

New Family Information



ST. MARY
CATHOLIC SCHOOL

The mission of St. Mary Catholic School is to develop the whole child's spiritual, moral, and intellectual growth and well-being in a Catholic environment.



Welcome!

Welcome to St. Mary Catholic School! We are excited to have your family here! All our families were, at one time, new to the rules, policies, traditions, and history that are St. Mary Catholic School. We hope that by reading this book and referring to it during the year, you will feel more “at home” and comfortable about knowing what to do, where to go, whom to see, and more.

In the following pages you will find information on a wide variety of topics presented in a Q&A format. The Table of Contents should help you get directly to a specific topic at any time.

Please take special notice that this book is not a replacement for the *Student-Parent Handbook*, which is available for parents online at the beginning of the school year. The Student-Parent Handbook is the official guidebook containing rules, policies, and information. This booklet is an additional tool to help you become more familiar with the history, tradition, and practices at St. Mary Catholic School. It will provide you with helpful information, but for specific “official” questions, please refer to the Student-Parent Handbook or contact the school office.

In addition to this information, St. Mary has a program called Bobcat Buddies. If you want, we will match you up with a family (a “Bobcat Buddy”) that will be able to speak and meet with you throughout your first year at St. Mary to answer questions and advise you. To request a buddy family, please email Patricia Richards at prichards@stmarylc.org.

Again, we consider this to be an informational booklet. Feel free to send comments throughout the year that we can use to make this publication as helpful as possible for new families. And if you have a question that you cannot find here, or one that needs improvement, please use the last page to submit to us so we can answer it for you and update this document for next year.

Thank you and God bless.

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History of St. Mary Catholic School

Founded in 1978, St. Mary Catholic School began as a small early-childhood Montessori school. We experienced a significant growth within the church parish in the late 1990's. The influx of families brought about an increased interest in providing children with an elite education in an environment rich with the **Foundations for Life - Service, Family and Faith**. The church itself was rebuilt, a multi-purpose building was created on-site, and the school expanded structurally to accommodate higher enrollment numbers. Our tiny school, created to deliver an intimate Catholic based early-childhood program, went on to become accredited by the Texas Catholic Conference Accreditation Commission to educate children in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. Primary grades first through fifth were formed shortly thereafter; a sixth-grade program was added in 1997, with seventh and eighth grade following in 2002.

For the upcoming 2023-2024 school year, St. Mary Catholic School employs 23 full-time certified teachers with a combined 250 years of experience in a classroom environment. Each teacher is certified within his/her specialty field of education and participates in ongoing staff development throughout the year in many different capacities. There are approximately 250 students registered for the 2023-2024 school year, and this number continues to increase with the beginning of school. The elementary program consists of self-contained classrooms while the middle school is departmentalized. St. Mary teachers, parents and the students themselves work together to promote academic success, community service and faith formation.

Our co-ed campus offers many opportunities for students to participate in extracurricular activities, as well. For example, students may join the Sport Skills Club, Soccer Shots, Orchestra, Robotics, Theater Club, Spirit Squad, Sign Language, Chess and Crochet Crew. The St. Mary athletics program includes soccer, volleyball, basketball and track for grades 3-8.

Community service is a focal point of a students' experience at St. Mary. All grade levels participate in service projects. They are studied through discussion and explanation of the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. Fourth through eighth grade students are required to participate within the community in many different areas: school recycling initiative, organize and execute food and clothing drives, create care bags for teens in need, crochet caps for premature babies, in addition to participating in local events for Anchor Point Family Support Center and Bay Area Turning Point. Students live by "Enter to Learn, Leave to Serve".

St. Mary Catholic School is an expression of the educational mission of the community of St. Mary Church. The school's focus is on the individual child's spiritual, moral, intellectual, social, cultural and physical development in an environment of mutual respect, dignity and appreciations of one's giftedness. It is the goal of St. Mary School to prepare its students to be productive members of society, to be living examples of the Christian truths and values that are taught, to be able to respond to the needs of the community and to have a global perspective of the needs of our world.



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The Campus

Parking Lot Reference Map



- A – School/Cargill Hall – Back parking lot
- B – Church Office parking lot
- C – Church parking lot
- D – School Office parking lot
- E – Overflow parking Lot

Where do I find the office?

The office is at the front of the school, which is located on the south side of the campus. Many people mistakenly go to the back of the school, which is the entrance along Walker St. You must enter though the front of the school. All outside doors are locked during the school day, and the front is where you will be let in by the staff. Look for the blue awning.

What do I need to do to enter the building during the school day?

When visiting, come to the front of the school (south side of the building). At the doors, ring the doorbell to the right of the center set of doors and wait for the low buzzing sound that indicates the door has been unlocked so you can enter. Stop at the office to do your business there or check in and wear your name tag wherever you need to go in the school building or



Cargill Hall. All visitors must present their driver's license to check in. Please note that parents or other adults who come into the building to attend an event, volunteer, or for any reason must be SAFE HAVEN trained. The school handbook gives some information on SAFE HAVEN, and you will see this mentioned a lot around the school. We provide detailed information below for you as well.

What is SAFE HAVEN?

SAFE HAVEN identifies best practices designed to help prevent wrongdoing and promote "right doing" within religious organizations. One of the SAFE HAVEN offerings is a child sexual abuse awareness program. School volunteers, chaperones of field trips, and others who have regular contact with students, which includes eating lunch on campus or visiting the classroom, are required by the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston to participate in the SAFE HAVEN program. *All visitors must have SAFE HAVEN Training to ensure the safety of our students. If you plan to visit or have family visit during the school day-they must have the appropriate training and clearance. This is a mandate of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston and must be followed by every visitor, every visit.*

The CMG Safe Haven online training is replacing the VIRTUS training. The training consists of 3 vignette style videos that is approximately 60 minutes and will include a background check to complete.

