Volunteer Handbook

St. Thomas School
Newton, IL
618/783-3517

WELCOME!!

On behalf of the students, teachers, and staff of St. Thomas School, thank you for offering to serve as a volunteer. For children and youth of all ages and backgrounds, a good education is the stepping stone to a better life. No one put it better than Hubert Humphrey who once said, "The road to freedom here and everywhere on earth begins in the classroom." Preparing today's students for tomorrow's challenges is crucial. When our children succeed in life, we all benefit.

Volunteers fill many roles at St. Thomas. They may work directly with students – helping in the classroom as a tutor or a class parent, supervising on the playground, coaching a sport or scholastic bowl, dispensing fluoride, or checking out books in the library. They may help with fundraisers – bingo, the garage sale or soup supper, SCRIP, working in our booth at Fall Festival, or helping with our Trivia Night or Picnic. They may also help keep our school running – providing help with maintenance and upgrades, serving as a substitute in the kitchen or the classroom, or driving a bus for field trips. We simply couldn't do it without the help of volunteers.

Whether you are volunteering as part of your required Fair Share hours or simply because you want to help our school, we appreciate your willingness to share your time and talents to increase the opportunities for our students. This handbook has been developed to aid you in performing the services that may be required of you at St. Thomas. We hope you will find it helpful.

Thank you again for volunteering. I wish for each of you a successful, rewarding, and satisfying experience. Should you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to speak with me.

Jill Bierman, Principal
St. Thomas School

Mission Statement

St. Thomas School is a faithful community of people dedicated to communicating Gospel values, educating and developing the whole person, and providing opportunities for growth, thus enabling the students and staff to be of service to God, to each other, to the Church, and to society.

Philosophy of St. Thomas School

WE BELIEVE that Catholic Education centers on Jesus Christ. This educational ministry seeks to communicate Gospel values and provides for a Community of Faith, which is living, conscious and active within a Christian community.

WE BELIEVE in the integration of Faith in the lives of our students so each can have the opportunity to develop the whole person: spiritually, morally, intellectually, emotionally, socially and physically. In building the Kingdom of God, we emphasize the great importance of each individual as loved and loving.

WE BELIEVE in fostering an environment in which each student is encouraged to accept responsibility for personal choices, to think critically and to acquire leadership skills.

WE BELIEVE in stressing basic life and educational skills to provide opportunities for growth.

WE BELIEVE that the mission of St. Thomas School is to enable the students to be of service to God, to each other, to the Church and to society.

Fair Share

St. Thomas School depends on volunteers to provide services for students while keeping costs down. All parents are required to work a specified number of hours at school activities and school fundraisers – to contribute their *fair share* as volunteers.

Requirements for Volunteers

Volunteers play an important role in the services offered at St. Thomas School, and we welcome all with a sincere desire to help. Without the assistance of volunteers, we could not offer the quality educational program we now make available to our students. In the interests of student safety, all parents and other volunteers are required to complete the Protecting God's Children session, to consent to a criminal history background check, and to review the diocesan Policy on Sexual Abuse of Minors by Church Personnel and the Policy on Working with Minors (Code of Conduct).

Communication

An effective volunteer program depends upon good two-way communication. The school will keep volunteers aware of pertinent events and information. The parent letter, school calendar, and school website also provide abundant information on school activities. Volunteers should contact the teacher or principal when they have a question, problem, or suggestion. *A regular volunteer who will be absent or late should call the school as soon as possible.*

Code for Volunteers

As a volunteer, I realize that I am subject to a code of ethics, similar to that which binds the professional staff. I, like them, in assuming certain responsibilities, expect to be accountable for those responsibilities. I will keep confidential matters that are *confidential*.

As a volunteer, I agree to serve without pay, but to strive to maintain the same high standards as the paid staff.

As a volunteer, I promise to take to my work an attitude of open-mindedness; to be willing to be trained for it; to bring to it an interest and attention.

As a volunteer, I believe that my attitude toward volunteer work should be professional. I believe that I have an obligation to my work, to those who direct it, to my colleagues, to those for whom it is done, and to the school community.

