

## Welcome from Fr. Zanni

Dear Fellow St. Thomas Family,

Welcome to all of you - those who are coming to St. Thomas the Apostle's Faith Formation program for the first time and those who are returning.

We take very seriously the confidence you place in us by enrolling your child in our programs, and we will do everything possible to support you. **However, you are your child's first and most important teachers in helping them to grow in faith and understanding of our Roman Catholic tradition.**

We understand formation in faith as a life-long journey in discipleship that is enhanced by learning about the basic elements important to our faith - Sacred Scriptures, prayers, Sacraments, Mass, the history of our journey of faith from the beginning of creation down to the present day, and a future to which we look forward in joyful hope.

The Catechesis of the Together Growing in Faith (TGIF) program is in its fourteenth year at St. Thomas this school year and we pray that you will continue to support and help the program to grow.

All our sacramental preparation programs are offered on select days, **with the understanding that participation in the Sunday Liturgy is essential to the formation of the child.**

For those preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation, it is with the understanding that participation in the **weekend Mass is a part of class time.** Confirmation is **not** graduation, but a continuation of their baptismal call of discipleship. We encourage you to help your child continue their faith journey.

I look forward to seeing you at Mass (the source and summit of all we do) as well as the many varied events hosted at our parish.

The Religious Education Office as well as the entire parish staff is ready to assist you in any way possible, and of course, my door is always open to you.

Thank you again for your participation in our programs.

In Christ,

Very Rev. Frank Zanni V.F.

Pastor

# RELIGIOUS EDUCATION'S MISSION STATEMENT

To live out our Parish Mission Statement, we at St. Thomas the Apostle, look upon Religious Education as a total parish experience involving not just the child, but all parishioners that form our parish community of faith. Beginning with Baptism, God's freely given Gift of Faith is nurtured and developed through Religious Education in a life-long process. It is begun in the home, the "Domestic Church:" – the first meeting place of the child with God. "Parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. Home experiences of prayer, meals, forgiveness, love, and sharing prepare the child to gather and celebrate with God's Worship Prayer of the Catholic Christians-The Mass.

## Our Philosophy

***Catechesis*** is an education in the faith of children, young people and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life.

Our Faith is not a private affair. Faith is a discipline that is continually altered, shaped and deepened through its practice within our Catholic community and beyond. All students, out of necessity, must grow in the knowledge of Catholicism, in the love of Christ, and in the life of the Church. Catechesis enables students to become adult Catholics rather than adults with primary notions about the Church and our Faith.

**The Church community and family unit must work together in the endeavor of catechizing our children, supporting one another and respecting everyone involved.**

**The Diocese requires that all children seeking reception of the sacraments need to be enrolled and attending TGIF two years prior to receiving the sacraments of First Communion, and First Reconciliation. Continued education is required to receive Confirmation.**

The policies and information contained in this handbook have the sole purpose of moving us closer to our common goal of a truly well-formed Christian Community, which includes people of all ages. Our program offers a variety of opportunities for the students to grow, including formal religious and sacramental instruction, planning and participating in communal prayer experiences and parish and community-based service projects.

The task of St. Thomas the Apostle Together Growing In Faith program is to help the individual to think and act as Jesus did. As our students become young adults and enter society, it is our hope that their faith and witness will help to bring about a more just, peaceful and loving world.

# RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM

**TGIF** (Together Growing in Faith) is an exciting concept in Catholic Religious Education. This program replaces CCD (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine), which was designed only for children. TGIF is a multi-generational approach to education where the whole family comes together to learn about our faith. Our curriculum and policies are determined by the Diocese of Youngstown Office of Religious Education and locally by our Pastor. The program is administered by the Director of Religious Education with the help of parish volunteers.

TGIF is designed for families, couples, or individuals who want to learn more about their faith. **All members of the parish are invited to attend** and come together as a faith community to learn about the Catholic Christian faith. This program has been expanding throughout the United States in numerous Dioceses for the past decade and originated here in the Youngstown Diocese in 2002. This program was introduced at St. Thomas the Apostle in 2003.

