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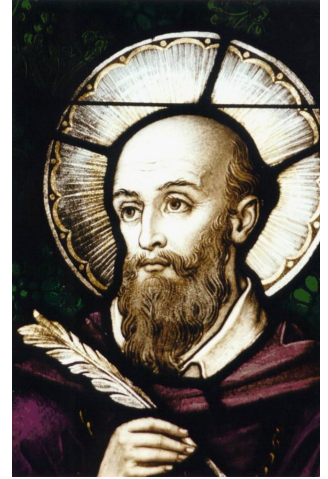
Philothea School of Formation

2019-20 Student Handbook

What is the Philothea School of Formation?

The Philothea School of Formation was founded in the Fall of 2019. It is an initiative of the Office of Youth Discipleship & Evangelization to assist in the formation of junior high and high school youth through community and mentorship.

Philothea comes from the text *Introduction to the Devout Life* by St. Francis De Sales. Philothea is the name of a young female who was desiring to grow in holiness and devotion to God. In her efforts to do so, she seeks out the wisdom and counsel of St. Francis De Sales. The text is a series of writings that he gave her as a beginning instruction to the faith.



The work of the Philothea School of Formation is essentially to coordinate and oversee efforts of apprenticeship and education in the faith similar to that of the style of St. Francis De Sales. It is also intended to support and supplement (not replace) the other various efforts of formation offered through parishes, schools, and communities.

Who Can Participate?

The Philothea School of Formation is open to any student in grades 7-12 who express a desire to grow in their faith and is willing to commit to the program requirements. All students must apply to the program, have an interview, and make a one-year commitment to the program.

Program Requirements

Students are asked to commit to the program for one year at a time with the option of continuing each year without reapplying as long as the program requirements are maintained:

For the 2019-2020 school year the program requirements include:



Regular Mentor Check-In's

Each student will be assigned a mentor that they are required to meet with at least one time each month. The primary goal of these meetings is for the mentor to offer accountability and counsel to the student in their commitment to living out the ordinary Christian life (see below).



Weekly Online Study and Discussions

Every week, through an online forum, we will post a simple (usually short) online article, video, or podcast followed with a couple of questions. The students, along with priests and other adults from around the diocese, will engage in discussion. Students are expected to have an active participation in these discussions.



Commitment to the Ordinary Christian Life

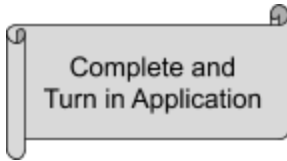
Students will be held accountable through their mentor in the following areas:

- Participation in parish life (Sacraments, community, youth ministry programs, etc.)
- Commitment to daily prayer
- Ongoing effort to live in and receive through their current vocation as son/daughter, sibling, friend, student, etc
- General attentiveness to the four areas of formation (Human, Intellectual, Spiritual, Pastoral)

Certification

Students that complete the program requirements will receive a certificate from the diocese after each year of completion.

Application Process



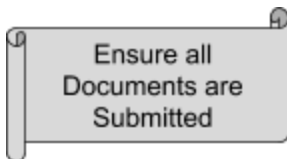
You can download the application at www.sfcatholic.org/philotha. Fill out the application in its entirety and mail or scan and email it to rekeren@sfcatholic.org.



Once the application is received, you will be contacted to set up a time for an interview. If possible, interviews will be done in person.



You may already have a mentor in mind. Because mentors must be approved before serving as a mentor, we ask that you refrain from asking anyone to be your mentor until permission has been granted. Discerning a mentor is an important part of the formation process.



Because of the nature of this program, several things need to be in place before you can formally begin. We'll work with you to ensure everything is turned in, approved, and ready to go so you can get started as soon as possible.



You'll be given access to our online forum for community discussions and we'll get you and your mentor everything you need to start meeting.

Different Roles Within the Program

Participants

Participation in this program is driven by the initiative of the participant (that's you!). While there are many who are intended to support you in your formation, you will find that the requirements of the program expect you to maintain a healthy order and discipline in your own life, in your relationships with others, and with the expectations of the program itself. No one will do this for you.

