

## Changes in Religious Education To Support Family Life

Family life and the many, many obligations that families assume when raising children are very complicated and conflicting. It appears that family life for everyone has gotten more complex. Twenty-five years ago the Religious Education Program responded to the schedule and style of family life of then. The Religious Education Program moved most of its classes from weekday afternoons to Sunday mornings. This was done because at that time children in Grades 1--8 usually did not have special enrichment programs, sports or other important activities and parents expressed a strong preference for this schedule. The entire Sunday morning was free for parents and children to attend Holy Mass and also Religious Education classes, often in one complete trip. Today our younger children now have a complexity of activities and commitments which boggle the mind. As a result our present Religious Education Sunday Schedule asks parents to choose whether their child(ren) will go to Mass or Religious Education. Now young people's commitments tend to start with the later morning. Life has changed and we have not kept pace with the Sunday cycle of life. Like twenty-five years ago, we must change our Religious Education Schedule to meet the changes in your life and schedule.

We are all aware that our obligation as a parish community of faith is to support and encourage parents to come to Mass each week with their child(ren) and then also support their child(ren) in Religious Education. The slowly evolving change in Sunday morning scheduling for young people has taken away the possibility for parents to meet their obligation to have their child(ren) attend Mass and also be formed in our faith. Indeed when parents brought their beloved child(ren) to church for Baptism, they pledged out loud at the Baptismal Service that "they would accept the responsibility of raising their child in the ways of our faith." We need as a Parish Religious Education Program to provide the practical and proper ways for parents to honor their word given before God and their family. We must continue to seek to provide a Religious Education Program for our young people (Grades 1—8) which will be supportive of nurturing the spiritual and faith development of your child(ren). In the past six months we have reflected upon our program as it is today and how we can best improve our program for this coming year and foreseeable future. We have analyzed the statistics of the last five years and consulted parents and teachers via a sample poll to arrive at a new schedule which will serve you, the parents, in achieving your responsibility to raise your child(ren) in the ways of our faith by attending Sunday Mass and participating in Religious Education.

What has strongly influenced this decision is that the weekday attendance at the individual classes by our young people is excellent, while the Sunday attendance is very, very poor and growing weaker (for example: absentee rate on weekdays is 10%, Sundays almost 40%). It appears that parents are better able to manage and facilitate their child(ren)'s attendance on weekdays and be supportive of this program. Younger students are more

available during the week and also transportation is more available. The long lines of cars outside our elementary and middle schools indicate that personal transportation by parents or a designated adult is easily available for young people.

What this schedule shift does best is it gives back to the parents and families the opportunity to attend Sunday morning Mass every week. A hallmark and sign of our Catholic heritage and faith tradition is that we worship God each Sunday at Mass. Parents no longer have to make a decision based on a late morning special activity for their child(ren). The advent of so many obligations for our young people has made it most difficult for parents. We want parents to choose each week to come to our holy sanctuary with their child(ren) and offer worship to our God at Mass and receive his grace as a special spiritual experience. We will be re-instituting the special Children's Liturgy of the Word at the 9 AM Mass for young children the Sunday after Labor Day. Because attendance at Religious Education during the week is easier for parents, we want also to support this "new" schedule.

Starting this September, 2019, our Program will be run Monday through Thursday afternoons each week and a second later shift on Mondays and Wednesdays to accommodate parents' and children's schedules. The times will be:

Monday:	4:00 p.m.—5:00 p.m. 6:00 p.m.—7:00 p.m.
Tuesday:	4:00 p.m.—5:00 p.m.
Wednesday:	4:00 p.m.—5:00 p.m. 6:00 p.m.—7:00 p.m.
Thursday:	4:00 p.m.—5:00 p.m.

For those parents who would like to attend a meeting to hear the reasoning and decision making in more detail, you are invited to attend on Monday, June 10<sup>th</sup> from 7:00 p.m.—8:00 p.m. in Sacred Heart Hall on the lower level of the church building.

We hope and pray that this paradigm shift will allow each and every family to participate in the Holy Mass, our priority as believers, and also for our younger people to grow in grace and knowledge of our God.

Respectfully yours,

*Fr. Brian*  
Fr. Brian  
Pastor

*Karen Ackles*  
Mrs. Karen Ackles  
Director of Religious Education