



st. mary nativity
CATHOLIC CHURCH

2025-2026

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION HANDBOOK

FAITH FORMATION OFFICE

706 N. Broadway St
Joliet, IL 60435
331-316-4366

Director of Faith Formation
Mr. Craig Mazur
cmazur@stmarynativity.org

**To report your child/ren's absence from Religious Education class
please call or email Mr. Mazur**

Dear Parents,

I am very happy to welcome you to a new year of Religious Education here at St. Mary Nativity Catholic Church!

Our goal is to make disciples so that the children and families in our program are on fire with the faith and their love for God! Our hope is that, as they grow in their knowledge of the faith, they will become witnesses by their lives and be bold proclaimers of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Our catechists and assistants who instruct and hand on the faith are faith-filled Catholics who are eager and excited to share the Good News of the Kingdom of God with your children. They are very passionate about the Catholic faith and proclaim the love of God with great joy and enthusiasm.

The Religious Education program exists to assist you as parents in evangelizing and catechizing your children. Your role in your children's faith formation is vital. As the primary religious educators of your children, it is by your practice of the faith and by your example that your children will see how essential God and the faith are in your daily lives. Your teaching, support, example, attitude, and the values you impart, are fundamental for your children. To keep the faith alive at home, it is important to attend Sunday Mass weekly as a family, pray together daily, participate in the sacraments often, and complete any family activities that are provided.

I ask that you read this Family Handbook very carefully. It contains essential program and policy information. It is important that parents understand the handbook contents and are willing to comply with its directives.

If you have a question regarding anything in this handbook please contact me. Also, if you would be interested in assisting the program further in a volunteer capacity, please feel free to contact me. We need many volunteers to make this beautiful ministry of handing on the faith to the children run smoothly and effectively.

Please take a look at our website, **www.stmarynativityholycross.com**, and look at the Faith Formation page to find information about the program. Also, please like the **St. Mary Nativity** page on **Facebook!**

May the Holy Spirit guide and lead us in a grace-filled year!

In Christ,
Mr. Craig Mazur
Director of Faith Formation

Carrying the message of Christ's love to our children.

PHILOSOPHY

The philosophy of the Religious Education Program of St. Mary Nativity Catholic Church is based on three key principles:

1. Faith Formation is a life-long process of entering into a personal relationship with God and getting to know Him more intimately. We strive to help the children recognize God's unconditional love, compassion, and forgiveness.
2. Religious Education has a threefold mission:
 - a. Through the Word of God, in study and prayer, the children will hear the Good News of Salvation. They will gain a better understanding of Scripture, learn how to apply it in their lives, and be able to proclaim the Good News to others.
 - b. To promote Worship through prayer and an appreciation and growth in the love of the liturgy, the children will realize that worship is central to our lives as Catholics.
 - c. In Service to the church, community, and at home, the children will learn that helping others, especially those who are elderly and poor, are at the heart of living a life in Christ.
3. In providing doctrinal, moral, and liturgical enrichment; as well as formation in the sacramental life and values of the church, we seek to make disciples of Christ, whereby the children will give witness to Christ by leading lives of holiness.

GOALS

The Religious Education Program will strive to:

1. Develop a sense of personal worth as children of God, made in His image and likeness.
2. Develop a sense of community where relationships may be formed and they can genuinely grow in friendship, trust, and prayer.
3. Teach what Jesus taught by remaining faithful to the principle elements of the Christian message for Catechesis and the Church:
 - a. The Mystery of the Holy Trinity
 - b. Creation
 - c. Jesus Christ
 - d. The Holy Spirit
 - e. The Sacraments
 - f. The Life of Grace
 - g. The Moral Life
 - h. Mary and the Saints
- Assist students in understanding and remembering:
 - a. the traditional prayers of the Church
 - b. the Beatitudes
 - c. the Ten Commandments
 - d. the Laws of the Church
4. Provide students with experiences of Christian Community:
 - a. to celebrate together the principle events of the liturgical year.
 - b. to promote participation in personal prayers and communal worship.
5. Guide students into commitments of Christian Service:
 - a. in doing service projects.
 - b. to activate Christian concern for issues of life, truth, and justice.

