

St. Mary Magdalen Shares RE Success Tools

St. Mary Magdalen has proven that it's okay to raise the bar for your Religious Formation program. The parish's Religious Education program reflects the spirit and vision of St. Mary Magdalen while going the extra mile to secure parental commitment.

During each Religious Education registration period, families with children receive the ParishSOFT registration form with the parish and parental commitments printed on the reverse side. Parents must register their children in person and sign the form to indicate their commitment to the following:

1. Acceptance of their own responsibility and partnership with St Mary Magdalen Parish to raise their children in the practice of the Catholic faith.
2. Weekly participation in the Eucharist.
3. Faithful participation in the religious education program.
4. Work with their children to better comprehend and live the lessons taught.

Through this commitment requirement, St. Mary Magdalen reminds parents that they are the primary catechists of their children. It is not enough just to carpool them to religious ed classes. The spiritual development that happens today will impact the rest of their lives.

No, this isn't scaring parents away. Quite the contrary! Mary Mahar, Director of Religious Education (DRE), and Josie Doucette, Religious Education secretary, are pleased to see a continuously high participation rate, a growing student population, and families paying higher out-of-parish tuition to educate their children at St. Mary Magdalen. This year over 120 catechists and more than 800 adults and children participate in kindergarten through high school classes, Youth Groups, Children's Liturgy of the Word, and a bimonthly Family Religious Education program. Interestingly, home study religious education programs are not offered; the physical *coming together to worship together* is an essential element to the parish vision to build a community in which God's presence is experienced in all people.

The staff at St. Mary Magdalen is committed to having a work environment that is not dependent on any single person. Instead, the pastoral staff works together like a well-oiled machine, using the same ParishSOFT family, member, and student record data at each desk in the parish offices.

"The confidential family and sacrament notes in ParishSOFT have opened up communication throughout the office," says Mahar. "If a child is not receiving a sacrament, we record the specifics directly in the student record. When any staff member is communicating with the family, he or she can see exactly what we've already discussed with the parents. After all, it's *everyone's* job to work with our families—it's great that the entire pastoral staff can all be on the same page." With just a few clicks in the Student Directory screen, parish staff can view the names of students registered in a school year, in a session, or in a particular class.

Youth minister Margaret Callaghan finds that ParishSOFT has meant less time doing paperwork and more time developing programs for middle school and high school Youth Groups. "I love it!" exclaimed Callaghan. "It saves paper, and it's easy to make changes to the database. We don't have to rely on any individual to make updates."

User-friendly software screens are important for this busy parish office, where staff members work independently on evenings and weekends. Users with edit rights can instantly change an address, and the youth minister, for example, can quickly add a new student to the Youth Group; or the Religious Education staff can use Advanced Search to locate students who have different last names than their parents.

Callaghan uses ParishSOFT family workgroups to make it easy to communicate with parents and her Youth Group participants. She also maintains Time & Talent ministry groups to track membership and event

participation. Using the student record data, Callaghan can quickly determine the names of all parish high school juniors and seniors, registered or unregistered. She then generates mailers and address labels for events like baccalaureate and the senior breakfast directly from the ParishSOFT database.

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