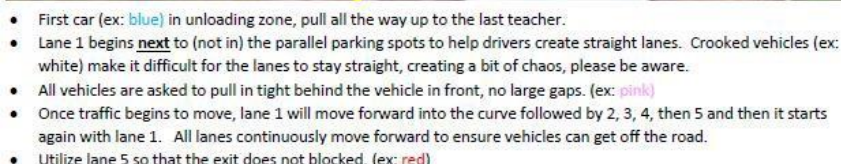
These trainings are available in English and Spanish. You will no longer access the VIRTUS database to verify Safe Environment Compliance for your employees and volunteers.

All Safe Environment trainings will be online.

- All new parents/volunteers will complete the Safe Haven online training program. The turnaround time for approval may be approximately two weeks or less.
- All individuals must complete the training and complete a background check **prior** to volunteering or eating lunch at the school.
- The 5-year anniversary date is still in place, individuals who recently attended VIRTUS will not be due to complete refresher trainings until they have met their 5-year anniversary date.
 - As the 5-year anniversary date is met, individuals will need to log into CMG Connect with their previous personal VIRTUS user id and 1234 as the password. **Once the individual logs into their CMG Connect account, they will be able to change their password.** If you do not remember the user id, they may contact the following: Janet Ellison at 281-331-4014 or jellison@stmarylc.org

After attending the SAFE HAVEN class, it may take a few weeks before being fully approved due to the background check that is part of the process, so we strongly recommend that you take a class as soon as possible to be ready when the need arises.

All students are dropped off via the drop-off car line in back of the school on Walker (Parking lot A). Please follow the diagram below of the morning traffic flow. There will be many teachers helping unload cars. Please do not exit your car during drop off, nor let children exit without the assistance of one of the adults. Students will proceed along the sidewalk to the north entrance of Cargill Hall for morning prayer. Further information is available in the school handbook.

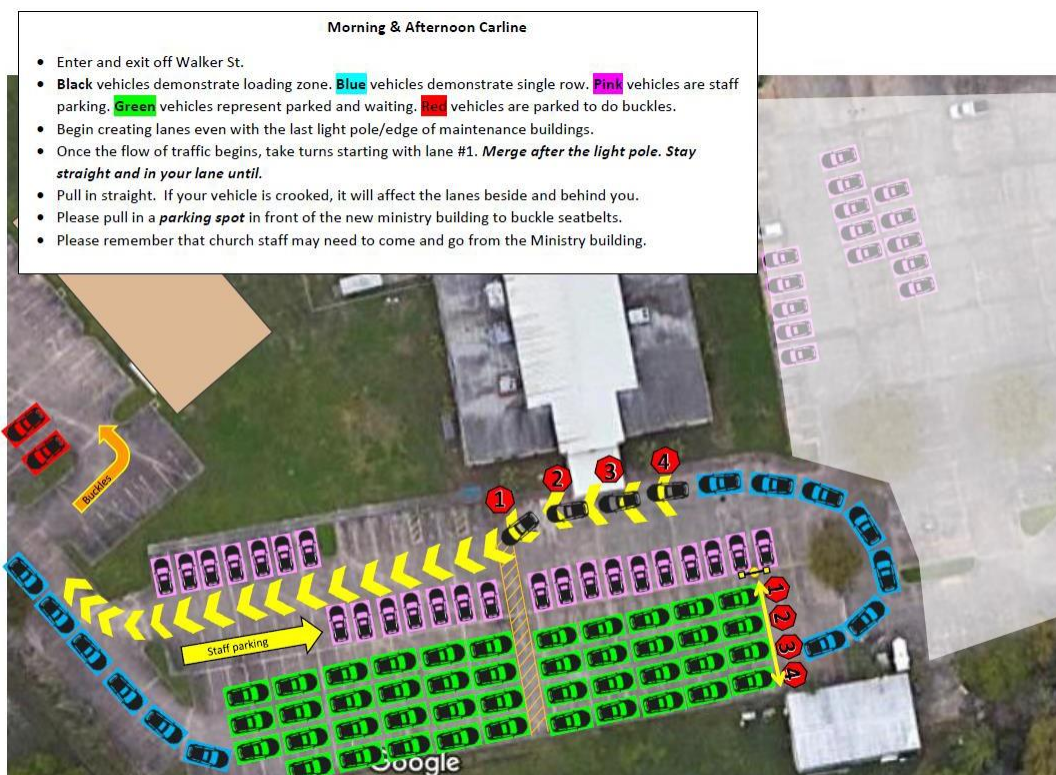


Yes, you are welcome to attend morning prayer! When you walk in please stand on the right side of the hall. To do so, please park in the lot near the front of school or by the church (Parking lot C) and walk to the North entrance of Cargill Hall. The Walker St. lot is a no-walk zone in the mornings during drop off. See the handbook for other details about morning prayer.



Where do I pick up my child(ren) in the afternoons?

Pre-k students, kindergarteners and their older siblings are picked up via pick-up line in front of the school (Parking Lot D). The diagram of traffic flow in this lot is shown below. 1st-8th graders without siblings in pre-k or kindergarten will be picked up via carline in the back of the school where morning drop off is (Parking Lot A). The traffic in the back lot will follow the same path as for morning drop-off. That diagram is on page 10. Further details are included in the school handbook.



Is there any other way to pick up my child(ren) other than to get in the carpool line?

If you need to pick them up in a different manner, please call the school ahead of time. You may check your child(ren) out through the front office up until 2:30pm. After that please use the carpool line. During carpool line, both lots are no-walk zones to avoid any type of accident.

Where do I park on campus?

You may park in the main lot at the front of the school or on the side by the fields or by the church. You may also park in back along Walker St., but doors into the school remain locked at all times, so you would still need to walk around to front of school to be buzzed in by the front office staff.

What happens if I'm late picking up my child(ren)?

Please call the office if you are running late so they can communicate the delay to your child(ren). Any children left after 3:45pm will be taken to Aftercare, and parents will be billed for that time.



Dress Code & Uniforms

What exactly is allowed according to the dress code?

