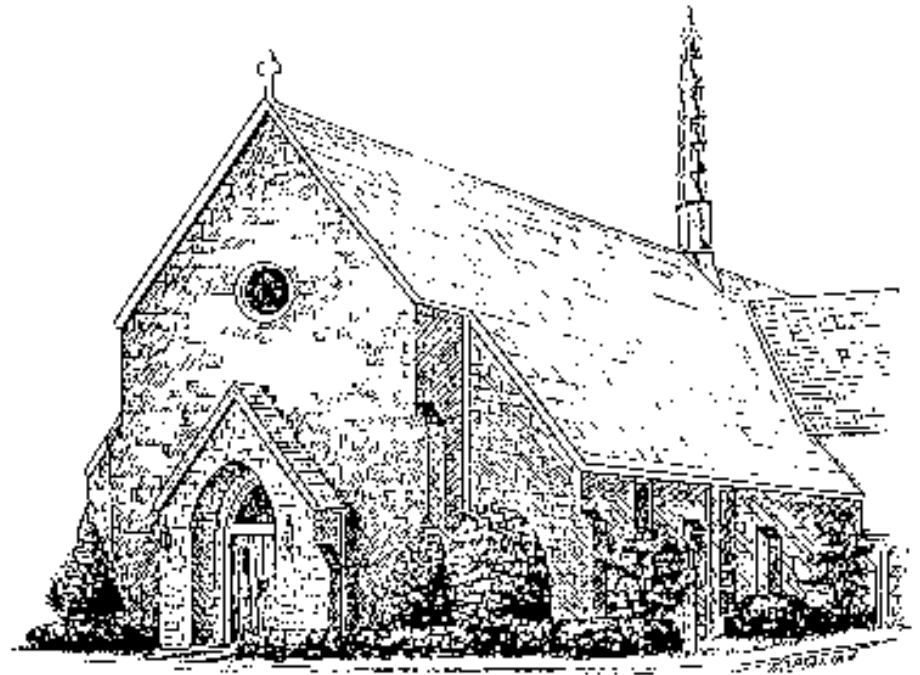


Parent / Student Handbook



Church of St. Mark, Evangelist
695 Smithson Ave.
Erie, PA 16511

The Catholic Church has issued many documents that describe the ministry of catechesis. This program is based upon the principles and guidelines found in these documents. *The General Directory for Catechesis*, *The National Catechetical Directory*, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* as well as diocesan statements on the ministry of catechesis provides a framework for our parish programs. The following is a summary of the most important directives provided by these documents and a clarification of how they help guide the catechetical program in this parish.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* quotes Pope John Paul II from *Catechesi Tradendae* as he describes what is entailed in the ministry of catechesis:

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. *CCC*, #5

The National Catechetical Directory further clarifies what elements should be a part of a quality catechetical program:

Like other pastoral activities, catechetical ministry must be understood in relation to Jesus' threefold mission. It is a form of the ministry of the word, which proclaims and teaches. It leads to and flows from the ministry of worship, which sanctifies through prayer and sacrament. It supports the ministry of service, which is linked to efforts to achieve social justice... *NCD*, #32

Guided by the principles found in the documents of the Church on the ministry of catechesis, the catechetical program of this parish will include the following elements:

Message

The story of Scripture and the teachings of the Church will be communicated within the context of the faith story of each student and the signs of the times.

Community

Efforts will be made to form Christian community among the students through interaction and faith sharing.

Worship

The participants will experience many forms of prayer and worship to help them become prayerful people.

Service

Participants will be called to service and justice, which is inherent in the message of Jesus and the teachings of the Church.

Field Trips

If a field trip is planned parents will be notified at least two weeks prior to the event. All activities or field trips will have a catechetical purpose. For each scheduled "off campus" field trip, a permission slip signed by the parent and this confidential / release form will be required for each student participating. There will be at least one adult chaperone for every 10 children above fourth grade, and one adult for every 5 children, fourth grade or younger accompanying the group. If cars are used, drivers must be over 25 years of age. A copy of the driver's license and registration must be obtained and certified to be current along with proof of current insurance.