GUIDELINES FOR ST. MARY NATIVITY RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Classes in the St. Mary Nativity Religious Education Program will be taught in conformity with the teaching of the Church as presented in the General Catechetical Directory, in Sharing the Light of Faith, The National Catechetical Directory of United States, The Catechism of the Catholic Church and in accordance with the policies and guidelines of Faith Formation Education Programs within the Diocese of Joliet.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

CHANGE OF INFORMATION

It is the responsibility of the parent to notify the Faith Formation Office if you should move or change any of the following information:

- **Phone Numbers: Home Phone, Cell Phone, Work Phone**
- **Address**
- **E-mail Address**
- **Health Status**
- **Marital Status and Custodial Situation**

FLOCKNOTE

News blasts, updates, and flyers will be emailed via Flocknote or hard copies may be sent with the oldest child of the family. Please mark mail@flocknote.com as a safe sender!

PROGRESS REPORTS

Progress reports will be given to the children in grades 1-8 in January and at the end of the catechetical year. These reports will help parents to keep track of their child's progress within the program and will also contain a record of the child's absences. Content, prayers and beliefs for each grade level are expected to be learned with assistance from our parents.

VOLUNTEERS

All volunteers are a wonderful asset to our program. Please call the Faith Formation Office if you are able to give time to help in our program during the year. We count on your presence and your commitment.

All adult volunteers are required to complete a program called Protecting God's Children.

A volunteer background check form will be filled out by each volunteer.

CATECHISTS are the heart and soul of the Religious Education program. They echo the life and stories about Jesus. Their time spent in preparation and presentation is greatly valued.

SUBSTITUTE CATECHISTS are vital to the program. They are needed to fill in when a catechist cannot come at their scheduled time.

CATECHIST ASSISTANTS, both adult and teen, are the strong right arms to the Catechists. Catechist Assistants are asked to perform many tasks such as taking attendance, listening to traditional prayers, helping children with class work, accompanying children to the office, making copies, helping with dismissal, etc.

OFFICE ASSISTANTS are willing volunteers who offer their time to help in the Faith Formation Office. They assist with tasks such as: taking phone messages, collecting attendance sheets, making copies for catechists, preparing mailings and sacramental booklets, newsletters, etc. Other tasks include monitoring the doors, bathrooms, and hallways for security, greeting the children, and helping with dismissal.

GENERAL INFORMATION

CLASS SCHEDULE

Sunday

9:15 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.

Grades 1 - 8

CONTINUITY

Parents are reminded that their child should be enrolled in the Faith Formation Program the **entire eight years**. Acceptance into the Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Confirmation Programs is based upon regular attendance of the student in the Faith Formation Program.

EMERGENCY CONTACT

The St. Mary Nativity Religious Education **Flocknote** enables the FF Office to notify all households and parents by email of an emergency or unplanned event that causes early dismissal or Faith Formation cancellation. It will also allow us to send you announcements or reminders throughout the year.

Our office will also activate the Emergency Closing Center with our information.

Parents and Volunteers can receive automatic e-mails on any changes of our schedule. To sign up for this free service, or check status on any closings, please visit the public website at www.emergencyclosingcenter.com.

Automated weather related phone: 847-238-1234

Reporting TV Stations: CBS, NBC, ABC, WGN, FOX

Search for St. Mary Nativity Religious Education (CCD), Joliet

ENROLLMENT

Enrollment in Faith Formation is open to any child of a family seeking Catholic education and Sacramental Preparation. Registration in the parish is encouraged.

You may know neighbors or friends who for various reasons are not enrolled in a Faith Formation Program. We ask you to encourage them to contact the Director at 331-316-4366.

The grade level of a student entering the program will be left to the sole discretion of the Faith Formation Director, in dialogue with the parent(s) or guardian.

EXPECTATIONS

It is expected that each family become actively involved in St. Mary Nativity Religious Education Program and Parish, as evidenced by regularly participating in the Mass and financially supporting the parish, in order to model an active Christian faith and to reinforce the values and attitudes of living that faith. The parent and their child also **agree** to act in accordance with these values and attitudes.

FIRST AID

State law regulates minor injuries to be treated with water, disinfectant and Band-Aids. We follow the rules of universal precaution. The Faith Formation Office has available to all catechists a supply of: disinfectant, Band-Aids, rubber gloves and Ziploc bags to dispose of any materials used to clean a wound. If there is a serious injury, we will call 911 and notify parents immediately. Our building is equipped with an AED (Automatic External Defibrillators).