Please see the handbook for all rules, allowed items, and specific uniform guidelines according to grade level. Some pictures of students in full dress uniform are shown here as reference.

Girls' Pre-k - 4th Grade Full Dress



Boys' Pre-k - 5th Grade Full Dress



Girls' 5th Grade Full Dress



Girls' & Boys' Junior High Full Dress





Can my child(ren) wear logo designs and labels on shoes and shirts?

No logos may be on shirts other than the St. Mary Catholic School crest made by Risse Brothers School Uniforms. Shoes with logos may be worn on school days when full dress is not required. Fridays and Holy Days are full dress days, and black or brown shoes appropriate for Mass must be worn. On these days students may bring shoes appropriate for recess in their backpacks to change into later. Pre-K through 5th grade must wear white crew or bobby socks on non-full dress days. 6th thru 8th grade may wear white no-show socks. Please refer to the school handbook for complete uniform information.

What is “Spirit Dress,” and when is it allowed?

On Wednesdays students are allowed to wear the school’s spirit shirt with their uniform bottoms. Occasionally other days during the year will be designated as spirit dress days as well.



How do I get a spirit shirt? Are they also sold in adult sizes?

This link can also be found at the bottom of our website home page.

<https://www.smlc-necessities.com/>

What do I do with uniforms that my child has outgrown?

You can either give them to another family you know or donate them to the uniform sale during the summer where they will be made available to other families.

When will my child(ren) need to “dress out” for P.E.?

Your child will not need to “dress out” for P.E., however s/he is required to have on school approved socks and athletic shoes to participate daily.

Are backpacks with wheels allowed?

Yes. Students will take textbooks home nightly, so rolling backpacks for 3rd thru 8th graders are a good idea.



Lunch & the Cafeteria

Where is the cafeteria?

Students eat lunch in Cargill Hall most of the time. However, it is also used by the parish so occasionally another event such as a funeral may displace the students for lunch. At these times the students eat in their classrooms. The office will do its best to notify you regarding days where lunch is in the classroom. Please do not come eat with your child on those days because classroom space is limited.

When will my child(ren) be eating lunch?

Your child's teacher may provide a class schedule to the parents, but if not just call the front office or email the teacher to learn your child's lunch time. Class lunch times are staggered throughout the late morning and early afternoon starting around 10:30am.

How do I purchase lunch for my child(ren)?

You will receive an e-mail with a menu and orders may be placed online if you have a FACTS account. You may also print the menu and turn in to the office along with your payment.

Fundraiser lunches?

These lunches are usually from Marco's Pizza, Canes or Chick-Fil-A. Funds go towards school activities such as the 5th grade trip to Camp Kappe, the 8th grade trip to DC, our sports program or other school programs. You may order these lunches during the month as long as the order is placed online or turned into the office 4 days prior to the date of the lunch. If you are ordering a fundraiser lunch during the week you must place your order through your Family Portal account or turn in a paper order to the office. Please e-mail Holly Smith at hsmith@stmarylc.org if you have any questions.

May I bring lunch from a local fast-food restaurant for my child(ren)?

Yes, but it is important to make the delivery on time. The lunch needs to arrive in the office at least 5 minutes prior to the start of the lunch period. Once you drop it off, school staff will deliver it to your child as soon as possible, or you may join your child for the meal as described below. If a child is at lunch for more than 5 minutes without food, a lunch will be provided, and you will be charged regular size lunch price. If you are running late, please notify the office so we can let cafeteria staff know to not provide a lunch.

What if my child gets to the cafeteria and does not have a lunch?

Our child's teacher will help him/her get a Lunchable and a drink and you will be billed for the cost, \$5.00.



My child wants to buy an ice cream at lunch. How can s/he do that?

Various ice cream and popsicle treats are available every day for \$0.50-\$0.75, payable in cash to the cafeteria staff.

May I come eat lunch with my child(ren)?

Yes! You will need to check in at the front office and receive a name badge each time. The official lunch visitation policy is stated in the handbook. You may want to arrive a little early and walk to Cargill Hall with your child's class since access to Cargill Hall is by badge only. If you miss them, though, there is a bell to ring at the school-side door of Cargill Hall. Someone inside will let you in if you have a name badge. Please remember you **must** be Safe Haven trained to eat lunch with your child. If you are running late, please notify the office so we can let cafeteria staff know to not provide a lunch.

How do the tables get cleaned with so many students coming and going?

Each class has designated students to wipe the tables and sweep the floor at the end of the class' lunch period. This is usually a rotating responsibility assigned by the teacher.



Communication

What is the Friday Letter?

This refers to the communication the school principal emails out each week, usually on Friday, with information for the coming week or so. Teachers also issue weekly updates about what each class will be doing the following week. Those are posted online, and some teachers also email it out to parents at the end of the week or over the weekend.

What is Bobcat Buzz?

Bobcat Buzz is the school's monthly newsletter. It is distributed via email as part of the Friday Letter message, and a copy is posted on the school website. Bobcat Buzz contains information from all over the St. Mary campus and should be a good one-stop-shop for details about upcoming events as well as pictures of what has been going on around the school.

What is FACTS SIS?

FACTS SIS is the online system where parents and students can access grades, performance, conduct, teacher comments, order lunches and up-coming assignments for some classes. The school will provide you with login instructions to "Family Portal" for this purpose.

When will I speak with my child's teacher for a parent conference?

Conference days are scheduled once each semester. These conferences are for the teacher, parent, and student. See the school calendar for the exact dates. Students in PreK-5th grade and their parents will have 15 minutes with their homeroom teacher. Junior High students and parents will meet with one or a pair of the junior high teachers as determined by the school. The school will provide notification of the conference times the week before the conferences. Conferences for families with multiple children will be scheduled back-to-back as much as possible.

Other than the scheduled conference days, how can I talk with the teacher?

You can send an email directly to the teacher. Teachers are happy to schedule a conference with you at any time of year and respond to emails or phone calls frequently. See the school handbook for further details about communicating with teachers.