## **WE COME TOGETHER FIRST**

We will gather at St. Thomas **usually** on the first Sunday of every month September -May from 3:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. Check In begins at 3:15 p.m. **(You must check your child in monthly in order for them to receive credit for attendance monthly.)**

We begin at 3:30 with Mass in Church promptly you should be seated in the church.

A light dinner will be served in the Parish Center after Mass. **(This is part of TGIF.)**

We do need cooking, set-up, serving and clean-up help each month. Come, eat, enjoy, and make new friends with those around you.

We begin our Religious Education Session by dividing into age specific learning groups. All ages learn, learn according to their state in life; children, young adolescents and adults.

After the sessions are completed, the different age groups come back together.

**Home kits** are distributed to each family at **check-in**, where additional curriculum is sent home **to continue your education process as family, friends, or a couple**. This is designed to embellish what you learned that evening so you can continue to live your faith at home and in your life.

## **COMMUNITY CELEBRATION...**

Working together as a community builds a stronger faith experience for everyone. All generations engage in more meaningful participation in church liturgies and events. A greater significance and meaning of these events will benefit all through a shared religious education.

## **TOGETHER GROWING IN FAITH...**

This program **empowers adults to take on the responsibility of being the primary teachers of their children** in the ways of faith...the responsibility you promised to undertake when you had your child(ren) baptized. At

the same time, parents learn about their faith as well, making them better teachers for their child(ren). For couples and individuals, it too is a learning experience for no one knows everything there is to know about our faith.

## REGISTRATION

Anyone of any age is welcome! Every family with children ages 5-18 **are required to register** for this program. We also have a Pre-k group for 3-5 year olds. Registration forms need to be completed for adults as well as children.

*Fees	
<b>1-2 Adults (over 18)</b>	...\$65.00 per year
<b>Single Session</b> .....	\$10.00 per session
<b>Family</b> .....	\$90.00 per year
\$40 Confirmation Fee due 2 <sup>nd</sup> year of preparation.	
*Fees include books, supplies for each session, food, materials for Sacraments and take-home kits.	

- TGIF is open to any and all **REGISTERED and ACTIVE** members of St. Thomas the Apostle Parish. If you would like to become a member of our parish, please come in during office hours, visit our web-site or pick up a packet on the Welcome Information table located at the back of church. You can also give us a call to obtain information.
- **Registration begins in May; forms are distributed at the last TGIF Monthly Session.**
- Payment **must be submitted with registration**; allowing us to place orders with publishing companies.
- Registration Forms can also be found on the St. Thomas website or directly from the Religious Education Office during office hours.
- We also have a locked “drop-off” box near the front of the Parish Center for submission after office hours
- If you are transferring from another program to St. Thomas, please submit a **CERTIFICATE OF TRANSFER** from your previous parish.
- If you would like to attend our TGIF program while remaining a member of another parish, please submit a **LETTER OF RELEASE** from your current Pastor.

## R.C.I.A

Rite of Christian Initiation for adults turning Catholic, or Catholics catching up on missed sacraments, Baptism, First Reconciliation, First Communion, and Confirmation sacrament formation will be over and above – yet part of this program.

## Communication

The Religious Education Office is open on Monday -Thursday 9am – 2pm. (Other times by appointment.) You can call the office anytime at (330) 394-2361/2461 and leave a message. We will get back to you as soon as possible.

The 2017-18 TGIF schedule was given out May 7, 2017 at TGIF and may also be found on

the St. Thomas Parish Website: [www.theapostlethomas.com](http://www.theapostlethomas.com) or on the TGIF table in the back of the Church.

You will receive an updated monthly calendar of TGIF and Parish activities each month at TGIF.