As a volunteer, I will be eager to contribute all that I can to human betterment, I accept this Code for Volunteers as my code, to be followed carefully and cheerfully.

Confidentiality

State and federal law protects the confidentiality of school records and information. Knowledge about student abilities, maturity, and behavior is often acquired at school. Students and school staff need to know they can trust volunteers to respect their right to privacy. ***Volunteers must not share information regarding a student or staff member with others, including their families.*** Nothing learned at school should ***ever*** be shared on social media. If a volunteer has a concern about something he/she sees or hears at school, it should be discussed with the appropriate staff member – either the classroom teacher or the principal.

Fire/Disaster Drills

Volunteers should be familiar with the fire escape routes and disaster routines for the specific rooms in which they will be working. These should be posted in the classroom and all facilities.

Volunteer Job Descriptions

General Guidelines

Volunteers provide a variety of needed services at St. Thomas. It is very important that volunteers be reliable about meeting their commitments as staff and students are counting on them. *They should call the school as soon as possible if they are going to be late or absent.* Volunteers should dress and act maturely and responsibly, and they should remain aware that they are essentially acting as staff members during this time. If they have questions or concerns, these should be discussed with the principal, not with other volunteers, parents, or neighbors.

Playground Volunteer

Playground volunteers play a very important role in keeping our students safe. With a concrete playground bounded by a major state highway and a busy street, there are a number of areas of concern. Playground volunteers should:

- Arrive a few minutes early so they can be ready when their supervisory time begins.
- Make sure one supervisor has a school walkie-talkie to contact the office if necessary.

- Request identification of anyone they don't know who enters the playground. If they have any questions or concerns about an individual, they should contact the principal or a staff member.
- Enforce the established safety rules (Appendix A for playground rules; Appendix B for parish center rules) and the consequences for breaking them. A student who must be told more than once should be required to sit out. Disrespect or persistent misbehavior should be reported to the teacher and/or the principal.
- Be alert and pay attention to the students. Volunteers must not neglect their responsibilities as they talk with other volunteers or with some of the students. *Volunteers should not use their cell phones unless needed in an emergency.*
- Volunteers may bring a child who is not yet in school if they can still fulfill their supervisory responsibilities.
- Distribute themselves around the playground so all areas are supervised. Students are better about following the rules if an adult is close.
- Dress for the weather. Our students are inside for the biggest part of the school day, and they need a chance to get out and run around. We will have them outside on the playground as much as possible.
- One of the lunch-time playground volunteers should meet each group of students at Door #4 where they come out after lunch. This will ensure that they are walking and being quiet until they reach the playground.

Substitute Cook

The head cook will provide directions regarding meal preparation and clean-up. A few guidelines:

- Closed-toe shoes must be worn. This is required by state guidelines.
- Jeans and a T-shirt are appropriate attire for working in the kitchen.
- Work hours are typically 9:00-1:00.

Library Volunteer

The head librarian will establish the rules for library volunteers. Generally, volunteers will

- Check books in and out.
- Cover, repair, and shelve books.

Fundraiser Volunteer

As a parochial school, St. Thomas receives no tax funds; therefore, fundraisers are very important in providing our programs. Volunteers who assist with fundraisers are to follow the direction of the head of the activity.

Field Trip Volunteer

Field trips are special times for students as they are away from school in relatively unstructured situations. Although they are both fun and educational, field trips also provide unique challenges. School rules remain in effect, and adults must be aware of safety issues. Teachers establish rules to meet the unique circumstances of each trip. Volunteers are to follow these rules and to help ensure that students also follow them. It is very important that adults keep a close eye on the students. Younger children are not permitted on field trips. Field trips provide enough special considerations that the school and the diocese have adopted specific policies (below) to govern behavior.

Volunteer Coach

Our coaches are wonderful examples of good sportsmanship and the development of skills and a love and respect for the game being played. We ask that our coaches communicate with the

Athletic Director for scheduling of practices and competitions as well as letting the school office know of practices and leave times. Ideally, a monthly calendar will be provided to our parents and to the office to be referred to if a question arises.