Does the school have a yearbook? How do I get one?

A yearbook is produced every year. Parents are provided an opportunity to order a copy in the Spring. You will receive an e-mail with a link to order your copy online. Also, parents and/or businesses may purchase yearbook space for ads or to celebrate their child's achievements. Books are prepared during the summer and usually distributed in the fall.



Religious Education and Programs

Do the students attend Mass regularly? When?

Yes, they attend Mass in the church at 8:30am each Friday and on Holy Days of Obligation. Students must wear full dress to Mass. Further information is available in the handbook.

Does the entire school attend Mass together?

Yes, all students attend Mass on Fridays and on Holy Days of Obligation at 8:30am. Junior High students often sit amongst early childhood students at Mass to help the teacher monitor them and to model proper Mass behavior.

May I attend Mass with my child? Where do I sit?

You are always welcome at Mass. If you are interested in sitting with your child, please contact his/her teacher ahead of time so they can plan accordingly. Students are seated with their classes in the side sections of church while parents may sit in the middle pews or with their children. You must complete Safe Haven training if you would like to sit with your child and his/her class.

How do students serve at school Masses? How are they chosen for these roles?

Students serve at school Masses several ways. If the student has gone through altar serving training, they are eligible to altar serve. They may be asked to read and/or participate in special feast days and events. The way they are chosen will vary from class to class, as some teachers may select, draw names or ask the students if they would like to take part in a particular way. The teachers do try to include all the children in the class on a rotating basis in some part of the Mass – the readings, the choir, etc. If your child would like to have a particular role in the celebration of the Eucharist, he or she should express that to the teacher. Each week a class is scheduled to sing as a choir. Your child's teacher will let you know when it is their week.

How do students celebrate Advent and Christmas?

We celebrate the coming of the Christ child at Christmas, and in anticipation, parties are held for each class before school dismisses for the Christmas break. Room parents will contact you to let you know specifically what each class is doing and how you can participate and contribute. Many students also participate in the Christmas program in the Church.

Do students observe Holy Week and celebrate Easter?

Yes. This is the time when we recognize that Christ suffered during this week and died for us on Good Friday. Therefore, there are not Easter parties or celebrations before Easter Sunday. Students prepare and perform a Living Way of the Cross during Holy Week on Wednesday evening and Holy Thursday morning. Class parties are held on the Tuesday after Easter Sunday. There is no school on Easter Monday unless it is a bad weather make-up day.

You may be asked to send in party items, including filled eggs for some grades, prior to the long Easter weekend, though, so everything is in place for the following Tuesday.



What is the Living Way of the Cross?

This is the bringing to life of the Stations of the Cross during the Lenten season by reenacting each station. Everyone is invited for two opportunities to experience this moving presentation, scheduled for Wednesday evening of Holy Week and the morning of Holy Thursday.



What/when is May Crowning?

May Crowning is the feast that honors Mary as the queen of heaven and earth. Held in many schools and churches, we celebrate it in May. We come together as a school community to pray and crown the statue of Mary by laying flowers before the statue and then process into the church for Mass. Students may bring a flower from home or purchase one from the PSA-sponsored sale. The flowers are then donated to a local nursing facility for the residents to enjoy.

What sacramental preparation is offered during the school day?

At St. Mary, second grade students are eligible to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation and First Communion. In January, families of second graders will receive a letter from the parish director of children's religious education letting them know about the sacramental preparation course dates and actual sacrament dates for the entire parish. Generally, the classes take place weekly in the evening with First Reconciliation being on a Saturday morning at the end of February and First Communion Masses being held on two consecutive Saturday mornings in late April or early May. The Religion classes during the school day also cover sacramental preparation, and second graders have an in-school retreat in the spring that is focused on First Communion. Sacrament preparation classes are an excellent opportunity for spiritual growth and fellowship with other parish families. Students that participate in First Communion are invited to wear their First Communion attire to the first school Mass after everyone has completed First Communion. It is a special way that SMCS recognizes our First Communicants.

Who is required to perform service hours? How are these approved?

The students in the 4th-8th grades are required to perform service hours throughout the year and may begin to earn the hours the summer before. The service hours are logged, and a signature is required from the person for whom the work was done, along with photographs and a project to be provided by the students. The religion teacher will provide the specifics at the beginning of the school year as to the expectations of this project. Service hours follow our Catholic tradition of serving others and are based on the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy.

Service hours can be earned through many activities, including some that will be done as school-related projects. Opportunities outside school include but are not limited to altar serving, helping clean up the day after the church Bazaar, singing in the parish Christmas Choir and Boy Scout or Girl Scout projects. Individual projects of your choosing are also encouraged.



Academic Programs and Activities

What type of curriculum does St. Mary use? Who chooses this curriculum?

The school uses the comprehensive and current school curriculum set by the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, it follows the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, TEKS. Catholicism is integrated into all subject areas. It is geared to meet the standards of academic excellence as defined by National Catholic Education Association. It meets and often exceeds all educational requirements set by the state of Texas as well as the [Texas Catholic Conference Education Department](#) (TCCBED). We also supplement our curriculum with many technology-based educational tools and the most current research-based practices such as [NWEA Map Testing](#), [Mathletics](#), and more. Textbooks are reviewed and selected on a regular basis so as to be accurate and up-to-date. Teachers participate in ongoing professional development to enhance curriculum as well as integrate our Catholic faith across the curriculum. SMCS has been designated as a STREAM school by the Catholic Schools Office. STREAM stands for Science, Technology, Religion, Engineering, Arts and Music. At SMCS we strive to support growth in mind, heart and spirit, so students can Enter to Learn and Leave to Serve.