**Please check Parish Weekly Bulletin for any revised dates or new information. Bulletins are available after each weekend Mass or online.**

Information will be given out at TGIF or posted in the weekly bulletin. **We rarely send anything by mail or phone home for reminders.**

## Parental Commitment

The general concept of our **TGIF** program (as in any religious education program) is to aid and encourage **PARENTS as the primary teachers in faith formation**. TGIF only meets on a monthly basis, therefore parental cooperation and participation is of the utmost importance. Full **parental responsibility in this mission** includes:

- inspiring the undertaking and applauding the completion of home assignments and family activities
- praying with the children
- through attendance **with them** at Weekend Mass, TGIF Sessions and Sacramental Preparation Sessions (as they apply). **CHILDREN MAY NOT ATTEND THEIR SESSION WITHOUT A PARENT/ADULT GUARDIAN.**
- **Parents Need TO prioritize this commitment as well as they would any other academic or extra-curricular obligation.**

“The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute.” **The right and the duty of parents** to educate their children are primordial and inalienable. Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. This already happens **when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel**. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God. **The parish is the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents.** CCC #2221, 2226

# Overview of Responsibilities

## Basic Responsibilities of Students

At St. Thomas's TGIF gatherings, students will:

- \* Attend classes regularly.
- \* Be prompt.
- \* Attend Mass regularly.
- \* Participate fully.
- \* Complete all assignments, both inside and outside of class.
- \* Conduct themselves in a Christian manner.
- \* Exhibit Christian manner towards fellow students and catechists.
- \* Demonstrate understanding of the content presented during the school year.

## Basic Responsibilities of Parents

Parents of St. Thomas's TGIF students will:

- \* Attend Mass with your children regularly.
- \* Regularly participate at the Eucharist.
- \* Attend TGIF sessions with your children regularly
- \* Make certain your children are prompt to meetings/ classes and events.
- \* Nurture a prayer life in their home.
- \* Get involved in parish activities.
- \* Strive to live daily by gospel values.

## Code of Conduct

- \* If a child causes disruption during class, the catechist will meet with the child after class to discuss his/her behavior.
- \* If the disruption occurs again, the child will be sent to the DRE for resolution.
- \* If the disruption occurs again, a conference with the parents will be requested.
- \* Disrespectful behavior of any kind toward other students or teachers will not be tolerated.
- \* Replacement for any damage done by a student to the building, general facilities, or materials is the responsibility of the students and/or parent/guardian.
- \* Chewing gum is prohibited in the church and classrooms.
- \* Hats-ball caps are not to be worn in the Parish center or the church.

**Please remind students Cell phones are to be turned off and/or not used during Mass and during Classroom time.**

## TGIF ATTENDANCE

Religious Education Office does its very best to create the annual calendar around the schedules of all area school systems that feed into St. Thomas. We strive to create opportunities for attendance for all families involved.

**Dates for monthly sessions throughout the upcoming year are typically available by the end of the current year.**

- Classes are **usually** held on the First Sunday during each month.
  - All students, 1st through 9th Grade, (along with their families) are **required to attend** monthly Sunday Session. **Confirmed** students will attend their monthly Session **even following Confirmation until 12<sup>th</sup> grade.**
  - We have **nine months of instruction** (September through May) during the Formation Year.
  - As a family, you are expected to attend each month; therefore attending **nine sessions** throughout the year (as opposed to other pro-grams that meet EACH WEEK). **It is imperative that you schedule accordingly so that your attendance is possible!**
  - **Sporting events and/or practices DO NOT constitute a legitimate reason to miss your TGIF session or Sacrament Prep sessions/ meetings.**
  - If the need to make up a monthly session arises, an attendance adjustment may be made by giving **advance notice** to the Religious Education Office.
  - Failure to attend sessions will elicit a **failing attendance percentage**. A failing attendance percentage will affect the **overall** student understanding of their faith journey and may make it necessary to repeat that grade level and/or delay sacrament celebrations. **Due to our limited time together and work assigned, attending the monthly sessions is mandatory.**
  - If you are unable to attend due to emergency/illness, **you must call/email The Religious Education Office. 330 394-2361/2461 or Theapostlethomasreled@gmail.com**
- \*\*Parents are asked to pick up missed assignments promptly. This will ensure your student can turn in homework the next month's session.**

## Mass attendance

**Mass attendance is a crucial part of the ongoing Faith Formation of each and every individual.** It is where everything that we learn about in TGIF comes into play and is **necessary in fostering spiritual growth.**

- Your family's attendance at weekly **Mass is required.** (Including Holy Days and special services.)
- Each TGIF Session this year will begin with a MANDATORY Mass at 3:30 pm.
- The usage of church envelopes is **evidence** of an **active/practicing parishioner.**  
**Please make sure you submit your envelope weekly.**
- **Commitment to the faith** signifies readiness for Sacraments.