Safety Procedures for Fires & Other Emergencies

There are safety procedures posted in each room for fire and tornado emergencies. Catechists will instruct the students in these procedures the first week of class. In case of fire or a tornado, attendance will be taken after an emergency evacuation and no child will be dismissed without their parent or guardian. Parent(s) must check with the religious education leader before leaving with their child to avoid unnecessary search and rescue operations.

Sickness

Should a student become ill while in class, parent(s) will be contacted according to the information provided on the student medical form. If the parent is unavailable, attempts will be made to reach the backup person listed. The religious education leader will make every effort to keep the child comfortable until he/she is picked up. Medications will not be administered to the child.

Medications

Children are not to bring medications with them to religious education classes without advance permission of the religious education leader. It is the responsibility of parent(s) to notify the religious education leader immediately of any changes in allergies or dietary restrictions.

Injury

Catechists are asked to report any injury to the religious education leader immediately. If an injury occurs, first aid will be administered in strict accordance with the *Blood-borne Pathogens* regulations of the Diocese of Erie and the parent(s) will be contacted. If the injury requires immediate medical attention, the religious education leader will call the appropriate emergency services, followed by a call to the parent(s). A first aid kit is available in the religious education office.

If an injury or an incident of violence involves an exchange of bodily fluids (for example, as in a wound which breaks the skin), the student(s) will be asked to submit to medical tests for transmittable diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis B as recommended by a doctor. These tests will be at the parent(s) expense. In the name of being a community of Christians motivated by care and respect, this policy asks that the results of these tests, which are governed by guidelines of strict confidentiality, be openly shared with the respective parties on a need-to-know basis.

Mission Statement

St. Mark Religious Education Program exists to facilitate sound, age appropriate educational opportunities that support full, active, conscious participation and celebration of the Catholic Faith. We support and encourage the entire community's learning, living, and sharing the wisdom revealed in Scripture and Sacred tradition.

Vision Statement

We will offer diverse faith building experiences to teach, guide, empower and challenge each other to develop a deeper relationship with God, self, family and community. All who experience the St. Mark Religious Education Program will feel welcomed and vital to the Parish Family and cherish their Catholic faith.

Program Goals

St. Mark the Evangelist Parish strives to be a Christian community faithful to the Gospel and the Catholic Tradition. The parish is, in reality, a community of communities, all united in the endless struggle and search to know, love and serve God, self and one another. The goals of St. Mark's catechetical program are:

- ✠ To provide a program of formal religious instruction for the children and youth of the parish
- ✠ To support parents in their role as primary educators of their children
- ✠ To offer sacramental preparation to children and youth
- ✠ To help youth discover the richness and challenges of Scripture and the teachings and traditions of the Catholic Church
- ✠ To build a strong Catholic identity among the youth of the parish
- ✠ To allow youth to experience the Church as community
- ✠ To deepen the prayer life of children and youth
- ✠ To motivate youth to live lives rooted in charity and justice based on the moral teachings of the church
- ✠ To expose students to the liturgical and sacramental richness that is part of the Catholic Tradition
- ✠ To enable students to become responsible, self-reflecting, loving and praying individuals
- ✠ To make programs that meet diverse spiritual needs available to adults of the parish.

The Role of Parent(s)

It is the role of the parish to assist parents in nurturing the faith of their children. Parent(s) who enroll their children in the parish catechetical program will be assisted and enabled in their role as the primary educators of their children. Parent(s) are encouraged to approach the staff with ideas to meet specific needs in raising healthy and holy Catholic children and youth.

At the same time, it is essential that parents cooperate with the parish and work with those who are the designated leaders of the parish program. Parents are asked to fulfill the following expectations in order to promote the faith growth of the children and youth and to insure a quality program. A parent(s) who would like their child to attend the program:

- ✚ Must be a registered member of a parish.
- ✚ Is responsible for providing the parish with information regarding the child's baptism and other sacraments if applicable.
- ✚ Attends Mass weekly with the child.
- ✚ Takes responsibility for their role as primary educator.
- ✚ Collaborates with the catechists in the program by sharing faith with the child (ren) at home and by making sure the child does any required follow-up to the lessons taught in class.
- ✚ Teaches the child the traditional prayers of the Church at home.
- ✚ Maintains an open line of communication with the child's catechist.
- ✚ Brings the child to class at the prescribed time and picks them up promptly at the conclusion of class.
- ✚ Makes sure the child enters the building where classes are held and goes to the classroom.
- ✚ Brings his/her child to class dressed appropriately, ready to participate.
- ✚ Attends parent meetings when requested.
- ✚ Is supportive of the catechist, especially in the area of discipline.
- ✚ Reads this handbook, completes and turns in the forms necessary for registration.
- ✚ Informs the religious education leader of the rights of the non-custodial parent in the case of divorce. This is essential to ensure that the program acts in the best interest and safety of the child (ren).
- ✚ Informs the religious education leader of any pertinent medical and emergency information.

and individuals will be encouraged to seek legal protection when necessary.

The term "harassment" refers to behavior that is not welcome, that is personally offensive and that fails to treat others with dignity and respect. It includes treating someone unfavorably because of his or her race, sex, creed, color, age or disability. Harassment may take the form of discrimination, unwelcome or critical comments or action. Harassment on the basis of sex might include unwelcome sexual advances, requests or demand for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct, including, but not limited to:

- ✚ Verbal conduct such as epithets, derogatory jokes or comments, slurs or unwanted sexual advances, intimations or comments
- ✚ Visual contact such as derogatory and/or sexually oriented posters, photography, cartoons, drawings or gestures
- ✚ Physical contacts such as assault, unwanted touching, blocking normal movements, or interfering with work, studies or play because of sex
- ✚ Retaliations for having reported or threatened to report such harassment

The term "sexual harassment" refers to harassment based on the gender of the offended individual when the people involved are of different "levels" within the parish. It involves threats and demands to submit to sexual requests as a condition of employment, grades or other benefits or to avoid some other loss and offers of benefits in return for sexual favors. It also means creating a hostile environment for the student or employee such that it is an unfit environment for learning or work. Examples include, but are not limited to repeated unwelcome sexual advances, repeated sexually explicit jokes or comments, or the displaying of sexually inappropriate materials.

Allegations and complaints of any type of harassment must be reported as soon as possible. Parent(s) who become aware of incidents of sexual harassment should report them immediately to the pastor or to the religious education leader.

Cancellation of Classes

Classes may be canceled from time to time because of inclement weather. The following direction for parent(s) is offered: **IF THE LOCAL SCHOOLS ARE CANCELLED OR DISMISSED EARLY, THERE WILL BE NO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CLASSES.** To find out if classes are cancelled, parent(s) should listen for reports on radio stations Classy 100, Star 104 and TV stations WJET, WICU, and WSEE. Cancellations will also be posted on the St. Mark Parish Facebook Page.

an alternative method of religious education will be negotiated with the parent(s) for the remainder of the year. Judgments about re-admittance to the program for the following year will be made on a case by case basis and this decision is at the sole discretion of the pastor.

Threats of Violent Behavior

As a community of believers who value patience over aggression, and love above all else, it is inconsistent with our basic values to tolerate an environment of threat or fear. Threats of harm made against another individual or group of individuals are not acceptable and will not be tolerated.

This policy recognizes that in any community of people there will always be some conflict. Students will always be encouraged to manage their conflict in a positive, non-aggressive manner. Behavior such as cursing, pushing or fighting will not be tolerated.

In cases which are deemed by the catechist or religious education leader to be “minor” (meaning: no reason to believe the situation would lead to physical harm) the students will be separated and encouraged to work out their differences after a “cool-down” period.

If the catechist regards the altercation as “serious” (meaning reasonable expectation that the conflict will lead to physical harm) the students will be immediately separated, the religious education leader will be notified, and the parent(s) of the students will be called. The religious education leader must determine that the conflict is resolved before the students will be readmitted to the program.

Students are expected to report to their catechist or religious education leader any threat made by a student, which mentions the killing of any person. Such threats will be immediately reported to the police for investigation. The student making such threats will be suspended from the program until such time as the police investigation is completed and the appropriate authorities are satisfied that there is no real threat of harm. In such a case, judgments about re-admittance to the program will be made on a case by case basis and this decision is at the sole discretion of the pastor.

