

Dear School Parents and Parishioners:

Greetings of Christ's peace!

Thanks for your patience and prayers! The purpose of this letter is to provide you with general information for a unified Faith Formation Program at St. Therese Chinese Catholic School (STCCS) at St. Therese Campus and St. Barbara Campus for the 2019-20 academic school year. We have an outstanding Faith Formation Program. We are so pleased that you and your family can contribute your talents to the on-going success of our program. God is good!

This letter is divided into six sections: 1) Catechesis, 2) Liturgy and Student Participation, 3) Retreats and pilgrimages, 4) Community Service, 5) Sacraments, and 6) Youth Ministry. Dates for all masses, sacramental programs, scheduled retreats and pilgrimages, as well as scheduled community service opportunities will soon be posted on our website.

**VISION:** Our faith formation is a family and community-oriented womb to tomb experience for all, particularly our children, to grow in one's love for God as directed by Pope Francis. In other words, no matter how hard one tries, one can never completely grasp the mystery of God through study. Like math and science, religion can be learned about in the classroom. The Catholic faith, however, also penetrates the human soul and heart. This means it needs to be lived out and experienced in one's family and faith community. Faith formation is first received by a child, therefore, at home, within the context of family life. STCCS seeks to build on the virtues and morals you have already established with your child.

## 1) Catechesis

This Greek word refers to what is commonly understood as "Religion Class." STCCS will be conducting different catechetical sessions for both students (in all grades from Prekindergarten through 8th) and their families.

**Students** receive ½ hour of catechesis (religion class) every day by a certified catechist (religion teacher). Just like any other subject at STCCS, the academic expectations for religion class are very high. School-sponsored outside activities such as retreats, special masses, and community service opportunities serve as ways for STCCS students to incorporate what they learn inside the classroom.

Therefore, we highly encourage you and your child to participate in parish-based activities as often as possible. Classroom assignments are often related directly to what children learn outside of their class, in the community, and doing acts of justice. Junior high students who volunteered at the Chinatown Summer Fair and St. Barbara Carnival, for instance, will receive extra credit in religion when they write or share their reflections with their classmates about their experience of volunteering. Feel free to consult the welcome letter from the child's catechist on how such projects are integrated into your child's religion grade.

**Parents** are called to be the “first and best teachers” in the ways of their child’s faith. Therefore you are invited to attend four parent formation sessions that are usually held after family masses in October, November, January, and February (dates TBA). Topics in the past have included: *Bullying, Catholic Modesty, Why Go to Mass, Catholic Sacraments, and Peer Pressure*. While Faith Formation sessions are not required for all parents (only parents who have a child preparing for a sacrament are required to attend), every parent and all families are invited to join in. A highly qualified, dynamic group of speakers will offer practical tips as well as theological insights during these interactive sessions.

## 2) Liturgy and Student Participation

The Eucharist is the “source and summit” of our Christian life. We strongly believe this and we are pleased to share with you the following mass offerings for the 2019-20 academic year:

- **Family Masses:** Family Mass represents the most excellent way for you and your family to grow in the faith. Family masses are assigned to different classes throughout the year. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the month at the 9:30am is the family mass at St. Barbara Church and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the month at the 10:30am is the family mass at St. Therese Church.
- **School Masses:** In addition to Family Mass, a daily mass will be offered and coordinated by school children on a weekly basis. On the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Mondays of the month, we will have the 8am daily mass at St. Therese Church and on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesdays we will have the 8am daily mass at St. Barbara Church.
- **Class Masses:** Once a year, each class will have its own special mass with fellowship afterwards.
- **Entire School Masses:** four times throughout the year, both school campuses will join together to celebrate the Eucharist.

**Participation:** All students, regardless of their religious affiliation, are expected to participate in family and school masses.

- Become an altar server. (We have an outstanding Altar Server program.)
- Be a Lector. (*Only Catholics will be reading during the Liturgy of the Word.*)
- Read a petition.
- Be a greeter or hospitality minister.
- Help design art work for program covers.
- Bring up gifts.

## 3. Retreats and Pilgrimages

Retreats are graced moments organized by a spiritual leader in order to more deeply connect with God through prayer and devotion. Pilgrimages, on the other hand, are spiritual journeys to a religious site. STCCS is pleased to offer the following retreats and pilgrimages this academic year:

- Holy Fire: This is for 7th and 8th graders only. School children will be attending on Friday, October 18th. Details to follow.
- Sacramental retreats: Each 1st Reconciliation, 1st Communion, and Confirmation group is offered a specialized retreat so they can better prepare for the celebration of their sacrament.
- Parish Advent, Lent and Pentecost retreats: We normally offer a retreat for families during each liturgical season.
- Parish Pilgrimage and Seven Churches: In the fall, the parish invites school children to go to a religious shrine for a day. During Holy Week, the parish always coordinates the visitation of seven churches.

#### 4). Community Service

In an effort to form the whole child, STCCS students are required to complete a number of community service hours each year. When students share unique gifts in the community, not only are their individual lives enriched, but also the entire community is uplifted. Students who complete many hours of community service are often the same students who receive the best high school recommendation letters from their teachers.

We pride ourselves at STCCS with community service because of the wide variety of ways we offer for our students to incrementally grow into becoming decent human beings as well as good Christians and citizens. Students can, for instance, choose from a wide variety of opportunities: spiritual, community-based, educational, janitorial and even culinary. Whether they are handing out food at the St. James food pantry, altar serving, giving a concert at the local library, making scarves for seniors, preparing Christmas cards for the shut-ins, cleaning the church, STCCS students consistently put the school's best face forward in Chinatown and Bridgeport.

Please note that hours students spend on personal development pursuits in sports and other cultural organizations such as karate, violin, piano, or dance will qualify for activity hours. As a school, we recognize and honor the impact which outside school activities have on the personal development of our children.

#### 5). Sacraments

Sacraments provide grace during the long journey of life. The Sacred Tradition of the Catholic Church adheres to this belief: God's most intimate way of sharing divine love with humans transpires through the seven sacraments. For those of you who acknowledge this institutional idea as true, we invite you to consider the first and most important one, baptism. We joyfully anticipate that several STCCS students and their families will be baptized during the Easter Vigil. If you have any questions about this process, feel free to reach out to Fr. Francis, Fr. Lukas or Mr. Howard. We would be more than happy to sit down with you and discuss the sacramental life.

Baptized STCCS students receive excellent preparation for 1st Reconciliation (2nd grade), 1st Communion (3rd grade) and Confirmation (7th and 8th grades). More details on those specific preparation programs will be shared as time gets closer to the Sacrament.

## 6. Youth Ministry

Our young people need to feel that they belong to our Church and community. Beginning in Sept. we will have a monthly gathering for our young people (7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades and high school).

## Conclusion

Each aspect of Faith Formation at STCCS is specifically designed to meet the needs of a diverse and plural community. In other words, it does not matter if your family has no faith tradition or one that is not specifically Catholic. We love you and want you to feel welcome as your child continues or is just beginning a very unique journey of friendship with Jesus Christ. If you have any specific questions about faith formation, feel free to reach out to us or to **Thomas Howard**, our Director of Religious Education.

We are looking forward to journeying with you in unity, to serving with you in joy, and to growing with you in the love of our Lord and neighbors in peace!

You are in our daily prayers and please keep us and our faith community, especially our children, faculty and staff in your prayers.

Peace

Fr. Francis Li  
Pastor

Ms. Lisa Deborah Oi  
Principal