HOME STUDY

Special arrangements must be made with the Faith Formation Director. It should be noted that even though a family may home school their children, the child must be in attendance in person in a Parish Religious Education Program for two years prior to the reception of the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Confirmation. For St. Mary Nativity Parish, that means the child must be in attendance in our Religious Education Program for Grades 1, 2, 7, and 8. Home Study is not permitted to accommodate schedules or extra-curricular activities.

LOST AND FOUND

If your child loses an article, please check with the Faith Formation Office: 331-316-4366.

MEDICATIONS

Except in extraordinary circumstances, which must be approved by the Director of Faith Formation, personnel will not maintain, administer or supervise the taking of medication. An exception is made for use of EpiPens, but only with the doctor's authorization. Arrangements must be made each year with the Director.

STUDENT MATERIALS

Children in the program will be given folders in which they can carry their papers, etc. **Please check their folders weekly and remove papers.** Students are given **textbooks** and materials that they are expected to bring to every class. Some teachers may choose to have the children leave their textbooks in the classroom. Students who lose their book (materials) may purchase a replacement from the Faith Formation Education Office. Students will be given backpacks to carry their materials.

TUITION

The tuition for 2024-2025.

\$150.00 for one child
\$265.00 for two children
\$300.00 for three or more children

Sacrament Materials Fees:

\$ 25.00 First Eucharist Program (Grade 2)
\$ 50.00 Confirmation Program (Grade 8 and High School)

No child will be denied instruction due to lack of funds. If payment for tuition presents a problem for you, financial arrangements must be made directly with the Director of Faith Formation, Craig Mazur, 331-316-4366.

POLICIES

ABSENCES

A student who misses 3 classes will receive a notification from the Faith Formation Office. Make-up work will be assigned for any classes beyond the third absence. Please contact the Director ahead of time if you know your child will be missing more than 4 classes. Students in 1st and 7th grade sacramental preparation years who miss more the 4 classes may be required to attend make-up sessions during the following summer.

In the event of an emergency or illness parents are asked to call 331-316-4366 to inform us of your child/ren's absence.

ABUSED AND NEGLECTED CHILDREN

Faith Formation personnel are mandated reporters, and are required by law to follow DCFS guidelines in reporting any suspicions of abuse or neglect.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance is expected for the **full hour and thirty minutes of class each week**. Every class is important in the student's catechetical formation. The Catechist facilitates the formation of community, proclaims the Word, encourages service and leads the students in prayer each week. Each class builds upon the preceding class.

ARRIVAL TIME

Students are expected to arrive no more than ten minutes before class time. If you need to drop your child/ren off early, they may need to wait in the FF Office/main lobby area, until their Catechist arrives.

CELL PHONES

Cell phone use is prohibited when Faith Formation classes are in session. That means any cell phone:

- that rings, or
- is used as a phone or a camera, or
- to text message

may be claimed by the Catechist or the Assistant and sent to the Director's office. The parent will be required to retrieve the cell phone. It will not be returned to the student. Catechists may make the decision to collect all phones for the class period.



CELL PHONE LAW

Public Act 96-0131 went into effect January 1, 2010. **THIS LAW PROHIBITS ANY DRIVER, REGARDLESS OF AGE, FROM USING A CELL PHONE WHILE OPERATING A MOTOR VEHICLE IN A SCHOOL ZONE.** According to Secretary of State, distracted driving has become a serious problem in both our nation and our state. So please follow the law! There should be no cell phone usage in our parking lot or on Broadway St. in front of the school building. Keep our children safe!

CUSTODY ISSUES

If parents are divorced or separated, St. Mary Nativity Religious Education Program presumes that both parents have access to the children and their records unless one parent provides documentation that he or she has sole custody.

DELAYED PARENTS

If a parent is delayed in picking up their child, for the safety of the child, he/she will wait for pick-up with their catechist or the director in the Faith Formation Office.

DISMISSAL

EARLY DISMISSAL:

Requests for early dismissal create a major disturbance to the class. We strongly discourage this – even occasionally. The catechist may not dismiss any student from the classroom.

