



ARCHDIOCESE
— OF —
SAINT PAUL &
MINNEAPOLIS

Catholic Identity Standards
Elementary Schools

Approved by Archbishop John C. Nienstedt: June 8, 2011
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“Like the marks of the Church proclaimed in the Creed – One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic – so too does the Holy See identify the principal features of a school as Catholic: a Catholic school should be inspired by a supernatural vision, founded on Christian anthropology, animated by communion and community, imbued with a Catholic worldview throughout its curriculum, and sustained by gospel witness. These benchmarks help to answer the critical question: Is this a Catholic school according to the mind of the Church?

(The Holy See’s Teaching on Catholic Schools, 2006, Section III, pg. 17)

Introduction

All Catholic schools, including those founded or directed by religious institutes, are approved by and function in relation to the Ordinary (archbishop) of the Archdiocese, the chief shepherd and teacher for Catholics in this See (Canons 803-806). Catholic schools are to provide authentic Catholic teaching, opportunities for worship and participation in the sacraments, and promote evangelization and service to the community. The Office of Catholic Schools of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis assists the Archbishop by ensuring that those schools under his care fulfill this mission.

In 2005, the Minnesota Catholic Education Association published broad standards for Catholic Identity in Catholic schools. After engaging and reflecting on these standards, specific indicators in each standard have been identified that will sustain and strengthen the building of discipleship in the Catholic elementary schools of the Archdiocese. Thus, the Archdiocesan Catholic Identity Standards for Elementary Schools rely on the good work of the Minnesota Catholic Education Association while adapting to the specific needs of this local Church. For the purposes of this document, “Elementary Schools” are defined as those Catholic schools that begin with Pre-Kindergarten or Kindergarten and conclude no later than Grade Eight.

Process

Each school will typically complete a Catholic Identity self-study and host an on-site review team from the Archdiocese every seven years. This process will be completed in the same school year as the review by a state-recognized accrediting agency. The date(s) of the on-site review will be determined in consultation with the Office of Catholic Schools. During the intervening years, the school will file an annual report with the Office of Catholic Schools that details progress made toward Catholic Identity goals and/or recommendations from the Archdiocesan review team.

To complete the Catholic Identity self-study, the school should gather a diverse population (canonical and/or other associated clergy, principal, faculty, advisory board members, parents, etc.) and examine the indicators listed in each standard. A narrative should then be crafted that addresses how the school fulfills each of the six standards

including any specific strengths or challenges in each standard. The narrative should conclude with a section on overall strengths and challenges and a plan for school improvement in the area of Catholic Identity. The self-study narrative should be submitted to the Office of Catholic Schools a minimum of one month prior to the scheduled on-site review.

The on-site review will consist of observations of the teaching of religion at each grade level, interviews with the teachers of religion, principal, canonical administrator, parents and students, attendance at an all-school Mass, and a review of documentation to substantiate the narrative. Based on the narrative and the on-site review, the school will receive one of three possible marks (with an accompanying score) in each standard along with specific comments. The marks will be as follows: Distinguished (3), Satisfactory (2), or Unsatisfactory (1). In the conclusion of the final report by the Archdiocesan review team, the marks will be tallied and divided by six to arrive at a Catholic Identity Rating and overall classification. The breakdown of classification is as follows:

16-18 points	2.67 Rating or higher	Distinguished
12-15 points	2.00-2.50 Rating	Satisfactory
0-11 points	1.83 Rating or lower	Unsatisfactory

In addition to the Catholic Identity Rating and overall classification, the final report will include specific recommendations for the school to implement and address during the next review cycle. This final report will be sent to the canonical administrator and principal with copies forwarded to the Superintendent of Schools, the Vicar General and the Archbishop. Principals are encouraged to share the final report with faculty/staff, advisory board members, parents and other relevant constituents.

The expectation is that the vast majority of schools will fall into the “Satisfactory” classification with some rising to the level of “Distinguished” and occasionally some, for a variety of reasons, receiving an “Unsatisfactory” rating. Each school will typically follow the regular seven year pattern of self-study, on-site review, implementation of recommendations and annual reporting to the Office of Catholic Schools. If a school receives an overall “Unsatisfactory” rating or an “Unsatisfactory” rating in any individual standard, that school must craft a plan in conjunction with the Office of Catholic Schools to remedy the issues(s) by the conclusion of the next academic semester.