Curriculum

Curriculum at SMCS is an Archdiocesan curriculum (founded on Christian values and authentic Catholic doctrine) based on the Texas Education Agency (TEA) essential elements as part of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Our campus curricula program is accredited by TCCB ED. Master teachers from the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston Catholic schools develop, review TEKS and make recommendations as needed to utilize TEKS as the basis for our teaching coupled with Catholic doctrine and enhanced learning opportunities. It is our philosophy and belief that our curriculum demonstrates an excellence in academics, rather than merely the essentials of academics, since our curriculum is based on national standards. Our curriculum includes English/Language Arts (reading, grammar, phonics, spelling, creative expression, and writing), math, science (classwork and lab work), social studies (history and geography), fine arts, P.E., and religion. SMCS also offers Spanish, technology, music and library classes.

How much homework will my child(ren) have?

The handbook gives guidelines for the amount of time students in each grade should expect to spend on homework, so check there as a start. Generally, in elementary school students will have homework every night in math and language arts as well as a stated amount of time to be spent reading. Sometimes there will be homework in other subjects, too, especially if there is an upcoming test to study for. As the grade levels increase, the students will often also have homework in social studies, science, and/or Spanish. Junior high students will have homework in several subjects every night. Some of it will need to be completed and turned in online using their MSN Outlook account. Instructions will be sent home at the start of the year letting you know how to help them set this up.



Do St. Mary students take the STAAR, or is this for public schools only?

St. Mary students do not take the STAAR test. This year students in kindergarten through eighth grade will be administered the NWEA MAP Growth Test three times per year to monitor growth. The MAP Growth Test data is used to support and challenge students. The testing takes less than an hour per subject. Students participate in MAP testing for English Language Arts, Math and Science.

What is Tuesday Tutoring?

Once a week immediately after school, tutoring is offered by the teachers to students who need extra help. Details of this program are provided in the handbook. There is no cost for these group sessions. If your child attends Tuesday Tutoring for several weeks without seeing any improvement in grades, more intense tutoring may be needed. Teachers will contact the parents regarding tutoring recommendations as well as invite students that need extra support to participate in tutoring.

Does St. Mary offer special enrichment for children who are ahead of the class academically?

The St. Mary curriculum is designed to challenge all students. SMCS Teachers work to differentiate instruction to offer support and challenge for students. For students ready for a further challenge, their classroom teacher will offer enrichment activities in the form of centers, computer-based opportunities, or other methods as determined by the teacher. SMCS offers a variety of clubs for enrichment. Students in grades three through seven may be invited to participate in the archdiocesan enrichment program, DECATS, Debusk Enrichment Center for Academically Talented Scholars. There are grade level guidelines for students to qualify for the DECATS Summer Program. Guidelines are based on a combination of classroom and standardized testing achievement.

When does my child start to be recognized as an Honor Roll student?

Honor Roll recognition is provided for 3rd-8th grades. Honor Roll Awards are presented to students during Prayer Service following the grading period. There are two options: All A Honor Roll and A/B Honor Roll. Students must demonstrate academic achievement along with an E in conduct to receive Honor Roll recognition.

When can my child go to the library?

Students begin checking out library books in pre-k4. Different grades are allowed different numbers of books to be checked out at once. Lower grades have story time with the librarian, and older students may use the library during their class' designated time as well as other times during the day as their teacher allows. Further library rules are described in the handbook.



What is the Accelerated Reader, AR, Program? When does my child start?

AR is an individually paced, computer-based [Renaissance Learning](https://hosted154.renlearn.com/234356/HomeConnect/) program that helps teachers monitor your child's independent reading skills. A student begins to use it as soon as his/her teacher determines s/he is ready, usually in kindergarten. After an online assessment, the student will be given a point goal and will earn points by taking a computer-based test after reading a book. Younger students watch a flower get "filled up" as they accumulate points. Older students will have a portion of their Reading class grade determined by their AR test scores. While the tests must be taken at school, parents and students can monitor progress at home by accessing the student account from home at

<https://hosted154.renlearn.com/234356/HomeConnect/>. Parents may want to sign up for email alerts to be sent with the results of each test the student takes.

Students in grades 1-8 have goals to meet each term based on their reading level. The AR Program is a way for teachers and administration to monitor comprehension skills throughout all grade levels. It is a form of longitudinal data that supports student growth.

What is Mathletics? How does it work?

[Mathletics.com](https://www.mathletics.com/) is the web site St. Mary uses to supplement the math curriculum both at school and at home. It is highly individualized learning that the students love! Your child will get a username and password to access the site from anywhere, including via the tablet app. The subscription lasts year-round, so we encourage your child to use it during school breaks and over the summer to keep up their math skills.

What grades participate in the Spelling Bee?

Spelling Bees are held at the Elementary and Junior High levels. First, 3rd through 5th grade classes hold a class bee, and the top spellers in each class then compete against each other in the St. Mary Elementary Spelling Bee. The winner goes on to the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston Elementary Spelling Bee. Similarly, junior high classes will hold class bees with the top spellers in each class competing against each other at a school spelling bee. The junior high winner goes on to compete in the local Scripps Spelling Bee.

What is the Science Fair? Who participates in it?

Science Fair is a competition in which students utilize the scientific method to answer a specific question and then present the results. Students earn a grade for this as well as compete against their peers for the opportunity to advance to the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston fairs, which feature winners from other area schools. Science Fair projects help students develop skills above and beyond science proficiency in the areas of reading and writing, math, time management, communication, and ethics. At St. Mary, students in 2nd through 8th grades participate in the Science Fair. First grade students have the option to participate. The Junior High fair is held in January, and the Elementary fair later in the spring,





usually in April. Project topics are assigned to 1st and 2nd graders; 3rd through 5th graders may choose a project within certain topic areas; 6th through 8th graders may choose any topic. Students must choose topics that are appropriate for their grade level. They will need some support from home to complete the project. The project details are displayed on a trifold board and presented by the student. Guidelines are reviewed and studied in class. Students also receive a packet explaining what is expected for their project. The Science Fair assignment is broken down into several checkpoints to ensure that students have time and feedback for their projects. These projects take several weeks to complete, and parental assistance will often be required, depending on the student's experience with science projects and on the subject being investigated.

