to civil authorities promptly.
- Any office bearer who receives a complaint from any member of the parish or civil authorities should document it in the prescribed format (Intake Form) and transmit it to the Complaints Coordinator within 24 hours. If it is a complaint against a priest, that should also go to the Protosyncellus (the Prefect of Priests who is currently Father Thomas Mulavanal). All are bound by strict confidentiality.

HANDBOOK AGREEMENT FOR PARENTS & STUDENTS

Parents: Please read the following statements carefully and sign below to indicate your agreement.

I hereby acknowledge and affirm that I have read the Student Handbook and discussed its policies with my child. I certify that I consent to, and will abide by all governing policies of the CCD program, including all applicable policies in the Student Handbook.

I understand that the standards of the school do not tolerate profanity, obscenity in word or action, dishonor to God and His Church, disrespect to the personnel of the school, or continued disobedience to the established policies of the school.

Signature of Guardian

Date

Printed Name of Child

Grade

Students: 4th – 12th Grade: Please read the following statement carefully and sign below to indicate your agreement.

I hereby acknowledge and affirm that I have read the Student Handbook. I certify that I consent to, and will abide by all governing policies of the CCD program, including all applicable policies in the Student Handbook.

I understand that the standards of the school do not tolerate profanity, obscenity in word or action, dishonor to God and His Church, disrespect to the personnel of the school, or continued disobedience to the established policies of the school.

Signature of Student

Date



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