We also like our coaches to conduct a parent meeting at the beginning of the season they are coaching. This meeting would be a time to spell out their expectations, to explain consequences for misbehavior or absence and to express any needs they may have for the season.

All coaches must meet the IESA guidelines.

Field Trips

St. Thomas School and the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois have specific policies dealing with responsibilities and behavior on field trips and other school trips.

Children, adolescents, and accompanying adults attending field trips must adhere to a code of behavior. This code of behavior, which applies to both minors and accompanying adults attending said functions, is as follows:

- Each person will respect his/her individual dignity, self-worth, and value in God's eyes.
- Each person will respect the dignity, self-worth, and value in God's eyes of other persons.
- Each person will respect the physical property and possessions of other persons and institutions.
- Each person has a duty to report violations of the honor code.

Specific violations of the code include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Possession or use of alcohol or any controlled or look-alike substances (sacramental wine for use in the liturgy is excluded from this policy).
- Sexual harassment or other sexual activity.
- Theft.
- Destruction of property.
- Any other act defined as criminal under the laws of the State of Illinois or the state in which the event is occurring.
- Leaving the activity/activity grounds without permission.
- Absence without permission from a designated sleeping area.
- Wearing of obscene, alcohol/drug related, or tobacco related clothing.
- Violence of any kind.
- Violation of directives given by supervisors or officially designated chaperones.

All infractions will be treated seriously and on an individual basis. Parents may be asked to pick up their son or daughter from the location and in the case of serious violations, law enforcement will be contacted.

Appendix A – Playground Rules

- Students may get a drink from water fountains in the parish center after they have been given permission from adult in charge. They may also use the restroom one at a time in parish center.
- No one is to be behind the air conditioning units or playing on bicycle racks.
- Students are not to bounce balls off of any building or the fence. Do not lean or climb on the fence.
- No balls, ropes or other equipment should be taken into the rock area.
- Swings – Students are not to stand on or twist swings. No jumping from swings. One student to a swing. No playing on the south side of swings. Students are to always swing facing north, so they can see other students.
- Students may not hang upside down from any part of the playground equipment.
- Students are to go down slides sitting on their bottom. They must never climb up the slide.
- Bongo climbers go from north to south. Monkey Bars go from south to north.
- No students are to go get a ball that goes onto the street. Only students in grades 5-8 can cross the alley or go into the parking lot to get a ball – after asking.
- Students may never pick up any rocks or play with the rocks.
- Students may not take a ball away from a group playing an organized game, even if they were the one to take the ball outside.
- Jump ropes should only be used for the purpose of jumping rope.
- Students are never to be on the steps in front of the doors on the southwest side of building, as we have problems with students using rocks to write on the door.
- No students should play in snow or water that is on the playground.

Consequences for Breaking Rules

Grades K-4

1st Offense – sit out for 5 minutes. (Beginning of the year makes the first time a warning.)

2nd Offense – sit out all recess

*If the student is still causing a problem, or if the offense is serious, they should be sent to the office.

Grades 5-8

1st Offense – sit out 10 for minutes.

*For a major offense or if they show disrespect, they should be sent to the office.

2nd Offense – send them to the office.

Appendix B – Parish Center Rules

- During morning recess time – no balls will be allowed and students must sit/stand in their designated area.
- Students are NOT to use the gym equipment that is in the locker room or under the stage. They may use the play equipment located in the cabinet in the entry way.
- Only 1 ball per grade. They must share as a class.
- All balls stay on the south end of the gym (end with the stage).
- Basketballs are to be used to play basketball. Basketball should be played at the south and southeast baskets.
- No balls are to be kicked.
- No balls are to be bounced against the walls.
- No bouncy balls, Frisbees, tennis balls, or footballs in the gym.
- No playing on the stage, bleachers, stairs, or in the entrance way to the restrooms.
- No snow is to be picked up when going from one building to another.
- Students are not to walk in the snow when there is a cleared off path.
- Jump ropes are only to be used to jump rope.
- The playground supervisor is ALWAYS in charge. All students are to do as directed by the supervisor.

Consequences for Breaking Rules

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This handbook was reviewed and amended April 2026.