Harassment

Respect for the dignity and worth of each individual is a basic precept of Catholic doctrine and therefore of St. Mark’s parish. Each person is entitled to work in an environment free from discriminatory practices such as any form of harassment based on race, sex, creed, color, age, or disability including sexual harassment. Parish leadership wishes to be vigilant regarding harassment whether between or among catechists and/or parish leaders, among students or between catechists/parish leaders and students. Such behavior will not be tolerated and if persistent harassment is proven, the offender will be dismissed when this is appropriate. Harassment of all forms is illegal as well as immoral

Elementary Program

St. Mark’s Kindergarten through 5th Religious Education provides a welcoming environment for children to grow closer to God and learn more about their Catholic Faith. Classes are offered on 2 different sessions, either Sunday from 9:00 –10:15 am or Wednesday from 3:45 – 5:00 pm. Every class participates in their own special Liturgy, which all class members are encouraged to attend with their families. Every member of the class has a special part in the Liturgy appropriate to their age. Each school year, we hold special Penance Celebrations at Advent and Lent. We also celebrate the Sacraments of 1st Penance and Eucharist, along with Annual Retreats.

The children have also been involved in special projects such as being pen pals with children from a Bible Camp in Appalachia Kentucky, and a troop of Marines stationed in Iraq. The children also sent Christmas gifts to "their" Marines and school supplies to the children of Iraq. Every year, we also do a "change challenge", during Lent, supporting whatever causes the Parish chooses. If you would like more information please feel free to contact the Parish Office.

Jr. / Sr. High Program

Grades 6, 7 and 8 meet twice a month; once a month on a Sunday evening for class from 6:00 until 8:00 in the Ward Center and once a month for an extended youth ministry session which combines opportunities for community service, retreats, community building and more. Grade 10 students are invited into a 3 year Confirmation preparation program held in the catechists homes. The Home Sessions times for Grades 9 – 11 can vary and are determined by the Home Session leaders. The Advent and Lenten Penance Celebrations are part of our curriculum and counted as a class. Grade Level Retreats are an important part of our curriculum and are mandatory. Overnight retreats, lock-ins, etc. offered for the different grade levels are optional (except for 11th grade) but have proven to be very successful so all are encourage participate. Participation by all students is also expected at the Lenten Soup Suppers hosted by their grade. Another key aspect of our program is community building so all teens are encouraged to be involved in the other youth activities offered whenever possible.

Admission Policies

St. Mark's religious education program does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, national origin, religion, physical or mental challenges.

Any family that is registered in St. Mark parish may enroll their children in the catechetical program. In order for their children to be admitted, the family must complete the appropriate registration and student information forms and indicate that they have read and accept the policies contained in this handbook. These forms are available from the religious education office or at the church office.

Students are typically enrolled in the grade in which they are currently attending in school, unless other arrangements are made with the religious education leader. An exception to this may be necessary to meet specific requirements for sacramental preparation.

A general registration session for all children is held each August. Families who wish to enroll their children at other times during the year may do so by contacting the religious education leader.

Registration Fees

One Child	\$30
Two Children	\$55
Three or more children	\$75
Non-parishioner	\$75 per child
Wednesday Child Care fee	\$15 per child

No student will be prevented from attending because of his/her parents' inability to pay. An inquiry to either the pastor or the religious education leader is all that is necessary to have fees excused. Please know that this is offered in the spirit of a community called to assist one another in love. Registration fees are non-refundable after the start of classes.

Parents and Catechists

Catechists that teach the classes in the religious education program are volunteers. The parish has made every effort to screen them to insure that they are capable of handling the responsibility involved in this ministry. The parish also offers training courses that increase the skills needed for the catechists to be successful. The religious education leader supervises the catechists in order to help them fulfill their responsibility. As parents you are asked to recognize the challenges involved in being a volunteer catechist and to support them in whatever ways possible. If any problems arise however, please first contact the catechist to discuss the situation. If that does not lead to a satisfactory resolution, please contact the religious education leader. All parishioners have the right to final recourse from the pastor of the parish.

As a last recourse, when a conflict between a student and catechist cannot be resolved, the parent(s) will be asked to finish the year at home with the child. The child will be treated, as one who is being homeschooled and the parish will follow the Diocesan guidelines concerning homeschooling.

The child will be admitted into the program in the next calendar year with no prejudice. The religious education leader or pastor retains the right to make exceptions to the disciplinary procedures.