An Office Assistant will contact the catechist - when the parent arrives - and request that the student be sent to the office. **Parents are to come into the building to sign the child out and meet their child in the Faith Formation Office.**

It is recommended that parents schedule ALL extracurricular activities and appointments at a time that does not present a conflict with your child's Faith Formation classes. *We do not consider sports activities a valid reason for early dismissal.*

DRUG/ ALCOHOL ABUSE POLICY

We will tolerate no possession or use of drugs or alcohol on Parish property. Serious consequences (including possible suspension or expulsion) will be taken should there be any infraction of this policy. All Religious Education Staff Members, Catechists, and Volunteers shall immediately notify the office in the event that they observe any person in possession of/or under the influence of drugs/alcohol on school grounds.

FOOD POLICY

The St. Mary Nativity school building is a shared space. As such, the classrooms need to remain allergy free and safe for all. Therefore, food or snacks are not permitted in the classrooms. There may be instances where arrangements can be made for an activity involving food in the cafeteria or Nativity Room. **Please let us know if your child has any food allergies.**

Gum chewing is not permitted in the building at any time.

LATE ARRIVALS (TARDINESS)

Late arrivals are discouraged as they are disruptive to the class. Parents are requested to make every effort to have their children arrive on time for class sessions. **All tardy students must enter the building at door "J" in the North parking lot and come to the FF office to obtain a tardy slip.**

REGULAR DISMISSAL

Classes will end promptly at 10:45 a.m. A student will be released to either parent unless the Faith Formation Office has a copy of the court order giving one parent exclusive custody.

SECURITY

When dismissing from the school, we ask that the parents do not enter the building. Please wait outdoors for your child. Dismissal from the school building takes place at Doors "J" or "L" in the north parking lot.

In order to safeguard the well-being of our children during class time, our building doors will be locked at the beginning of class each week. Any person having business in the school building during these hours will be asked to come to the Faith Formation Office via Door "J" and sign in. All other doors are locked at all times.

WEAPONS POLICY

St. Mary Nativity takes seriously the safety and well being of students in our care. We will tolerate no possession of any type of weapon (whether real or make-believe) on parish property. Serious consequences (including possible suspension or expulsion) will be taken should there be any infraction of this policy. All Religious Education Staff members, catechists, and volunteers shall immediately notify the office in the event that they observe any person in possession of a firearm or weapon on school grounds.

DROP-OFF & DISMISSAL PROCEDURES FOR 2025-2026



Parents and guardians are urged to use extreme caution when dropping off or picking up their children. Please follow marked directions in the north parking lot. Faith Formation Staff, Catechists, and Assistants will help with drop-off and dismissal.

Enter through door "L" and proceed past the Church doors to the Nativity Room for the opening session and announcements. Children will then be brought to class.

Classes will be brought to Church for dismissal. Families are encouraged to attend 11 a. m. Mass. If you are not able to attend the 11 a.m. Mass, Please come into the Nativity Room to pick up your child(ren).

SACRAMENTS

Sacraments are sacred moments in a person's life as he/she encounters Jesus Christ. Preparation for the Sacraments are joint efforts on the part of the child, the parents, and the catechist. Class time, parent meetings, parent participation, retreats, and celebration experiences are all necessary ingredients for a meaningful initiation into these sacramental experiences.

Sacraments are typically celebrated in:

Grade 2: First Reconciliation and First Eucharist

Grade 8: Confirmation

First Reconciliation preparation begins in grade one and is further developed in grade two. There will be a group celebration in November for second grade children when the parents, in conjunction with the Pastor and Director, deem the child ready.

First Eucharist preparation begins in grade one and is further developed in grade two. Students must be enrolled for two years before reception of First Eucharist. The celebration of this sacrament usually takes place in second grade when the parents, in conjunction with the Pastor and Director, deem the child ready.

Preparation for the initial reception of sacrament(s) by children in grades three through eight will be arranged, using age-appropriate instructional materials and procedures, with the parents by the Director.

Confirmation preparation begins in grade seven (Year I) and continues through grade eight (Year II). The candidate must have completed two consecutive years of Faith Formation before they can be confirmed. If they have not taken Year I they will be required to do so.

There must be a desire and commitment to the requirements of the preparation programs and the Catholic faith on the part of the children and families preparing to receive sacraments.

