

August 28, 2016

Dear Parents,

Welcome to the St Matthew Youth Ministry program!

The formation of our faith as Catholics is a life-long endeavor that isn't fully complete until we come face-to-face with Jesus Christ at the final judgment. This life long journey requires constant care and learning, with our mind and our heart, to better understand the will of God and conform our hearts to the heart of Christ.

As parents, you are blessed with the gift of children from God. You are the first and most important teachers for your children, and in your role as parents, you are called by God to teach and mold them in our faith, to introduce them to and help them grow in love with Jesus Christ. You are by no means alone in this most important task. Our Church assists parents in their role as teachers through the many programs that we have, supporting faith formation and development across the many stages of life. The Youth Ministry program is focused on high school students and the challenges they face in life. It is open to all high school students from St Matthew, whether they attend a Catholic High School, a Spotsylvania County High School, or are part of a home school program.

Program Outline

The ultimate objective of our Youth Ministry program is discipleship in Jesus Christ. That is what we are all called to do in our life here on earth, and all activities in the Youth Ministry program are oriented towards that objective. Our approach to discipleship is through exploration, through service to others, and through recreational activities.

Exploration

The exploration of our faith allows the students to understand more fully what it means to be Catholic, what it means to be in love with Jesus Christ, what it means to be a disciple. Loving Christ is the most basic element of faith formation.

As a foundation for the exploration of our faith, we use a program called "Journey to Emmaus" which is a four-year program designed and developed by the Arlington Diocese Office of Youth Ministry. This program is based on the framework developed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops released in January 2010 for all religious programs for high school students. The curriculum covers eight core doctrinal elements: 1) The Person of Christ, 2) The Life in Christ, 3) Morality, 4) Christian Mystery, 5) The Church, 6) Christian Prayer, 7) Sacred Scripture, and 8) the Profession of Faith. Each session consists of a variety of activities designed to engage the students on several fronts—it is not just classroom instruction.

Another facet of Exploration is participation in other developmental activities, such as directed retreats, the Diocesan Youth Rally held each year in Arlington, VA, and Mount 2000, a weekend long experience of Christ with about 1600 high school students from across the Mid-Atlantic region. Other events might include the annual March for Life held in January of each year in Washington, DC, or other activities that will be scheduled throughout the year.

Service to Others

St Paul wrote that faith without action is no faith at all. We are all called to put our faith into action through working with others and helping the less fortunate. Through the Youth Ministry program, the high school students will have opportunities to put their faith into practice. This will be accomplished through the support of other Parish programs by the high school students, such as assisting the St Vincent de Paul Society in their work with the St Vincent de Paul Food Pantry, participating in the annual Diocesan Work Camp held each summer to provide support and repair of houses for those less fortunate in the Diocese, and working with the Thurman Brisban Shelter for the homeless. As each event is scheduled, more information will be provided to the students and you, the parents.

Recreation

As noted in the Exploration section, there will be opportunities for recreational activities associated with the classes. At other times, we will schedule Youth Ministry activities solely for recreational purposes. These may include hikes in the Shenandoah Mountains, or up to Old Rag Mountain, trips to the beach or Kings Dominion and Busch Gardens, cook outs, lock ins, bowling trips, swimming parties, movie nights, and many other activities. The recreational activities will be planned by the students, with appropriate adult supervision.

Parental Participation

There are about 190 high school aged children in the Parish. Your support for this program, and your encouragement for the participation of your students is critical to reaching the largest number of students. This is an opportunity for you and your teenager to grow together in faith, to engage in meaningful conversation about their and your faith, and that conversation can lead to conversation about other areas of your lives. This isn't a guarantee of better communications between you and your teen, or within your family, but it is an opportunity for that to occur with time, effort, and love.

I also ask that you consider volunteering to support some activity of the Youth Ministry program. This may be as simple as participating as a chaperone for an event, hosting an event, providing transportation, or perhaps becoming more involved as your time and talent will allow.

Key Dates & Meetings

The Youth Ministry program will normally meet each Sunday evening from 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. in the St Joseph Parish Center.

Below are a few key dates for the Youth Ministry program. A more extensive calendar will be provided shortly after the program starts.

- September 25, 2016: Youth Ministry Program kick-off meeting at the St Joseph Parish Center, 5:00 – 8:00 p.m. Includes cook-out, parents and family invited.
- October 23, 2016: Diocesan Youth Rally, Marymount University, Arlington, VA. The program runs from 11:30 a.m. till 8:00 p.m. and will include dinner and Mass with Bishop Loverde. Additional information will be provided by separate correspondence.

- November 6, 2016: Child Protect Program for Youth. This is a mandatory Diocese requirement for all high school students. More information on the program, and an opportunity to have your son/daughter opt out of this particular class will be provided in the next few weeks by letter.
- January 27, 2017: March for Life, Washington, DC
- February 3 – 5, 2017: Mount 2000 retreat at Mount St Mary's University in Emmitsburg, MD. This is a Eucharistic Retreat sponsored by the seminarians at Mount St Mary Seminary.
- June 24 – 30, 201: Diocesan Work Camp in Spotsylvania County, VA.

I look forward to working with you and your sons/daughters during the coming year. This can be a lot of fun as well as spiritually enriching for you and your family. I strongly believe in good communications, so I will be in regular contact with you. You can reach me at anytime via email at deaconmike2@verizon.net, or call me at 540-287-8624. Please complete the attached form to register your teen(s) for the Youth Ministry program and mail or drop it off at the Parish office. I'm always interested in your feedback and suggestions on how we can support your role as parents and as your teen's first and most important teacher. I ask that you keep all of us in your prayers, and I will keep you and your family in my daily prayers as well. Thanks for taking the time to read this letter, and I look forward to a great year.

Yours in Christ,

Deacon Mike Strain