Parents

Parents have the primary role of the formation of their child. This program is not intended to replace the parents or do the work for the parents, but to support their efforts and partner with them. This partnership is something we want to take very seriously. Parents will be provided information as to how they can best participate in and assist with the program. Parents must approve of their child's participation in this program and approve the mentor assigned to their child as well.

Pastors

In a similar way, our hope is to, as much as possible, partner with the pastor in their responsibility of offering good formation opportunities to our young people. We do keep the pastor involved throughout the process, making them aware of who is participating in the program and what we are doing. Pastors are also asked to provide insights into any potential mentors that a participant may request.

Mentors

The role of the mentor is primarily to provide accountability for students to the expectations within the program and to offer counsel in the various areas of formation as needed. This will typically be done through a phone call or meeting. The mentors also have a responsibility of submitting regular feedback and evaluations to the diocese which may also be shared with parents or pastors along the way.

Parish / School Staff | (Religious Education Directors, Youth Ministers, Campus Ministers, etc.)

Parish and school staff are often sought out for additional support, insights, and feedback, but do not currently have any formal roles within the program. If a parish or school has enough participants within the program, it may be appropriate to appoint a contact for the diocese who can help coordinate some of the details necessary for the program to function most effectively. As pastors receive information regarding the program, they may also choose to share information with their appointed staff. Parish and school staff do often make great mentors within the program as well.

Online Community

The goal of the online community is to offer a place for the individuals within the program to connect with others, ask questions, and share their experiences with one another. The online community is a private community, only visible to the participants, mentors, and other approved priests and ministry leaders.

Contents of Forum

The online community forum is comprised of three different areas:

Weekly Discussions

Each week the moderators will begin one thread for discussion. This will typically include a short video, blog post or reading, a clip of a podcast, etc.

Participant Driven Discussions

This is an area where participants can start their own threads with questions about the faith, prayer requests, sharing of ideas or resources, etc.

Additional Resources

Moderators may also share additional resources (first approved by the diocese) here.

Expectations of Participation

Participants in the program are expected to participate each week in the “Weekly Discussions” section of the community by responding to questions, responding to others, and/or enhancing the discussion in some way.

It is understandable that one might “fall behind” with this commitment. Participants must never fall behind more than two weeks.

Commitment to the Ordinary Christian Life

Our primary goal in the Philothea School of Formation is that participants would be formed in the ordinary Christian life. In short, this means learning to live a life of faith and prayer at every moment and in every place.

The “exercises” then are ones that cannot easily be practiced except in the ordinary life.

Before being accepted into the program, participants will sign a “covenant” committing themselves to the basic requirements of the program.

Students will be held accountable through their mentor in the following areas:

- Participation in parish life (Sacraments, community, youth ministry programs, etc.)
- Commitment to daily prayer
- Ongoing effort to live in and receive through their current vocation as son/daughter, sibling, friend, student, etc
- General attentiveness to the four areas of formation (Human, Intellectual, Spiritual, Pastoral)

Mentorship

Mentorship is at the heart of “method” used by St. Francis De Sales to his student *Philothea*. Mentorship is also the most sought after “method” from young people today. As mentioned above, the purpose of the mentorship within this program is to offer accountability, support, and counsel in the students attempt to live out the ordinary Christian life. For clarity and consistency within this program, it is important to understand the proper role of the mentor.

While a mentor might have some opportunities to teach and to “help” with advice or counsel along the way, their role should be more so in helping the student seek out good teachers and becoming a student.

In short, the mentors role is offer suggestions and accountability to the student in how they are living out their Christian life. A mentor should enhance the “ordinary” aspects of life, not replace them. Similar to the work of a family doctor, they should “prescribe” solutions and refer the student to “specialists” as there is a need rather than becoming the solution themselves.

Mentors will receive more specific information and training on their role prior to becoming a mentor and will be invited into ongoing training on a regular basis.

Certificate of Completion

While being able to put the *Philothea School of Formation* on your college applications isn’t the reason you’re doing this, students who complete the program requirements will receive a certificate of completion.