Child Protection Policy

St. Mark's pastor and religious education leader are required by the Pennsylvania Revised Code and Diocesan Policy on Child Protection to report suspected or actual child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. All other staff members of St. Mark's, both paid and volunteer are bound by Christian conscience to report suspected or actual child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. All parish staff and volunteers who work with children are required to have clearances from the State Police (Criminal Record Check – PA Act 34) and the Department of Public Welfare (Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance – PA Act 151). All staff, paid and volunteer, participates in an in-service training on child protection, identification of child abuse and reporting procedures. Creating a safe environment for children is a requirement of the Gospel since Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs" (Matthew 19:14).

Weapons Policy

In order to ensure a safe and Christian environment, it is forbidden for anyone to possess a weapon or any object/material/substance that could be used as a weapon or confused with a real weapon by any reasonable person (toy guns, etc.) in the buildings, or within the geographic boundaries of St. Mark Parish or in any location used by the parish to conduct any catechetical activity, or in any conveyance providing transportation to or from any activity related to the religious education program.

Weapons or potential weapons will be confiscated by the religious education leader when this action does not place the religious education leader in danger. If the student has used a weapon against another person or will not surrender the weapon or offending object/material/substance immediately and willingly, the local police will be called first, followed by notification of the parent(s). This is a zero tolerance policy.

Any student who violates this policy will be subject to immediate parish disciplinary action over and above any civil/criminal action brought by injured parties.

The student will be removed from the religious education class and

Discipline

Everyone involved in the program is challenged by the words and example of Jesus to respect each person's right to be treated not only with dignity and respect but also with love. In order to provide for a safe and well ordered program, in which students and catechists can learn to follow Jesus' call to love, some rules for behavior are necessary. Students are expected by their behavior to make the classes safe and positive experiences for themselves and their classmates. The program exists for student growth and in turn students are expected to carry out the following responsibilities:

- ✠ Show respect to catechists, other students and program personnel
- ✠ Treat the property, good name and physical safety of others with respect
- ✠ Be present only in the areas of the building for which they have permission at a specific time
- ✠ Act in a safe manner in and around the building
- ✠ Use voice and display actions in a manner appropriate for a classroom
- ✠ Be respectful of the study time of others
- ✠ Use of or possession of illegal drugs, alcohol, or tobacco is strictly prohibited. Such items will be seized and parents notified immediately. The child will be immediately removed from the environment.

Good discipline is self-discipline and is always aimed toward growth. We recognize that children may make mistakes and the role of the catechist at times will be one of guiding and correcting those mistakes in a positive manner. These corrections will always be done with the best interest of the child in mind and at no time will St. Mark's accept the demeaning or intimidation of children in the name of discipline.

Disciplinary Process

At the time of the first correction, the student will be warned.

Students whose behavior becomes a continual problem in the classroom will be sent out of class to the religious education leader. Anytime a student is sent from class for disciplinary reasons their parent(s) will be contacted either by phone, in person, or in writing.

If the student's behavior continues to be a problem, the student will be removed from class and the parent(s) will be contacted again. In order to return to the classroom, the student and parent(s) will meet with the catechist and religious education leader to resolve the issues. At this time the parent(s) may be asked to sit in on the class for a few weeks to observe their child and his/her interaction with the catechist and other students.

Attendance

Children who are enrolled in the parish catechetical program are expected to be in attendance for each scheduled class session. It is the responsibility of parent(s) to insure their presence. If your child is to be absent, you are asked to contact the religious education office in advance. Attendance will be taken weekly and the parent(s) will be called by an office volunteer if the child is absent and we have not received prior notification. Consideration is taken for those children who are not able to attend each week due to visitation with a non-custodial parent. If this situation applies to your child you are asked to contact the religious education leader so accommodations can be made.

Missed Classes

Each class session builds on the material covered in preceding classes. Children who are absent miss a great deal and will have to make up the material covered in the missed class.