All grade levels study the scientific process at the beginning of the school year. They participate in grade level labs to demonstrate the method in order to prepare them for the SMCS Science Fair. SMCS is recognized by the archdiocese as one of their S.T.R.E.A.M. (Science, Technology, Religion, Engineering, Arts and Music) schools. We are proud of the designation and work to provide many S.T.R.E.A.M. opportunities for all students!



Early Childhood Program

When is kindergarten graduation?

St. Mary Catholic School does not have a kindergarten graduation ceremony, but they have a many special celebrations during the year featuring students in the Early Childhood Program.

Do pre-k and kindergarten students have snacks?

Yes, they alternate providing snacks each week to provide for their classmates, and the school also provides some days as well. Teachers will send home a schedule each month, so you know when it is your child's turn to bring in a snack. Classroom allergy information will also be sent home.

Do students in pre-k and kindergarten take field trips?

No. They participate in "in school" field trips, but field trips that are off campus begin in 1st grade has hosted author's visits, Moody Garden's traveling classroom and productions from theaters in Houston, so all students have the opportunity to enjoy in-school field trips.



Elementary School

Does my child need to know how to write in cursive?

St. Mary students are taught cursive handwriting in the 2nd grade, and once all letters have been taught, they are expected to complete all assignments in cursive. If your child does not yet know cursive and has passed 3rd grade already, the teacher will work with you to set up a plan.

Is my child allowed to eat a snack during the day?

Teachers usually allow students to bring an individual snack, and each teacher will communicate at the start of the year when the students are allowed to eat these. If the class contains one or more students with specific allergies, these will also be communicated to parents by the teacher.

What kind of field trips do students in grades 1-5 take?

Elementary school students usually take one field trip each semester. The locations vary, but in the past have included the Main St. Theater, Armand Bayou Nature Center, Moody Gardens, various plays at the University of St. Thomas (usually after reading the associated book or play), the Ronald McDonald House, and exhibits at the Houston Museum of Natural Science. Parents provide the transportation for these trips. Further guidelines are included in the handbook.

What is Camp Kappe?

Offering the School of Environmental Education, [Camp Kappe](#) is a retreat facility near Plantersville, TX where 5th graders in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston spend four days and three nights learning about one of the seven components of Catholic Social Teaching: Care for God's Creation. Some fundraising is performed by the 5th grade class to help defray the cost. The date of the trip and specific information is provided to parents of 5th graders several weeks prior to the trip.

What is STAR BASE?

DoD STARBASE focuses on elementary students, primarily fifth graders. The goal is to motivate them to explore Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) as they continue their education.

The program engages students through the inquiry-based curriculum with its "hands-on, mind-on" experiential activities. They study Newton's Laws and Bernoulli's principle; explore nanotechnology, navigation and mapping. They are captivated by engineering as they use the computer to design space stations, all-terrain vehicles, and submersibles. Math is embedded throughout the curriculum and students use metric measurement, estimation, calculation geometry and data analysis to solve questions. Teamwork is stressed as they work together to explore, explain, elaborate and evaluate concepts.



Junior High

Do the junior high students stay in one classroom like the elementary grades?

The junior high students will circulate throughout the day to different classrooms according to subjects. However, they are assigned by grade a homeroom. Each Junior High student has a locker to keep their book and school supplies. They both start and end their day in their homeroom to help them prepare for the day and for homework for that evening.

What is the 8th grade trip about? Who gets to go?

The 8th grade field trip to Washington, D.C. is a privilege and a blessing for the graduating class. Parents and students participate in fundraising events to help defray the cost. The trip usually takes place during one of the last months of the school year. A sponsor teacher from that grade will attend as the official chaperone. Fundraising for this event starts during the 7th grade year following the conclusion of the current 8th graders' trip. Included in the cost is hotel, food, transportation and a tour guide for the duration of the trip. It is a wonderful way to celebrate the children's career at St. Mary Catholic School and graduation into high school. The bonds and memories are unforgettable to this group for years to come!



Extracurricular Activities

My child wants to play sports. What are the options?

St. Mary offers many sports throughout the year. The fall season ushers in cross country (coed, grades 3-8), soccer (coed, grades 5-8) and volleyball (girls, grades 4-8), followed by basketball (girls' and boys', grades 5-8). The spring season will bring track and field (coed, grades 3-8). Practices are held after school with the exact schedule varying by sport. The seasons usually last 2-3 months depending on the competitive events that are scheduled for each sport. There is a fee of \$100 to \$200 per sport, and each student athlete will need to get a doctor to administer a physical and sign the appropriate Archdiocesan form to certify fitness to play. Athletic eligibility requirements and other expectations are described in the school handbook.

How does my child get involved in the Spirit Squad?

Information is provided at the beginning of the school year explaining the after-school practice times and fun events the Spirit Squad leads, such as pep rallies and the Christmas parade performance.



Who can participate in Orchestra?

Orchestra started in the 2019-2020 school year. Mrs. Miller, will send out information regarding joining orchestra. Students as young as kindergarten will have the opportunity to join the SMCS Orchestra. There is a limited number of slots available. Tryouts and information will be sent out by Mrs. Miller in August.

What is musical theater?

Musical theater is a once-a-week, after school club that is a display of singing, acting and dancing known as the triple threat. The students have the opportunity to participate in a musical, in the spring. Students learn basic vocal skills/techniques, study the art of stage acting, and learn simple choreography and dance technique. Students in 3rd-8th grades are able to join this fantastic and exciting club offered for a fee. Ms. Richardson and Mrs. White are the leaders of the SMCS Musical Theater Program.

What is Crochet Crew?

Crochet Crew is an after-school club that meets one day each week. Students in 1st - 8th grades may participate. The students learn the basic crochet techniques by the use of a loom, which is available for a small fee. No prior experience is necessary. The students crochet hats/beanies for newborns at their own pace throughout the year, to be distributed to area hospitals by the students toward the latter part of the year. They are also given as gifts to St. Mary Catholic Church newly baptized babies. The beanies are blessed by a priest before distribution. Students also earn service hours by attending the meetings and for each baby beanie they make.