“Catholic Schools are vital to the Church’s mission of evangelization and catechesis. They exist in order to educate the whole person: mind, body, and soul. They present the totality of the Catholic faith. Whether Catholic schools are part of a parish structure or are regional, diocesan, or private, growth in the Catholic faith for the children and young people who attend them is essential to their identity and purpose.” (*National Directory for Catechesis*, USCCB, 2005, 61.4b)

Catholic Identity Standards for Elementary Schools



**Divine Mercy Catholic School
Faribault, Minnesota**

MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY:

The school will have mission and philosophy statements that articulate the Catholicity of the school community's shared vision, principles, beliefs, and core values.

Divine Mercy Catholic School is guided by its clearly communicated mission statement that reflects a value of the whole person and the guiding force of Christ's example as communicated in the Gospel. Our mission statement is regularly reviewed by our School Advisory Council and school staff. The mission statement is prominently displayed throughout the school and is communicated on the school website, in handbooks, and in school publications.

As a ministry of Divine Mercy Catholic Church, we share the parish's focus on the Eucharist (as indicated by Divine Mercy Catholic Church parish's adopted mission in 2010). This focus is carried out at Divine Mercy Catholic School through instruction and service. As the Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith, we gather weekly to celebrate the Holy Mass. We place a strong emphasis on the sacraments not only during the Mass, but also in every classroom.

At Divine Mercy Catholic School we integrate the faith throughout our curriculum, preparing our students to assume their proper roles in the Catholic Church and in society.

Strengths:

- Divine Mercy Catholic School has a clearly articulated mission statement.
- Staff teach and model what is reflected in our mission statement.
- Our dedicated staff are committed to assisting our students in knowing and practicing the faith.
- Our mission statement is prominently displayed.
- Our mission statement is included in school publications and communications.

Challenges:

- Our mission and philosophy should more closely align with that of the parish.
- Our mission and philosophy should consistently guide decision-making.

GOVERNANCE AND POLICIES:

The school's governing body, policies, documents and management practices will reflect the Catholic mission and philosophy of the school.

Divine Mercy Catholic School's governance structure provides direction that ensures effective operations. Our pastor is actively engaged in the school and familiar with its day-to-day operations. The ultimate governance responsibility is his. Our associate pastor is an assistant principal in our school and is also engaged with the day-to-day activities.

Our School Advisory Council provides meaningful consultation to the pastor and principal and is part of a leadership structure that helps implement the school's mission. Our School Advisory Council seeks diverse representation from our school community. They work through various committees to ensure continuity and stability of our program and operations, such as updating policies. As DMCS enters its third year as a parish school, the School Advisory Council is renewing its focus on active monitoring of school processes and is identifying opportunities for continuance of shared governance in collaboration with the pastor.

The policies of Divine Mercy Catholic School reflect our commitment to adhere to the teachings of the Catholic faith and our desire to model them to our students, families, and the broader community. These are updated through a policy committee comprised of Divine Mercy Catholic School staff, parents, and School Advisory Committee members.

Strengths:

- Divine Mercy Catholic School staff annually review and sign the NCEA Code of Ethics for teachers, the Archdiocesan Pastoral Code of Conduct, and Justice in Employment documents.
- Divine Mercy's School Advisory Council acts as a consultative body to the principal and pastor.
- Divine Mercy Catholic School and Church work collaboratively to run programming.
- An increasing awareness and participation in the school's function by priests and parish leadership exists.
- DMCC parish administrator provides strong support for effective and efficient functioning of the school.

Challenges:

- A defined admissions process must continue to develop.
- On-going formation, training, and evaluation of staff needs to be provided.
- Divine Mercy Catholic School's discipline policy needs to align with its mission.
- The role of the School Advisory Council needs to be more clearly defined.
- Finding time for only two priests to participate regularly in catechesis and school day functions is difficult.

LEADERSHIP, FACULTY AND STAFF:

The school's leadership team, faculty and staff will know, support and model the teachings of the Church as outlined in the *General Directory for Catechesis*, paragraphs 114 – 115 and the *National Directory for Catechesis*, sections 25. A – I, 54.8 and 54.9 a - d. School employees will pursue ongoing religious formation that will enhance the school's Catholic identity. All school employees will adhere to "standards of conduct" that reflect Catholic tradition, Canon Law and current policies (including Articles 12 and 13, *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*).

The leadership of Divine Mercy Catholic School articulates and models the teachings of the Catholic Church. We are in the process of determining a new leadership model. As we look to the future leadership of our school, we are committed to having leadership that has a demonstrated commitment to our Catholic faith.

