



What is the Billerica Catholic Religious Education (BCRE) philosophy?

Our philosophy is firmly founded on providing an environment in which our children can fall in love with Jesus Christ and become his disciples! Recognizing that parents are the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith, we also strive to provide a program in which all parents and guardians can become disciples of Jesus Christ, with a growing desire to attend Mass and joyfully participate in the Sacramental life of our parishes.

We will offer programs that compliment and support what families are already doing together: attending Mass, praying together, and growing together in faith.

We will offer program schedules that give families the flexibility they need with a frequency that we are able to support through volunteer and staff resources.

We will use Religious Education to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church throughout all of Billerica.

Finally, we pray unceasingly that Jesus will guide us to further His mission here on earth.

Why this style of Youth Religious Education?

Many parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Boston and throughout the United States are evaluating the effectiveness of their faith formation programs. Do existing programs help children and families build a firm foundation of Catholic teaching? Do existing programs lead more families to attend Mass? Is there a growing desire to receive the Eucharist each week? Some parishes have even stopped religious education altogether. In 2015-16, we revised our existing programs to respond to these questions.

The Archdiocese is challenging each collaborative to become *Disciples In Mission* and to focus our youth Religious Education on making **disciples** of our students and of their families. A disciple is someone who studies their faith, and who prays and reads Scripture every day. They speak about their faith and their God with others. They seek to know God's call in their lives. Disciples share the Good News because they have Good News to share!

During our inaugural year, we evaluated the new program and made several adjustments to the 2016-2017 program based on feedback from our parents' survey, Coordinator feedback, and input from our Pastoral Leadership. The 2017-2018 program year will look very similar to 2016-2017. However, we are planning to make another big evaluation in the future to respond to how our initiatives are working and to respond to unanswered questions from the first evaluation. Your feedback is welcomed!

2017-2018 BCRE Program Overview

Billerica Catholic Religious Education serves St. Andrew, St. Mary, and St. Theresa parishes - the Catholic Community of Billerica - with one program that is repeated at each parish.



- There is one curriculum, presented in one style, regardless of where and when each class is held. Students and their parents/guardians may register for and attend any session in any classroom in Billerica.
- Each student will receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation in their home parish, unless they choose otherwise.
- We teach individual grades in groups - Grades 1-2 together, 3-4-5 together, and 6-7-8 together. High School (Confirmation) grades are taught separately.
- ***The Church teaches us that parents are the primary teachers of the faith for their children. Since one of our goals is to engage parents/guardians in their children's faith experience, we require that a Grade 1-5 parent/guardian attend each session with their child.*** Accommodations will be made for parents/guardians with children in multiple elementary grade groupings.
- We offer multiple class times on Sundays and weekdays to meet our families' needs. Elementary (Grades 1-5) classes are 75 minutes long; Middle (Grades 6-8) and High School (Confirmation) are 90 minutes long. There will be 15 sessions for each grouping.
- Your family may switch your session days from time-to-time during the year to allow for illness or other scheduling conflicts, by calling the Religious Education office at 978.667.3733. Switching may be limited due to class size limitations. Your family is allowed up to 3 session time switches per child per year.
- Each Grade (1-High School) meets approximately every 2 weeks, sometimes longer due to some holidays and school vacations. Grades 1-5 alternate weeks with Grades 6-10. This leads to approximately 15 classes per school year for each child. Families will receive a session calendar with their registration confirmation.
- Grades 1-2 and 3-4-5 use the same style of age-appropriate teaching and same curriculum. This style uses interactive lessons, augmented with crafts and activities.
- Our target class size for Grades 1-2 and 3-4-5 will be 16 students with their parents/guardians to assist in their child's learning. Each child is provided materials to use in class and at home.
- Grades 6-7-8 use the same teaching style as High School— a group (30-50 students) presentation interwoven with small group (8-10 students) table activities or discussions. There are volunteer Small Group Leaders at each table.
- Grades 6-7-8 use the Pflaum *Visions* curriculum and High School/Confirmation use the CHOSEN series from Ascension Press.
- The entire 2-year High School curriculum focuses on Confirmation. High School classes will meet on Sundays, either before or after Mass.



