

## SCHOOL DESCRIPTION GUIDE

SCHOOL: Name St. Mary's School (Area Center) Address 360 Maple Telephone (906) 632-3511CDD ENROLLMENT: Approximately 1,400*Sault Ste Marie MI*SCHOOL PERSONNEL: Director: Sister Mary GabrielCore Faculty: Religious 9 + (1 part time)Priests 8Volunteers 69Secretary 1Lay men 8Lay women 61SCHOOL STRUCTURE: Pre-school, 1-12, Special Education  
32 classrooms (some are used interchangeably)  
15 average class sizeSCHOOL FACILITIES: Gym, Materials CenterTRANSPORTATION: Mainly bus - pre-school and high school students provide their own transportation.

## The Following Report is the Description of the Total Program

This program is designed for our total Catholic population - from pre-schoolers through senior citizens. Religious education is for everyone. A truly living faith is vital and we must strive to communicate this vitality of belief to all whatever their age or circumstance maybe.

- AIMS: 1. To teach people, adults especially, what our lives as we live them, teach more about our belief in God than anything we'll ever say.
2. To teach that Christ is the core of our religion. He is the center of our lives, and therefore our main endeavor is to make His Signs (Sacraments) in our Christian Community visible and understandable in the light of recent theological understandings and insights.
3. To communicate a deep respect and reverence for each.

There are presently approximately 1,400 students involved in this program, and numerous adults. The adult participation centers around parents whose children are involved in the program, but it is not strictly limited to them.

The children spend approximately one hour in class each week. They also spend a half hour coming and going on busses to our Center.

The heart of the program centers mainly on the use of the Michigan Released-Time Law allowing children two hours of released-time per week. We have scheduled these released-time classes in cooperation with the local area public school superintendent and his administration. The schedule includes time and classes for ten area public schools. One school is too far away and has too few Catholic students, and we have arranged for religion classes to be taught in homes in that area. The local public school there assists in having their busses drop the students at these homes after their daily classes are completed. Pre-school classes are held twice during the week and a couple of parishes offer these sessions during the Sunday Liturgy.

The high school program operates in the evening. (A schedule was attempted for released-time classes for these students as well, but, it proved to be too complex a situation to handle.) Therefore, the high school religion classes are held on the following basis:

Home discussions are held four nights of the week, students choosing one night, and once a week regular classroom type instructions are held. In one rather remote area, we are having released-time high school instructions during the day every other week at the request of two pastors whose children are involved. Another area, (Sugar Island) classes meet in homes every other week.

The main activities for parents at the present moment (it changes almost weekly; we adapt as the situation presents itself) are parental sessions for preparation for the reception of the sacraments. These sessions include the sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, Penance, Confirmation, and Marriage. Sessions for parents whose children will be receiving Holy Communion, and Penance for the first time are held three different times each time they are presented, in order to offer maximum opportunity for parents to get to these sessions. Family First Communion is offered for the second graders predominantly, and Penance for the fourth graders. Our Lenten Area Program for adults, being conducted through all the parish liturgies during prepared homilies, deals with the Church "Where It Is Today." It is concentrating on giving all an updating on the changes in the Church in the past ten years. At present the Pastoral Service area focuses mainly on visiting the sick in the hospital, the long term care ward of the hospital, the Provincial House, also for the elderly, and the Senior Citizen High Rise. Visits to shut-ins are also part of this program. We are attempting to get needed help in the visiting of shut-ins from existing parish organizations. Plans are also being studied to update the anointing of the sick on a regular basis.

- a) Core staff (sisters) has definite roles as noted in job descriptions.
- b) Core staff has relative autonomy in carrying out the program. They also have maximum knowledge of other areas of consultation via weekly core staff meetings.
- c) Core staff has extensive preservice schooling stemming from experience as teachers. Inservice training for the program stems from initial involvement in the creation of the program, and from participation in workshops and staff meetings regularly. Also each division has weekly teacher preparation sessions.
- d) Core staff members who are religious receive a stipend equal to that of full time religious teachers because they are in fact full time religion teachers.
- e) The director works out the budget for the Program in coordination with the various staff members, and presents this for approval to the Area Board.
- f) One recently vacated school (it closed as a full time school) is designated as the Center for the program, but due to the area covered geographically, other facilities are also used on a part time basis.

The program has a separate budget. The budget is drawn up by the director in consultation with the core staff. The director administers the total budget, but each level administers its part of the total budget. The constraints are that the Board approves the budget, as does the Parish Councils where they exist, and a budget report is prepared twice a year, with a certified accountant checking the books at the end of each fiscal year.

The program was thoroughly cooperative at all levels in its initial planning stages. Pastors, priests, parents, and interested people were involved in the initial planning. One lay group with two sisters, and one priest involved, designed the all parish survey questionnaire, and piloted it through an adult group before presenting it to the parishioners at the parish liturgies on Religious Education Sunday. The program was also reviewed as proposed by the Diocesan Board of Education and the Bishop.

Three Main Characteristics that I believe make this program a success are:

1. The recognition of the need for this type of program. Awareness was precipitated by the closing of all area Catholic Schools because of financial difficulty.
2. Interested, dedicated pastors who were aware of our great need, and also deeply committed to the communication of the gospel of Christ. These men, further, are magnanimous in that they are not protectors as it were, of their personal pastoral power in the limited way of guarding my parish. They were interested in combining resources and coming up with what may possibly be the greatest good for the people of God on the whole.
3. A core staff that is committed to the communication of the gospel of Christ, and who were trusting enough of the Spirit to risk their all in giving to this community whatever competencies they have, coupled with a great hope and a deep personal faith.