Our principal team is responsible for the oversight of personnel, professional development, and formal assessment of faculty and staff. Our pastor, associate pastor, and parish administrator serve on this team. The priests are present in the school often. They visit classrooms on a regular basis, conduct instruction and participate in sacramental preparation programs, prepare students to become altar servers, consult on discipline matters, and discuss various school related matters with staff.

Position descriptions for grade level teachers require them to be a practicing Catholic, which ensures someone qualified to be a catechist teaches religion.

Our parish and school maintain files and background checks on all school employees as well as volunteers. Our staff and volunteers also participate in Virtus training. All volunteer files are reviewed annually.

The standards for conduct are outlined in job descriptions and handbooks, as well as in code of conduct forms signed by staff and volunteers.

Strengths:

- DMCS demonstrates a spirit of community throughout the school.
- Divine Mercy staff live and support the teachings of the Catholic Church through daily prayer, weekly Mass, adoration chapel visits, and service opportunities with students.
- Divine Mercy Catholic Church and School work cooperatively to provide preparation for the sacraments.
- Divine Mercy provides a strong religion curriculum that follows the guidelines developed through close adherence to the Archdiocese of St. Paul's standards.
- All staff and volunteers complete Virtus and sign a code of conduct. A revised tracking system has been implemented.

Challenges:

- Develop a faith formation plan for faculty and staff.
- Communicate the school's mission and vision to the greater parish community and Faribault area.
- Observation of religious instruction on a systematic basis is needed.
- Greater collaboration between the Catholic School and the parish Faith Formation program is desired.

FORMATIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE & FACILITIES:

Catholic schools will display their Catholicity in the physical environment and be welcoming, inclusive, and safe for all who enter the facilities, including families, volunteers and guests. Schools will develop age appropriate standards of conduct for students and implement personal safety curriculum according to Archdiocesan policy.

Divine Mercy Catholic School strives to maintain a welcoming atmosphere while adhering to practices that protect the safety of our students and staff. All visitors to the building enter through the front door since all other doors remain locked. It is our policy that they receive a visitor's badge to enter further. Textbooks, literature selections, posters, and artwork all display evidence of our sensitivity to the physical, intellectual, social, and emotional differences of our students and their families. It is the desire of Divine Mercy teaching staff to increase the support given to students with academic and/or physical challenges.

In an effort to be sensitive to the needs of families with economically diverse backgrounds, we provide free school supplies and give away gently used clothing every year. Father Erik Lundgren serves as a resource for our Latino families as they integrate into our school. While clear about our Catholic Identity, we do accept families of other religious traditions.

Our school adheres to the safe environment training programs for children and young people as required by the Archdiocese. We use the Benzinger family life program in grades 4-6 and the Net Smart program. We also provide assemblies dealing with current social issues such as bullying. An example of attention to this is that last school year fifth and sixth grade students viewed the movie "Chrissa" which portrays a girl's personal experience being bullied.

Divine Mercy Catholic School has religious statues and artwork prominently displayed throughout the building. Each classroom has a crucifix. Pictures of our Holy Father and the Archbishop are prominently displayed in the entrance. These pictures are to provide a reminder of our mission as a Catholic School and are an inspiration for students, staff, and visitors to carry out our Catholic faith.

Our Catholic instruction and school mission works hard to emphasize to students that they need to be continually aware and sensitive to "different" people, be patient with others with physical or mental challenges, and to be inclusionary and compassionate as they encounter their fellow man.

Strengths:

- Divine Mercy Catholic School adheres to the safe environment training programs for children and youth.
- Religious statues and artwork are present throughout the building. A large depiction of The Divine Mercy image is prominently displayed.
- Ensure that the Security and Crisis Plan meets changing program and facility needs at Divine Mercy Catholic School (e.g. monitoring)

Challenges:

- A lack of visibility from the front office limits the security of our building.
- Providing for a permanent resource teaching position to give support to the variety of physical, intellectual, and social-emotional needs of our students has been challenging.
- Maintaining up-to-date resources for instruction of the Catholic Faith is challenging.

INFORMATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF FAITH:

The school will be a faith community that nurtures the spiritual lives of students, families, staff members and all others having contact with the school. A systematic plan for catechizing students will shape the religion curriculum. A variety of opportunities will be available for the entire school community to worship and pray together.