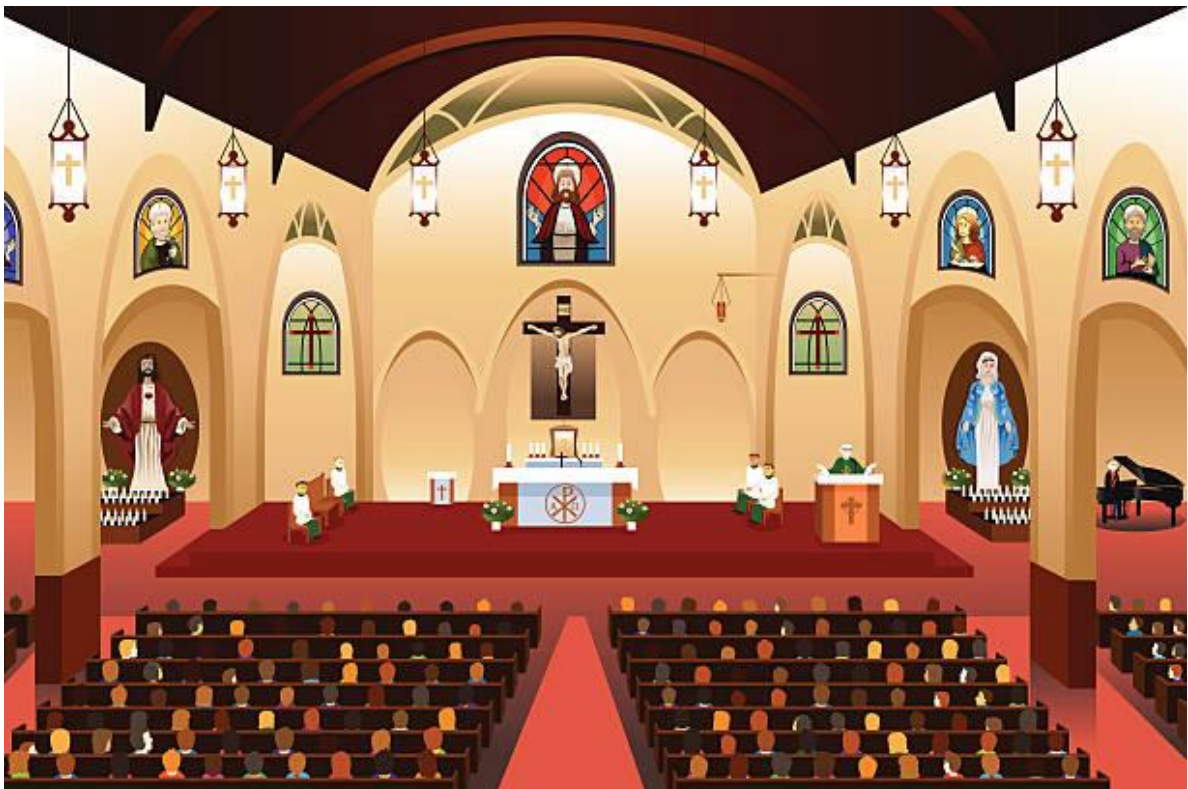


EUCCHARISTIC LITURGY

On the night before He died, Jesus directed us to remember Him by celebrating the Eucharist. It is the most important thing He told us to do. It is a GREAT blessing to be Catholic, that the God of the universe should humble Himself and take on the form of bread and wine, so to be intimately united to us. The Eucharist is the GREATEST gift we will ever receive! What a tremendous grace that we are called to share in this profound mystery of the Eucharistic meal, “the wedding feast of the lamb” (Rev. 19:9).

There is NOTHING more important in our whole life that we will ever do than go to Mass. God is so madly in love with us and longs to be with each one of us. We should have a great desire to want to attend Mass on Sunday, and as often as we can, to be so closely united to Our Lord. Mass is essential to coming to know God and growing in our relationship with Him. Parents, as the primary educators of their children, show by example their commitment to weekly participation in the Sunday Eucharist. May we help our children grow in love of God and the Eucharist by attending Mass on Sunday as a family.

Each week the children will complete some form of a **Mass Reflection** that they can obtain from their catechist. This is a great way for the children to pay attention and participate in the Sunday Liturgy. It provides a wonderful opportunity to discuss the Mass with your children so they will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the liturgy.



CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

CONDUCT

Students in Religious Education Classes are reminded that the rooms and desks they use for class are shared with other ministry groups and children programs within the parish. All are expected to respect the property of the school and other students. Parents are responsible for any damage to or theft of St. Mary Nativity property.

Good conduct, cooperation, attention, and courtesy are expected during class time. Any student who continually fails to cooperate with the Catechist and other students within a class shall be spoken to privately. A parent may be called in if necessary.

The Religious Education program defines serious misconduct as, but not limited to, fighting, stealing, cheating, and possession/use of drugs, weapons, and/or alcohol, disrespect to staff, gang involvement, vandalism, aggressive behavior, swearing, vulgarity, and possession of dangerous items.

OTHER EXPECTATIONS

1. The children will enter and exit school in an appropriate manner.
2. The Catechist must be present in the classroom before the students may enter.
3. Students will take assigned places in the classroom and need permission to leave their seats.
4. Coats and hats are not to be worn during class. There will be a designated place for coats and hats.
5. Modest attire is required. Wearing any of the following: suggestive logo or wording on t-shirts low-rise jeans that expose underwear, and low-cut tops may result in your child being sent home.
6. Catechists, assistants, and students should display mutual respect.
7. Students will raise their hands and wait for permission before speaking.
8. Textbooks and appropriate materials are required for each class.

HOMEWORK AND THE PARENT'S ROLE

It is our hope and expectation that parents worship with their children at Mass. Parents should be modeling their faith, talking about their faith and values and telling and re-telling stories about Jesus. Parents are asked to review what has been taught in class and help the children with any homework a Catechist may have assigned. Parents are also encouraged to take time to pray with their children and help them learn the traditional prayers.



CURRICULUM

Grades 1 through 8 will be using **Word of Life** published by Augustine Institute/Ignatius Press. Word of Life employs an engaging and relevant kerygmatic catechesis that young learners will enjoy through a blended learning model of textbook and engaging video enhancements. State-of-the-Art digital components that allow young learners and parents to interact with dynamic faith formation materials will be used both in the classroom and at home.

Word of Life uses a teach-the-teacher model that equips teachers to present lessons effectively and themselves to be more deeply formed in the faith as they teach. When teachers and catechists are well-formed and passionate about the content, everyone wins. It is an authentic and comprehensive program for both children and parents, providing complete family faith formation with Word of Life materials and the expansive digital library of Augustine Institute and Ignatius Press.

Addition Confirmation requirements will be discussed in a separate communication.

Grades 7 & 8 will also be issued a **Youcat**, a youth catechism that is written in language suitable for young people to understand the faith.

MASTERY OF CATHOLIC PRAYERS AND BELIEFS

<u>GRADE LEVEL</u>	<u>PRAYERS / BELIEFS</u>
1 st	Sign of the Cross Angel of God Glory Be Our Father Hail Mary Grace Before Meals
2 nd	Review 1 st grade prayers Morning Offering Act of Contrition
3 rd	Review 1 st and 2 nd grade prayers Apostles Creed Seven Sacraments
4 th	Review 1 st , 2 nd and 3 rd grade prayers and beliefs Ten Commandments Memorare to the Blessed Virgin
5 th	Review 1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd and 4 th grade prayers and beliefs Eight Beatitudes Prayers of the Mass Prayer to St. Michael
6 th	Review 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 th grades prayers and beliefs Nicene Creed
7 th	Review 1,2,3,4,5,and 6 th grades prayers and beliefs 7 Spiritual Works of Mercy 7 Corporal Works of Mercy
8 th	Review 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 th grade prayers and beliefs Gifts of the Holy Spirit Prayer to the Holy Spirit



Students may be periodically pulled from their regular classes to be individually tested on the recitation of the prayers listed.



**St. Mary Nativity
Faith Formation Office
706 N. Broadway St
Joliet, IL 60435**

2025-2026 Receipt and Acknowledgement

We, the _____ Family, have received and read the St. Mary Nativity Religious Education Handbook. We will support the procedures and policies therein.

A copy of the handbook can also be found on the parish web site www.stmarynativityholycross.com .

Childrens' Name(s): _____

Parent's Name: _____

Parent's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please sign and return this form to the Faith Formation Office by September 28, 2025.