*Mass on weekends:      Saturday —4:30PM      Sunday—10 AM*

The **Precept of the Church** specifies the law of the Lord more precisely: **“On Sundays and other holy days of obligation the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass.”** The precept of participating in the Mass is satisfied by assistance at a Mass which is celebrated anywhere in a Catholic rite either on the holy day or on the evening of the preceding day. *CCC #2180*

Since **Sunday is an Easter celebration that occurs each week,** Christians from the earliest times have gathered together on that day to **celebrate and thank their Redeemer and to reunite themselves** with Him and with others.....participation in the Sunday Eucharist is fundamental for a Christian life, the Church explicitly declares that it is a **serious sin to stay away from Sunday Mass without good reason.** *YouCat #365*



## Home Assignments

**The Youngstown Diocese provides us with a list of approved curriculum and Series as well as The Goals for the Teaching of Religion with Grade Level Outcomes.** (Available to view in Rectory) We use the approved Pflaum curriculum” Gospel Weeklies”. **(This includes students homework/home assignments).**

- All Religious Education cannot be taught during one session with your family each month (meeting only nine times per year).
- Further catechesis **at home**, during the weeks between sessions, is absolutely necessary (along with attending Mass on the weekends).
- **Children are expected to complete the appropriated assignments each month and submit them the following month.**
- These assignments, in addition to committed attendance and **Mass** are integral parts of our monthly lesson.
- Failure to complete each grade level requirement will result in an incomplete status for that grade level and may delay, (until completion of said requirements), any Sacrament Celebration.
- Parents are encouraged to work with their children through all assignments but **NOT to complete them for the students.**
- Family discussion concerning/during completion of assignments is **HIGHLY ENCOURAGED!**
- If your child doesn't do the work, he/she will not benefit from the lesson being taught. Your kids will “form” their faith through their OWN thoughts! Many of the assignments are pure reflection; therefore “right or wrong” will not apply. We seek to initiate talk and reflection about faith within your family.

The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. In the procreation and education of children it reflects the Father's work of creation. It is called to partake of the prayer and sacrifice of Christ. Daily prayer and the reading of the Word of God strengthen it in charity. The Christian family has an evangelizing and missionary task. CCC #2205

## Prayer

**The Youngstown Diocese provides us with a list of grade-level specific prayers that are given to each child at the beginning of the Faith Formation year.**

- Parents are encouraged to help at home not only with the memorization but more **importantly with the understanding of the content and purpose of the prayers.** However, **attending Mass** gives the children the opportunity to do so.
- Most important is teaching our children to turn TO GOD in prayer.

The catechesis of children, young people, and adults aims at teaching them to meditate on the Word of God in personal prayer, practicing it in liturgical prayer, and internalizing it at all times in order to bear fruit in a new life. Catechesis is also a time for the discernment and education of popular piety. **The memorization of basic prayers offers an essential support to the life of prayer, but it is important to help learners savor their meaning.** CCC #2688

...People who pray entrust themselves more and more to God. Even now they seek union with the one whom they will encounter one day face to face.....Of course, one cannot learn to pray in the same way one learns a technique. As strange as it sounds, prayer is a gift one obtains through prayer. *YOUCAT 469*  
With all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit. To that end, be watchful with all perseverance and supplication... Ephesians 6:18-20

## Sacrament Preparation

The Sacramental life of the Roman Catholic Church is what uniquely distinguishes it from other Christian denominations. The **WHOLE LITURGICAL LIFE** of the Catholic Church in fact revolves around the **Eucharistic sacrifice and the seven sacraments.** The Bishop, along with Pastors, Pastoral Associates and the Directors of Religious education share in the responsibility to see that those **preparing to receive the sacraments are well formed in accordance with Church standards and teachings.**

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.  
Matthew 28:19,20

## Requirements All Sacraments:

The child must be baptized; we need a copy of each child's **baptismal certificate** on file. **Please submit with registration** (if not baptized at St. Thomas, St. Bernadette's or St. Vincent's).