Arrival & Dismissal

Classes are held in the Ward Center. Parent(s) are asked to bring their children before the start of classes. Supervision will be provided for students during the stated class times. The program is not responsible for supervising children arriving more than 15 minutes early (*Child care is available on Wednesdays prior to class*) for the activity or for the children 15 minutes after dismissal. Please do not drop off children more than 15 minutes before classes are scheduled to begin, and please pick up your child promptly at the end of class. Children are to be picked up only by parent(s) or their designee. Parent(s) are to notify the religious education leader if someone other than the parent or designee is to pick up their children. While all reasonable attention will be given to car-pools and the like, the police will be notified immediately if a child is seen leaving in a car not recognized by the religious education leader or catechist.

Class Schedule

Elementary classes are held on Wednesday afternoons from 3:45 - 5:00 or Sunday mornings from 9:00 - 10:15. Grades 6,7& 8 meet on Sunday evenings from 6:00 - 8:00. Home Session times and day vary. Grade 12 meets bimonthly at a time determined at the beginning of each school year. The calendar of classes gives the starting and ending dates, along with all breaks.

Classroom Visits

Parent(s) are permitted and encouraged to visit their children's classroom at any time. They are required to sign in with the program leader before entering the classroom.

Homework

Catechists are encouraged to assign work for the children to do at home with the assistance of their parent(s). Parent(s) are encouraged to ask their children about homework after each class period.

Attendance & Performance Records

Attendance and Performance records will be kept on file for each student and are confidential. The religious education leader, pastor and current catechist only have access to these records. Parents may make an appointment with the religious education leader to review their child's records at any time.

Baptismal Certificates

Families with children who were not baptized at this parish are requested to bring a copy of the baptismal certificate, along with any other sacramental records, when they initially enroll their child in the program. Children who have not been baptized will be accepted into the program provided the family intends to have them baptized and is willing to enroll them in the children's initiation program.

Curriculum

Textbooks and other materials used in the classrooms of St. Mark's are in conformity with the teachings found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and offer catechists the resources necessary to conduct classes, which include all the elements of the ministry of catechesis. All of the texts have been evaluated and found acceptable by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Catechism of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Parents who would like to examine the text material should contact the religious education leader or the pastor.

Home-schooling

Home-schooling is only permitted with special permission granted by the pastor and must follow the policies and guidelines of the Diocese of Erie.

Sacraments/Liturgy

Participation in religious education or a Catholic school during the preceding year is a pre-requisite for enrollment in all Sacramental preparation programs at St. Mark's. The parish follows the diocesan policies for sacrament preparation.

Children are prepared for the Sacrament of Reconciliation during second grade. The preparation involves parent meeting[s], a retreat day, catechesis at home, along with classroom preparation as found in the regular classroom text. First Reconciliation will be held during a Lenten Family/Communal Reconciliation Service. Two other opportunities for Reconciliation are provided through the religious education program during Advent and Lent. Parents are encouraged to bring their child to the Sacrament of Penance at other times.

Students are prepared for First Holy Communion in the third grade. The preparation involves parent meeting[s], a retreat day, along with regular classroom instruction. First Holy Communion is celebrated during a weekend mass at the end of April or the first weekend of May.

Confirmation is celebrated for students in the 12th grade at St. Mark's. The preparation begins in 9th grade and involves home session meetings, two day retreats, one overnight retreat, an evening of reflection and a parent meeting as well as twenty-five hours of service to the parish and/or parish community. Confirmation is celebrated in the Fall on a date set by the Bishop. These dates are typically announced toward the end of January or early February.

Celebration of Liturgy & Liturgical Year

In an attempt to help children and youth understand more deeply the power and mystery of the sacred liturgy, they will be given the opportunity to celebrate the seasons of the liturgical year. Youth will also be given opportunities to plan and celebrate paraliturgies (prayer services) and Eucharistic liturgies (Mass). Insofar as is possible, parent (s) will be notified of such occasions and will be invited to attend.

Student Assessment

St. Mark's participates in the Diocese of Erie Student Assessment that involves Grades 5, 8, and 11 completing a national Assessment instrument in the spring every third year. The Assessment tool has been referenced to the diocesan curriculum as well as to national textbook series. The Assessment provides information concerning specific strengths and weaknesses of the program. Students are assessed on knowledge, attitudes and practices.

We need to always recognize that there is a difference between faith and information about faith. These assessment instruments measure "information about faith" not faith itself. Faith is about a relationship with God in which one comes to love God in return for God's love already shown.