Divine Mercy Catholic School has a written religion curriculum that is aligned with the Archdiocesan K-8 Religion Standards. This curriculum includes integration of Catholic Social Teachings and the corporal and spiritual works of mercy through grade level projects and service. We utilize the Benzinger Family Life and Loyola Press religion series.

Students are provided with many opportunities to practice their faith and pray together. Weekly Wednesday morning Mass is celebrated with rotating grades planning and leading. These school Masses are planned and celebrated in accordance with the directives of the general Instruction of the Roman Missal and follow the practices and rituals of the liturgical seasons and Feast Days. All students in grades 2-6 celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation twice a year. During Lent, students go to the Adoration Chapel and attend Stations of the Cross weekly. Divine Mercy students pray the Rosary and Chaplet of Divine Mercy. Students pray at the start and end of the day, before lunch, and before all assemblies.

Parents are encouraged to participate in weekly liturgy, stations, rosary and chaplet. All second-grade parents attend the sacramental workshops provided by the parish Faith Formation program in preparation for First Reconciliation and First Communion.

Seven years ago Divine Mercy Catholic School developed a character-forming discipline model based on the Fruits of the Spirit (as found in Scripture). This has been integrated into classroom instruction.

Through our religion curriculum, priest visits, and homilies, students are encouraged to explore potential vocations in priesthood and religious life. Fifth and sixth graders each chose a different seminarian to pray for throughout the year. A May crowning liturgy is done each year. DMCS follows the practices and rituals of the liturgical seasons and feast days. We join Bethlehem Academy for several liturgies throughout the school year.

DMCS has committed to administering the ACRE assessment of Catholic Religious Education in grade 5 for the first time during the spring semester of this school year. The utilization of this data is embedded with our MNSAA Strategic Plan (Objective 1, Strategy 2).

Strengths:

- Divine Mercy Catholic School's curriculum is aligned to the Archdiocesan K-8 Religion Standards.
- Students participate in weekly Mass. Parent attendance is encouraged and many parents do share in the Holy Mass with their child.
- Eucharistic Adoration, Reconciliation, Stations of the Cross, the Rosary, and Chaplet of Divine Mercy are celebrated regularly throughout the school year.
- Divine Mercy is faithful to Church teaching in our curriculum and resources.
- Newsletters are sent home communicating religious and academic content.

Challenges:

- We are administering the ACRE assessment of religious education for the first time this Spring and our challenge is to use the data provided to improve instruction in the Catholic Faith.
- Divine Mercy Catholic School has a need for retreats and educational opportunities for staff.
- Tools are needed to assess staff needs for professional development for instruction of the Catholic Faith curriculum.
- We need to educate and empower parents to support and reinforce their children's learning of the Catholic Faith, including the Parish Family Formation ministries.

TRANSFORMATIVE FAITH COMMUNITY:

The school will actively promote a Catholic culture in which discipleship in Jesus Christ, evangelization and service are integral elements within the life of the school.

Students at Divine Mercy Catholic School are actively engaged in service to the parish and greater community in many ways. Through our Marathon of Service, Christmas basket project, food shelf donations, monthly nursing home and St. Vincent DePaul Society visits, our students practice service. Through our Care and Share dress down days, we raise money for national organizations such as Pennies for Patients, Sharing and Caring Hands, Juvenile Diabetes, Union Gospel Mission, and St. Jude's Children Hospital. Globally we have contributed to Heifer International and other organizations. Students also collect school supplies for third world countries each year. Examples of support of Catholic teaching imbedded with instruction include the essay contest, "Living for the Glory of God", and having students write about their own reflections.

Students are encouraged to see themselves as Christ to others. We see this in simple things such as older students sitting with younger students at Mass, cleaning the cafeteria tables, school patrols, and student council research of worthy causes to support. When students encounter current events in the world or in school that can be teachable moments, teachers take time to discuss/teach about appropriate responses according to scripture and the Ten Commandments. When students participate in a service project, teachers and volunteers provide guided reflection before and after the event in order to make the appropriate connections to Catholic teachings.

Strengths:

- Divine Mercy Catholic School provides multiple opportunities for students to connect Catholic instruction to community service.
- Each grade level has a particular focus for their service.
- Catholic Social Teachings, the Corporal and Spiritual works of Mercy, prayer, and service are integrated into all areas of the curriculum.
- DMCS children and families have a high rate of service in the ministries of the parish.

Challenges:

- A system is needed for balancing curriculum demands with an increasing number of requests for students to provide service.