School Events and Organizations

What and when is Open House?

Open House is a fun night full of information for you and your child(ren). Come in and say “Hi” and see what your child has been learning. Meet your child(ren)s teacher and get a packet with useful information on the upcoming year such as schedule, expectations, volunteer opportunities and more. This event takes place a few weeks after the first day of school.

When are “early dismissal days”? Why do we have them?

Early dismissal days are the first Wednesday of every month when dismissal occurs at 2:00pm. You are required to pick your child up at this time or make arrangements for after care. This day occurs to allow the teachers to meet with the principal to discuss important school topics and upcoming events.

What is the Halloween Carnival all about?

The Halloween carnival is a fun and safe tradition at St. Mary Catholic School. It is a full day of carnival activities such as games, popcorn, candy, face painting and a photo booth. Fun for the entire family! Parents, grandparents, younger siblings and any family members are encouraged to attend and see the children dressed up for Halloween. It is usually on the Friday before Halloween with set up Thursday after school. Please note the costume rule of no witches, devils, masks, or weapons. Adults who attend **must** be SAFE HAVEN trained.

What is Field Day?

Field day is an end-of-the-year event that allows the kids to play and compete in the nature of good spirit, encouragement and overall sportsmanship. It is held on the school/church grounds and is an all-day event, complete with snow cones, snacks, drinks, awards and fun. There are many different opportunities for the children to compete against their peers within their class and in a grade level adjacent to their grade, i.e. 7th vs. 8th. A special t-shirt will be designed for the day, and order forms for those will go home a few weeks before Field Day. Each class will have a different colored shirt. Parents and other family members are welcome to attend, and we can always use extra help that day to make everything run smoothly! Keep in mind that adult attendees **must** be SAFE HAVEN trained.

When is Catholic Schools Week, and what takes place during it?

Catholic Schools Week is a great celebration of all the Catholic schools in the United States that begins on the last Sunday in January. Activities often include a school open house, special evening events for the family, and special activities during the day for the students.

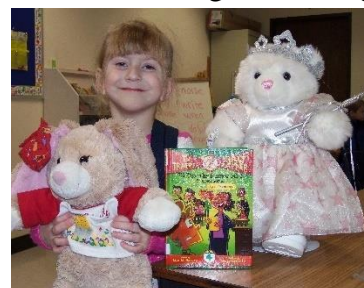


What is the student birthday blessing?

On or around the day of your child's birthday, s/he will get to go on stage at morning prayer time to receive a blessing from the whole school on his/her special day. Students with summer birthdays are asked to choose a date late in the year to receive their blessing.

What is the birthday bear program?

The birthday bear program is an opportunity for parents to make a small donation to the library to purchase a book that is inscribed with the name and birthday of their child, noting it as being donated in his/her honor. Students in pre-k through 5th grades get to choose from an array of fancy bears to keep with them in the classroom for the day. Junior High students may enjoy a free dress day instead of the bear. Forms for this program are available at the start of the school year and should be submitted at least a few weeks in advance of the student's birthday. Students with summer birthdays may choose any day during the school year as their "substitute birthday" for this program.



What is First Weekend Mass?

On the first Weekend of each month the children of St. Mary Catholic School are asked to attend any Mass in their full-dress uniform. In return for their service, the children are permitted to wear free dress to school the following Monday. Please see the calendar on the school website for dates.

What are family movie nights?

They are a fun social event where the children enjoy snacks and an age-appropriate movie while parents can mix and mingle in the background. The office will send out sign-up sheets for these fun events.

Is there a special day for grandparents?

Yes! The Grandparents' Luncheon is usually held the Friday before Thanksgiving and features grandparents (or parents or other relatives) eating lunch with students and having their picture taken in a specially designed photo area. Lunch order forms will be available a few weeks in advance. Keep in mind that adult attendees **must** be SAFE HAVEN trained.



What is the St. Mary Catholic School Spring Gala?

This is our biggest fundraiser of the year! It is complete with dinner, dancing, and both silent and live auctions. Each class at St. Mary is asked to provide a themed basket and themed class project for the auctions. It is for adults only, and all are invited including parents, grandparents, friends, family and parishioners of St. Mary. Dress is nice but does not need to be formal. Proceeds are earmarked for different areas each year depending on the needs of the school. Below are some pictures showing past class baskets and art projects.





Do we have Pep Rallies? If so, when and where? Who can attend?

Pep Rallies are held to kick off our Steps for Students fun run, held in February, and major fundraisers with an occasional one for the sports participants throughout the year. Our Jr. High student lead the Pep Rallies. All are invited, and they are held in Cargill Hall at the end of the school day, usually from 2:00-3:00pm.

Do the students take school pictures?

Yes. They will have a class picture day early in the second semester as well as two other individual picture day opportunities. In the fall pictures for the yearbook are taken in full dress uniform. In the spring students are invited to wear a nice outfit for another individual picture. Sports pictures are usually also taken on this day. You will be given the option to purchase pictures each time.

What is the Parent School Association (PSA)? When does it meet?

The PSA is equivalent to what other schools may call the PTA or HSA. The purpose of the PSA is to aid the school in all aspects of its work, to be a forum for discussions, to provide informational programs, to raise money and to create a deeper appreciation for Catholic education, especially at St. Mary Catholic School. Many hands are appreciated in the making of a PSA committee. Meetings are held on an as-needed basis and usually focus on a specific topic. Parents are all considered members of the PSA – no extra fees or sign-up required – and are asked to volunteer each year in whatever ways fit your schedule and talents.

Who makes up the School Council? What does it do? When/where does it meet?

The school council is comprised of parents and parishioners who, as a body, serve in an advisory role to the pastor and principal. They participate in the development and execution of a strategic plan for the school, assist with budgeting, and offer leadership in the areas of marketing, development, recruitment, communications, and facilities. The school council holds an open meeting one Monday evening each month in the school library. See the school web site for the schedule and minutes of past meetings. The council can be contacted by emailing lhalbardier@stmarylc.org.



