

2011-2012 Jr. High Youth Ministry PARENT HANDBOOK

September, 2011

Dear Parents,

Living in the present age is a daunting task even for those well equipped with faith and faith understanding. We do not know all the challenges our children will have to face as they reach adulthood. The greatest favor we can do for them is to help them form a strong personal relationship with God and teach them what Jesus taught us.

As Pope Paul VI insisted, the gospel is really attractive, the truth is desirable. We must not be like a light put under a bushel basket, but a light that shines in the darkness. This requires faith and faith formation. It is never too early to start, or too late to continue.

My great thanks to the wonderful, caring catechists who give so much time to our children. Let us all share the work of teaching as Jesus did.

Sincerely,

Father Paul

To all members and their parents,

It's with much excitement that I welcome you to the Journey Program, new and returning families. St. Margaret Mary Parish offers an outstanding program for 6th, 7th, and 8th graders. Junior High is such an important time in a young person's life. It's a time that includes friends, decisions, hurdles, joys, confusion, and countless opportunities. God offers Himself **SO** generously to each of us - all we need to do is respond to His invitation. Journey is a place that examines and embraces that invitation.

Young people are gifted with humor, curiosity, compassion, intellect, and much more. Our adult community is responsible for calling forth and affirming their gifts. Parents, part of every Journey session begins in Church with Gospel reflection from the previous Sunday. Please make every effort to allow your student weekly opportunities to worship

You are always welcome to contact me with questions, concerns, ideas, or just to say "hey!" I'm looking forward to this year.

God's Peace,
Patti Guare, Director
Junior High Ministry

JUNIOR HIGH YOUTH MINISTRY

Welcome to the Journey Program . . .

The Junior High Youth Ministry program of Saint Margaret Mary is based on meeting the spiritual, social, and faith development needs of junior high teens. The program has been named the “Journey Program” in that junior high teens begin a journey of getting to know themselves in and outside of their homes, their talents and gifts, the meaning of friendship, and their role in our church community. The goal of the Journey Program is to help young adolescents develop a positive self identity as unique individuals created and loved by God. The program is designed to help teens engage in healthy relationships with others by participating and contributing to our Catholic Christian community. The Journey Program incorporates four different components in an attempt to meet the developmental needs of early adolescence. These components are Word, Community, Service and Prayer.

All Junior High teens, whether attending parochial or public school, are encouraged to attend the Journey Program as a means of living our Christianity and becoming active participants in the Saint Margaret Mary community. The program is a great way for teens to meet other junior high teens and to develop friendships based on their faith and Catholic beliefs. We believe that faith development begins in the home and extends into the Journey Program. Parental involvement is highly encouraged, and parents are welcome to participate in some of the scheduled events with their teen.

Threads -- Generations of Faith

The Junior High Journey Program continues to support the entire St. Margaret Mary Parish Community in its continuation of *Threads*, an intergenerational religious education program. These evenings are opportunities to come to the church as a family to pray, eat, and grow closer to God. *Threads* will be held on October 14th, December 9th, and February 10th. We all have something to share!

Three Year Track Program

A three-year track is offered for Junior High teens, with mini-courses related to the faith themes of: Church, Jesus or the Gospel message, morality and moral decision-making, personal growth, relationships, social justice, and abstinence. Interwoven with these are retreats, service and social events which provide a holistic and balanced youth ministry program. The Journey Program schedule is designed to follow the District 203 school calendar and vacations.

At each grade level, the teens will cover three different topics, each lasting six to seven weeks. The topics for each grade level are as follows:

6th Grade: “*Becoming Friends*”, “*Celebrating the Eucharist*” & “*Exploring the Bible*”

7th Grade: “*Exploring the Story of Israel*”, “*Making Decisions*” & “*Building Up Life*”

8th Grade: “*Being Catholic*”, “*Praying*” & “*Dealing with Tough Times*”

Retreats

A Retreat is scheduled for each grade level (6, 7 & 8) on Saturdays in the Upper Room beginning with a pizza lunch at noon and ending by attending the 5 PM Mass. In between, we will have opportunities for ice-breakers, small and large group discussions and activities, snacks and prayer. While Journey Retreats are optional, they are highly recommended. Dates for this year's retreats are:

6th Grade: Saturday, January 28, 2012

7th Grade: Saturday, March 3, 2012

8th Grade: Saturday, April 14, 2012

Program Leaders

The success of the Journey Program depends on the leadership and support of parents, leaders, and parishioners. Oftentimes this age level is not given the time and attention that they deserve. We need to foster teaching faith development at this stage when teens are questioning their roles and the role of God in their lives. The volunteers who work with the teens are parents and adults who dedicate their time and efforts in sharing their faith with the junior high teens. They act as small group leaders and foster a positive environment to discuss the Catholic teachings and questions that arise with the teens. Effective teaching requires that leaders are open to what teens have to say without being judgmental. The leader's sharing of personal experiences related to the topic can be very profitable. Leaders are trained and given the necessary materials and supplements to lead the classroom discussions. They also must complete a "Protecting God's Children" workshop offered here at St. Margaret Mary and at numerous other sites around the Diocese.

If you are a parent of a junior high teen and are interested in working with our parish's young teens, please call Patti at 369-0833. We are always in need of young adults and adults willing to be mentors and role models and, more importantly, who are open to the ideas and needs of this age group.

Parental Volunteer Help

If you are not ready to be a Journey Leader, but want to volunteer in the program, please consider helping us out as a Nursery Helper or Office Worker. These volunteer opportunities can be done during your teen's regularly scheduled time. If you are interested or have questions about these volunteer opportunities, we welcome your call.

Journey Class Schedule

Journey meets throughout the school year on a weekly basis. The class is one hour long. Teens are asked to be on time as an hour goes by very quickly. **Teens participate in large group prayer at the beginning of the hour in the church and are then dismissed to their classrooms.** The program begins the week of September 10th and ends the week of April 30th.

Our 6th, 7th, and 8th Graders have three options for attending:

- Mondays, 4:30-5:30 pm
- Mondays, 7:00-8:00 pm
- Thursdays, 4:30-5:00 pm

Junior High Mission Trip

The Junior High Mission Experience is jointly sponsored by parishes in the Aurora/Naperville Youth Ministry Cluster. The Mission is 3 days during the summer for students entering 7th, 8th, or 9th grades. Each day includes work at a designated site, prayer, reflection, recreation and of course, meals. Service activities can include, but are not necessarily limited to, painting, child care, yard work, cleaning, etc. Students may register to attend one, two or all three days. Exact dates and sites will be published in Spring, 2012.

Social Events

Social events offered this year are the annual ski trip to Four Lakes Village in Lisle in February and trips to Great America and Raging Waves Water Park during the summer. Large Group events during regular class time often end with pizza and/or ice cream sundaes.

Large Group Events

At every grade level, the Journey Program will offer several large group events designed to supplement the topic being covered in the class room. The events are facilitated by outside speakers, our parish priests and staff.

Service Projects

All Journey students are required to participate on *Harvest Sunday* (Nov 13, 2011) and *Operation Wrap* (Dec 12, 2011). A *Feed My Starving Children* packing session has been scheduled for January 13, 2012.

Home Study Option

If a junior high teen is unable to attend the regularly scheduled time, we encourage the parents and teens to purchase the student handbooks and materials being covered in the class and to proceed with the home study option. In this case, the parent and teen need to make a commitment to get together for an hour each week to review each topic. A teen that is on home study is able to join us in all of our large group events by registering with the Religious Education office the week of the event. E-mails will be sent to remind you of the dates of Large Group events. Please be advised that the home study option is not the best way to encourage and develop friendships and community among the teens of our parish.

Discipline Policy

Leaders are strongly encouraged to develop their own classroom rules in order to facilitate the learning process. These rules are discussed and agreed upon by each teen at the beginning of the year. Once the classroom rules are established, teens are asked to sign a Contract of Conduct & Participation that must be signed by the teen, parent and leader. We encourage parents to verbally review the classroom rules with the teen and to agree to abide by these rules by signing the contract. The first time that classroom rules are violated, the teen will be sent to see Patti. If the disruptive behavior is continued, the teen will be sent down to see Patti and a phone call will be made to the parents. If there is a third incident of disruption, the teen will be asked to come in with his/her parents for a conference with Patti and the leader and the option of home study will be seriously considered.