- **Please note:** the class capacity for the BCRE program is highly dependent on the number of volunteers who assist as Catechists (Teachers), Classroom Aides, Small Group Leaders, and Presenters. After the available capacity is filled, families will be directed to Home School and placed on a waiting list until sufficient volunteers come forward.

Who is the BCRE Team?

There is one Coordinator of Religious Education (CRE) for Grades 1-2, one CRE for Grades 3-4-5, one CRE for Grades 6-7-8 and one CRE for High School (Confirmation). There is an additional CRE for the Home Study program, and additional CRE for First Reconciliation / First Eucharist preparation. Each CRE serves *across Billerica*.

Our Grade 1-5 Coordinators will each teach/present some of the classes in each session cycle. In Grades 6-HS, our Coordinators will act as a session Presenter / Facilitator and will be supported by other Presenters / Facilitators and Small Group Leaders for the activities and discussion.

Several volunteer opportunities exist to help with BCRE as Catechists (Teachers), Classroom Aides, Small Group Leaders, Presenters, Hall Monitors, Classroom preparation, and Material Preparation / Office Help. Registration discounts, for parents of students in our programs, are available for several volunteer roles.

The BCRE Team may be reached at 978.667.3733 or by stopping into the Billerica Catholic Religious Education Office, located behind St. Theresa Church in Billerica Center. Please check the website (<http://reled.billericacatholic.org>) for hours and the email addresses of the staff.

The Sacraments of Reconciliation (Penance) & Eucharist (Communion)

Preparation for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist is a *two-year process that begins as a student enters their first year of Religious Education*. Children whose first year of Religious Education is Grade 1 will receive their First Reconciliation and Eucharist in Grade 2, but children whose first year of Religious Education is *Grade 2* will receive their sacraments in *Grade 3* (and so forth).

- Separate materials, supplemental to the regular class materials, are used for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist preparation, administered at home by parents/guardians, with assistance from the Coordinator of Religious Education.
- Students preparing to receive sacraments, accompanied by a parent/guardian, are required to attend both a First Reconciliation workshop and a First Eucharist workshop. A mandatory information meeting will also be scheduled for the fall for the parents/guardians of those preparing to receive these sacraments.
- Mandatory rehearsals are required for all First Eucharist children, who will need to be accompanied by a parent/guardian.



- Separate and distinct preparation for these sacraments apart from their grade-level curriculum serves the following purposes:
 - It allows grade-level class time to be used for the regular curriculum
 - It allows for students not in Grade 2 to better integrate into the sacramental preparation process
 - It allows for students in our Home Study program, or attending Catholic Schools, to prepare for sacraments

The Sacrament of Confirmation

Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation is a *two-year process that begins as a student enters High School Religious Education*. Youth who enter High School Religious Education in *Grade 9* will receive Confirmation upon the completion of their second year, which may be *Grade 10*. Youth who enter High School Religious Education in *Grade 10* will receive Confirmation upon the completion of their second year, which may be *Grade 11* (and so forth).

- Mandatory Confirmation Mass rehearsals are required for all Confirmation candidates.
- All Confirmation candidates are required to attend one retreat. We offer several options from which to choose.

Home Study Program (Grades 1-8 only)

Families who choose Home Study will receive materials that students complete at home with the assistance of their parents/guardians. Periodically, they will be expected to return materials to the Religious Education Office.

- Home Study materials are distributed in September and then periodically throughout the year, as needed.
- Home Study First Reconciliation and First Eucharist students and parents/guardians are expected to attend all scheduled meetings, rehearsals and workshops that pertain to the sacramental preparation process.
- Home Study is not an option for the Confirmation Program.

Registration and Fees

We encourage families to register early, since classes will be filled on a first come, first served basis. Families wishing to register after classes have been filled will be directed to our Home Study program.

- If your family is concerned about the fees, a payment plan may be arranged. Please speak with the Religious Education Office Manager about your situation; don't let this delay your registration.
- Many volunteer roles are eligible for discounted program fees. Please see the registration form for additional information.