Ways to Get Involved

What volunteer opportunities exist? Who do I talk to for more information or to volunteer?

There are many volunteer opportunities for people with a wide variety of talents and schedules! Some are through your child's teacher(s), others through various school committees, and many through the PSA. Any volunteering done at the school **requires** the volunteer to be SAFE HAVEN trained.

At Open House, your child's teacher will probably give you a paper asking about ways you can contribute. These opportunities are coordinated directly by the teacher.

There are a few groups that benefit the school as a whole that you may want to consider being part of: the school council, the St. Mary Catholic School Spring Gala planning committee, and the marketing committee. Please see our principal if you are interested in learning about or joining any of these.

The Parent School Association (PSA) mobilizes volunteers including but not limited to the areas listed below:

- ☐ St. Mary Welcome Group -- Bobcat Buddies
- ☐ Newsletter and Communication Group (Bobcat Buzz)
- ☐ Room Mom Coordinator
- ☐ Advent and Christmas Shop (PSA Fundraiser)
- ☐ St. Valentine's Day Sale (PSA Fundraiser)
- ☐ May Crowning Flower Sale (PSA Fundraiser)
- ☐ First Sunday Mass
- ☐ Monthly Teacher Appreciation Events
- ☐ Halloween Carnival
- ☐ St. Mary Catholic School Spring Gala (Fundraiser)
- ☐ Steps for Students Fundraiser and Tailgating Celebration
- ☐ Teacher Appreciation Week
- ☐ Spirit Shirt Sales
- ☐ Back-to-School Pool Party

You are welcome to email the PSA parent contact, Patricia Richards at prichards@stmarylc.org, at any time regarding volunteering or contact Mrs. Halbardier or Mrs. Ellison in the school office.



What are the responsibilities of a room parent?

The St. Mary volunteer room parents assist the teacher in many different ways. At a minimum, SAFE HAVEN trained room parents are responsible for making sure the following are completed on schedule:

- ☐ Three class parties (Christmas, Steps for Students Tailgating Party and Easter) - dates are listed on the current calendar, which is on the school website. Early Childhood classes will also have parties for Apple Day, the Hundredth Day of School, Chinese New Year, Dr. Seuss Day, and Go Texan Day.
- ☐ Decorating, setting up, cleaning up and staffing the class' assigned Halloween Carnival booth
- ☐ Gala Auction Class Basket and Gala Auction Class Art Project for the Annual Spring Gala that is held in April.

The room parent can always ask for assistance from other parents in that class who might want to help. All SAFE HAVEN trained parents are invited to assist in classroom activities. The room parent works to coordinate events with help from families.

A "Room Parent Workshop" is held early in the year for those interested in learning more.

I have a child/children not yet in school. Can I bring him/her/them with me when I volunteer?

St. Mary is all about family and can almost always work around having siblings attend meetings, conferences, and volunteer jobs on campus with you. If you will be helping in a classroom or the library, please speak to the teacher or librarian ahead of time to confirm whether it is feasible to have younger children attend with you for that specific activity. If you are volunteering on a committee that meets after school, your children may attend SMCS After Care Program free of charge during the meeting. Please contact Janet Ellison, jellison@stmarylc.org if you need child care when you attend an after school meeting. One exception is field trips. Drivers and chaperones for field trips are not allowed to bring other children along.

What is the Watch D.O.G.S. program?

[WATCH D.O.G.S. \(Dads Of Great Students\)](#) are fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and other father-figures who volunteer during the school year. These "Watch DOGS" work along-side the teachers in the classroom, play at recess, eat lunch with students, and perform other assigned activities where they actively engage with the students. SAFE HAVEN-trained dads, grandfathers, uncles, and other father-figures are encouraged to volunteer for a half day or a full day by contacting the principal.



Financial Matters

Does St. Mary provide financial assistance?

Applications for financial assistance must be filed through the Private School Aid Service (PSAS). Further information on deadline and how to apply is available in the handbook. Additionally, SMCS offers direct financial assistance through funds raised from the Spring Gala. Contact the office to schedule a meeting with Mrs. Halbardier if you would like to discuss financial aid.

What is Steps for Students?

[Steps for Students](#) is an Archdiocesan-wide fundraiser held each February. The goal of Steps for Students is to raise awareness of the importance of a Catholic education and provide much needed resources for our Catholic Schools. This day of family fun includes a 5k USA Track and Field Association sanctioned race and Post Race Party. While the event includes schools from all over the Houston area, registration fees and support pledges are designated to a specific school, so this is a great opportunity for fellowship and raising money directly for St. Mary Catholic School! Registrants receive a t-shirt, which is often allowed to be worn to school on Spirit Days around the time of the race. SMCS depends on our community for participation in Steps for Students to support our school. Each year the Steps for Students Sponsor, Coach DeLeon, will work with our community to set goals and celebrate meeting them!

What are restaurant fundraising nights?

Throughout the year the school will host various fundraising nights at different places. You can attend and mention St. Mary or provide a flyer, and the school will be given a portion of the sales from the night. It is a great way to socialize with other parents and students and staff while also raising money for your school!

Why do we have book fairs? Do parents go to them?

Book fairs are fundraisers that directly benefit the school library. We at St. Mary have them two times during the school year. Parents, grandparents, friends, parishioners and family are all invited and encouraged to come. It is a great way to encourage the students to read more outside the classroom. The children are given a wish list sheet to fill out at a preview time during the school day to help family members purchase perhaps for a gift. It also gives the parents an opportunity to purchase something for their children's teachers to use in the classroom in addition to augment the regular curriculum.



Do you have a suggestion or a question that was not included?

Please use this page to help us improve this information for future new families.
You may return it to the school office. Thank you!

My question is:

The answer I did not understand is:

My suggestion for improvement of this booklet is:
