

# Small Group Leader Handbook

These procedures are for the safety and well-being of our young people and volunteers. Please follow them carefully to help maintain safety, supervision, and sanity!

**Attendance:** Please take attendance on the provided form as the young people arrive. Attendance forms should be left in your mailbox in the Faith Formation office at the end of each class.

**Supplies:** Basic supplies will be provided in each room for writing and crafts. Other art supplies, including construction paper, tag board, and various craft supplies are available in the AV Room. The closet in the Faith Formation office holds extra supplies such as pens, pencils, glue, tape, scissors, etc. If you need more supplies for your classroom, we can get them for you or you can help yourself. If you would like to use outside books or videos/DVDs, please check with Faith Formation staff for prior approval.

**Room Responsibilities:** During the Faith Formation year, your room belongs to you and your group and many other groups during the week. You are expected to make sure that your young people clean up the space and return everything to its place each time. For your own benefit, please ask your group to help clean up! This includes vacuuming and washing the tables if needed as well as shelving supplies. There are carpet sweepers and electric vacuums in the AV Closet. You are also encouraged to hang up artwork or projects that your group has completed in your classroom or in the hallway. You're invited to **decorate** your room and to make the space warm, inviting, and child-centered. You can use supplies from the AV Room. **Be creative** with your use of the tables and chairs. To help emphasize that we are not stressing a school model, you may want to have the group sit on the floor or sit in a circle of chairs and leave the tables against the walls for use during projects and writing.

**Technology:** We are fortunate enough to have a screen and tablet in each of our meeting rooms. Please be responsible with these devices and handle them with care. There will be an instructional sheet on how to sync the tablet with the screen next to each TV. If you're having technical difficulties, bring it to the attention of a Faith Formation staff member. Be sure that both devices are powered down at the end of your session and return your tablet to your mailbox in the Faith Formation office.

**Bathroom Use:** Bathroom use may be necessary during class but try to minimize the distraction to your group by requesting that the young people go before they arrive and/or wait until after your main lesson has been completed. For younger grades, it's sometimes easiest to take the entire class to the bathroom, to avoid several interruptions. **ALWAYS** send two students for safety in PreK-5th. Even if one does not need to go, there should always be two together. If a child in your small group needs assistance using the bathroom and their parents are not in the building to help, please come find a second adult (a staff member or any other Virtus trained adult volunteer) so that two adults are present to ensure that there is no inappropriate behavior. Both adults do not need to be in the stall or in the bathroom with the child, just in the general area. Also, *all adult volunteers should use the bathroom in the Faith Formation office while there are children in the building* to avoid having adults and children in the bathroom at the same time.

**Cell Phones:** We understand that many of our young people bring cell phones to class, and that this is a part of life. However, we also feel that phones are a distraction for all of us, and that we need to free of distractions during class. **If your Small Group has issues keeping off their phones during the**

**session, feel free to collect them and return them at dismissal.**

**Communication:** Our primary form of communication with catechists and families will be email. There will occasionally be notes and updates in your mailbox or on the white board above the mailboxes. If you want to send an email or note home to your group, please ok it with the Faith Formation Coordinator in advance. This will ensure consistency and that you have the support of the staff for anything you send home in case there are parent questions or concerns.

**Discipline:** The Church of St. Gerard believes in the importance of the fact that the root word of *discipline* is *disciple (follower)*. Each of us is called to be Christ's follower. Each of us must make good choices about our actions and how we treat others. We want our events and programs to be **peaceful, safe, respectful and fun for all** and all of us have a responsibility for making this happen.

**Please follow these General Guidelines for Discipline:**

- For the most part **parents or the Catechist** in charge should help their child/ren maintain good self-discipline.
- If there is a young person **unable to maintain self-discipline** (especially after reminding them of the correct behavior) the student can be sent to the Faith Formation office for a break.
- When reminding young people of correct behavior, please be as **positive as possible**, remind them of discipleship, and do not use aggressive or threatening tones or words.
- If there is a persisting issue with one or more youth, bring it to the attention of the Faith Formation Staff. Staff will contact the parents and may schedule a meeting to discuss whether or not continued participation in the program is best for the child and others.
- **Never use physical force to correct behavior.**
- Young people should **never** be left unsupervised, especially during a problem behavior situation. Please send other young people or another volunteer for help if needed.

**Emergencies:** Please stay calm, stay with your group and use common sense in any emergency.

**Medical:** If a medical emergency happens in your room, immediately send for help and assist as your own first aid training allows. First Aid kits are available in each room. Please do not touch any bodily fluids. If the medical problem is serious, call 911.

**Fire:** Follow posted Fire Escape Routes. Stay with your group and **take your attendance sheet with you** so that we know who is present. Once you are in a safe location, take attendance and notify the Director of Faith Formation/other Formation Staff or the Fire Department if anyone is missing.

**Other:** Should there be an intruder, severe weather or any other kind of emergency, you should keep all group members in the room with the door closed and locked if possible until you are notified by a parish staff member or emergency personnel to leave/move locations.

**Accident Reporting:** Even minor accidents should be reported to Faith Formation staff. Bumped heads, cuts, scrapes, falls, etc. could turn out to be more serious than they first appear and for safety and liability, they need to be reported. Faith Formation staff are on hand to assist with any emergency accidents requiring medical help. Once the situation is dealt with, an Accident Report will be filled out by the adult who witnessed the accident or was immediately responsible for assistance. Accident Forms are available in the office.

**Safe Child Concerns:** As a catechist working directly with children, you are responsible for following all Archdiocesan and parish expectations for the safety of our young people. Sometimes, you

may find that our young people will confide in you and you may be told home information concerning possible abusive or otherwise harmful situations. You and the Faith Formation staff are mandatory reporters and must take proper steps to address any child safety issues. It is very important that you report any concerns to us as soon as possible so that we may take appropriate steps to notify authorities who will investigate the situation as needed. If in doubt, please speak to us and we will help you judge the situation so that our children may get assistance when needed.

**Open Door Policy:** If your Small Group meets in a room that doesn't have a window in the door (the Annex, Youth Room, Bride's Room, Music Room), please keep your door propped open. This is for the safety of our children and youth and so that Faith Formation Staff can monitor each room without interrupting your group.

**Severe Weather:** Living in Minnesota, winter severe weather is to be expected! In general, since most families live in the immediate neighborhood, programs will be held in spite of snow and cold. When the conditions are severe enough that we must cancel due to safety concerns on a weekday, please pay attention to the media and **if Anoka/Hennepin School District 11 is CLOSED or CLOSING for afterschool activities, we will be closed for programs that day.** A cancellation notice will be emailed to you at least two hours ahead of the session time and it will also be posted on the St. Gerard Facebook page. A Push Notification will usually be sent out on the parish app.

**Special Needs:** In respecting the dignity of all people, we include and support special needs learners in our programs. As part of this, we use the parents as experts on their child, adapt curriculum and class placement as needed, and include helpers for that child when necessary. Small Group Leaders will be informed in advance of any special needs of which we are aware. If after the first few classes, you feel that you are not equipped to accommodate the student with special needs, please contact a member of Faith Formation staff to arrange a meeting with the parent, staff member, and yourself to assess the situation. We will also assist with on-going evaluation of how the child is doing in the group and provide alternative support or arrangements when needed. Please remember that any information is to be kept **confidential**. If other children in the group seem to have concerns or questions regarding the child, please let the Faith Formation staff know so that we can help with addressing the issues. Many times, adaptations that work well for special needs learners actually work very well with the whole group (i.e. hands-on learning or a special quiet time) so if possible, the whole group should be doing the same thing. Compassion and understanding are key words in this process and we appreciate your assistance with this.

**Food in the Classroom:** As a general rule, we ask you do not bring snacks/treats into class. Food can be a distraction to the lesson, and there are several children/youth in our program with food allergies. However, if you would like to bring treats the session before Christmas break or the final session of the year, you are welcome to do so. If you plan to bring in treats, please be aware of any food allergies in your class. Please check the food label on any treats you bring in. **We have a strict no nut policy in all of our faith formation programs. Do not bring any food that contains nuts.**

**Dismissal:** Parents will be asked to wait until the end of the session to take their child/youth with them. If a parent needs to take their child early, please have them get in touch with a member of Faith Formation staff. **Do not allow** anyone to take a child anywhere unless it is previously arranged as part of the activity or you have confirmed that it is the proper person to take the young person somewhere. If someone other than the parent is to pick up the child, the parent should notify a Faith Formation staff member. Please wait for the dismissal time to end class—do not end early!