- Student MUST maintain **100% participation** in all Sacramental Prep Meetings/ Classes/Events.
- Student should **maintain 100% attendance at TGIF Sessions.**
- Student MUST complete ALL assignments; both TGIF and Sacramental.
- **Parent/guardian participation in sessions** is also an integral part of preparation for each sacrament. **Please prepare to be present at these sessions.**
- All students, Kindergarten through 12th grade, are required to participate in **yearly ongoing faith formation** to assure a continuous, systematic, and age appropriate catechesis.

The sacraments are outward signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions. *CCC #1131*

## Reconciliation

In addition to the **Requirements for ALL Sacraments** (noted above):

- Student should be in **2nd Grade or older**
- Participation in **Two years** of TGIF *prior to* the Sacrament

The human heart is heavy and hardened. God must give man a new heart. *CCC #1432*

If we say, "We have fellowship with him," while we continue to walk in darkness, we lie and do not act in truth. 1 John 1:6

## First Eucharist

In addition to the ***Requirements for ALL Sacraments*** (noted above):

- Student should be in **2nd Grade or older**
- Participation in **two full years** of TGIF prior to the Sacrament
- The student **must** celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to reception of the Holy Eucharist for the 1st time
- **Student should not begin sacramental preparation unless there is regular attendance and participation at the Sunday Mass.**

...the Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith: "Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking." CCC #1327

When everything is subjected to Him, then the Son himself will [also] be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all. 1 Corinthians 15:28

As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. 1 Peter 4:10

## Confirmation

In addition to the ***Requirements for ALL Sacraments*** (noted above):

- Student should be in **8th Grade or older**
- Student should have had **ongoing participation** in Faith Formation **after the celebrations of Reconciliation and First Eucharist (3rd through 8/9th grade).**
- Student **MUST** maintain 100% attendance at **Confirmation Meetings /Classes**
- Participation in Confirmation Retreat
- Completion of a Discipleship Project and Parish/Diocese volunteer hours
- Student will select a Sponsor who at least 16 years old; *fully initiated into and an active participant of the Catholic Church. NOT a parent.*

...by the sacrament of Confirmation, the baptized are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed. CCC # 1285

..they sent them Peter and John,, who went down and prayed for them, that they might receive the holy Spirit,, for it had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:14-17

## Fundraising

St. Thomas's has fundraisers to defray programming costs.

This year we will be participating in 3 fundraising programs:

1. Nut Roll baking and sales. (November and the week before Palm Sunday. Help is needed to roll.)
2. Candy Bar sale (each family will receive 20 bars to sell with more available to sell if you so choose.)
3. CRS Helping Hands Event- Collecting change and making meals for the poor.

**Keep handbook in a safe place. This book will be needed as reference through the course of your child(rens) religious education at St. Thomas.**

### **\*Please note:**

Additions may be added on an as needed basis and should be placed with handbook.

**Return this page only Before September 1, 2017,**

## **Parental & Student Acknowledgment:**

I acknowledge that I have received and reviewed with my child(ren) the contents of the Religious Education Handbook for the 2017-2018 school year.

**1<sup>st</sup> Child in program:** \_\_\_\_\_

**2<sup>nd</sup> Child in program:** \_\_\_\_\_

**3<sup>rd</sup> Child in program:** \_\_\_\_\_

**4<sup>th</sup> Child in program:** \_\_\_\_\_

**5<sup>th</sup> Child in program:** \_\_\_\_\_

**6<sup>th</sup> Child in program:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Print Parent Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please fill out one form per family and return at Mass in collection basket next week.**

**You may also drop it off in black mail box by Parish Center or Rectory Office**

**Thanks!**