

August 23, 2010

Dear Parents:

A new year of religious education classes will begin soon, so this is a good time to recall that religious education is the right of every child; and that makes it the responsibility of every parent. At the time of baptism, parents accept the responsibility of training their child in the practice of the faith, to keep God's commandments as Christ taught, and by truly loving God and neighbor. Religious education takes place in every home by the words and actions of family members in everyday life situations, by family prayer, by family activities, and by active participation in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church.

Formal religious education in St. Mary's Elementary School or St. Mary's Parish School of Religion (SOR) not only reinforces the education of the home and provides more of what faithful Catholics should know as they enter adulthood and pass on the faith to their own children, but also offers children opportunities and experiences of the larger Church community. It is not only an opportunity of the parish to offer religious education classes, but the parish is bound to it by the very evangelizing nature of the Church. It is a divinely entrusted mission of the Church to assist men, women, and children so that they can experience the fullness of the Christian life.

If your child is not enrolled in St. Mary's Elementary School, then your child is expected to be enrolled in St. Mary's SOR. Failure on the part of a child to attend every year, or to attend all the classes throughout the year, cannot help but be regarded as a lack of desire to participate in the sacramental life of the Church.

SOR classes, grades one through eight, will begin on Wednesday, September 15, and will meet from 6:45 PM to 8:00 PM. Although we have offered Kindergarten for many years, the number of children enrolled in Kindergarten has always been small. Since Kindergarten is not mandated by the Diocese, we will no longer offer it.

The public schools of Van Wert County entered into an agreement to keep Wednesday evenings free of activities to allow families to participate in religious programs without conflicts. However, many other activities throughout the county and outside the county, which are not connected to the schools, do hold classes on Wednesday evenings. If your child is involved in any of these other activities (dance, martial arts, gymnastics, hockey, etc.) ask the instructor to schedule your child for an evening class held on a night other than Wednesday. Most instructors recognize the importance of religious education and, when given sufficient notice, will work out a new schedule with your child.

Registration for SOR will take place during the first evening of class in the gym from 6:45 to 8:00 PM. Parents may come into the gym, pick up the forms and fill them out there.

Parents may also wish to run off the forms from the parish website, fill them out at home, and bring them to the gym already completed.

To fill out the forms ahead of time, go to [www.stmarysvanwert.com](http://www.stmarysvanwert.com). Click on *Religious Education*. Click on *SOR*. Click on *Forms*. There are two forms:

Family Registration Form (one per family)

Medical Emergency Form, two-page set (one set for each child)

If you are not registered with the parish, you will need to call the parish office or fill out a parish registration form in the gym that first evening of class.

The fee for SOR is \$45 per child with an additional \$10 for those preparing for Confirmation this year in grades seven and eight. Payment is due at registration. Please make checks payable to: St. Mary's Church. You may also pay in cash. If there is a financial difficulty, please talk with me. We can definitely make arrangements. No child will be denied religious education due to a lack of funds.

Whether you prepare the forms beforehand or wait until the first evening of class, please do not send money with your children with the expectation that they are to register themselves.

A baptismal record is required before the reception of any of the other sacraments. Please bring a baptismal record for your child if your child was not baptized here at St. Mary's and was not registered in SOR or St. Mary's School last year. If you do not have a baptismal record, please call or write the church of baptism. The church of baptism can send a record directly to St. Mary's. However, do not wait to receive the baptismal record before registering your child. Also, please do not send a baptismal record with your child.

At the time of registration, be sure to pick up a handbook, which will include the schedule of the year and weather policy. The schedule and weather policy can also be found on the parish website.

If your child is preparing to celebrate First Reconciliation, First Communion, or Confirmation this school year, letters concerning the preparations for the reception of the sacraments will be mailed to you. If you do not receive a letter by Monday, September 20, please let me know.

House Bill 422 has made particular security measures mandatory for schools and other places at which children gather. The SOR meets most of the criteria, so we are as consistent with the St. Mary's School security policy as possible with consideration for evening classes.

Please use the bell tower entrance or the Jennings Road School entrance to come into the building. The doors to the back parking lot and the doors at the library end of the education wing will remain locked to anyone outside. Children may not leave by any of those doors except in the case of an emergency. The double doors leading into the education wing will be locked during class time.

There is a change to how the children are dismissed.

There were three incidents, brought to my attention by parents last year, of children walking or running through the Jennings Road parking lot to get to their cars and stepping in front of moving vehicles. This has been one of several long-time concerns and something we were trying to avoid. In the past, we also had children choosing to wait outside in the dark and cold when parents were not on time to pick up their child or forgot altogether; and it happened one time, of which I am aware, that a child climbed into the wrong car. If you have ever walked up to the wrong car yourself, thinking that it was yours, consider how much more difficult it can be to determine the correct car at night. There have been other concerns, too; and so, we have tried to eliminate hazards.

Children will no longer routinely leave by the Jennings Road School door. Everyone will leave by the bell tower. The majority of parents have chosen to drive up to the bell tower in the past; and after the first week or so, the line moves pretty well.

Please pull forward under the carport far enough so that three cars can be in the carport area at one time. Please do not leave your car to pick up your child, run into the building for something, or engage in a conversation with a catechist. That just holds up the line. Please do not pull out of the line to go around other cars.

If you carpool, please write a letter telling us which families are riding together.

If you have an older child in high school, with a driver's license, and who is parked in the back parking lot on a Youth Group meeting night, that high schooler may walk from the Administration Center to the bell tower to pick up your younger child to walk with them to the back parking lot. We had some misunderstandings about this in the past; so from now on, a once-a-year letter from the parents is needed to tell us that their high schooler will be doing this on the evenings of Youth Group. This is intended to assure that all the SOR students are with their families and not walking to cars we cannot plainly distinguish from the bell tower. Please remind your high schooler to use the sidewalks and to not walk between cars.

Parents have asked if they can attend the Opening Prayer, Living Rosary, Stations of the Cross, etc. Parents are always welcome! If, however, the church is in use, (for a Reconciliation Service, for example), an opening prayer time will need to be held in the classrooms.

If you wish to speak to your child's catechist or to me after class, send a note or call the Religious Ed. Office at 419-238-3079 so we can meet with you along with your child. Please park in the Jennings Road parking lot and enter the building through the Jennings Road School entrance.

If you are interested in becoming an aide in a classroom or you are willing to substitute teach on occasion, please talk with me. We could use your help.

The staff of St. Mary's SOR is looking forward to this year of faith education and formation with your children. See you on September 15.

Yours in Christ,

Cheryl L. Freewalt  
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