

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs) ABOUT PEACEABLE SCHOOL

1. What is Peaceable School all about?

Peaceable School is a program we implemented last year here at St. Matthew school to create a more peaceful and tolerant school environment in which our children are motivated and equipped to resolve conflict peacefully themselves. We believe conflict is a fact of everyday life; it is neither good nor bad. There are positive ways to deal with conflict and there are negative ways. We believe that people who learn to deal with conflict positively will lead happier and more productive—and more Christian—lives. Peaceable School is a national curriculum which we have modified for our particular needs. For us at St. Matthew this means creating a more Christlike environment and helping our children reach their full potential as Children of God. As Jesus taught at the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.” [Matthew 5:9] That is our motto.

2. How did it get started?

Peaceable School started at St. Matthew when a group of concerned parents approached the Parents Club a couple years ago looking for a way to stop bullying. Through a lot of discussion, it was decided to adopt the Peaceable School program and ask parishioner and conflict-resolution specialist Topper Steinman for help. Mrs. Scherer and the teachers on the original committee were in favor of a program only if it was not strictly an anti-bullying program but focused on building Catholic values and created children who were peaceful in their conflicts and understanding of the feelings of others. Their belief was that we would gain more ground by working at the issue from a positive rather than a negative slant.

3. Does St. Matthew have a bullying problem? If not, why do we need Peaceable School?

Whether St. Matthew has a bullying “problem” depends on your definition of a problem. We are blessed to have a more peaceful environment, with less bullying, than most schools. But let’s be honest, bullying does exist at St. Matthew. Bullying is a natural consequence when people (like school children) whose social skills are not fully developed interact. So some bullying does occur, and we believe any bullying is too much. Peaceable School can help deal with that. But even if there were no bullying, there would still be value to Peaceable School because Peaceable School is not just about stopping bullying. Life is unavoidably filled with conflict, and Peaceable School is about giving our children the life skills to deal with conflict in a healthy and positive way.

Moreover, Peaceable School, as we have developed it here at St. Matthew, is not just a way of dealing with problems, but a way of developing positive behavior—of developing Catholics who model their behavior after Christ.

4. What are the basic elements of the program?

Peaceable School at St. Matthew has four basic elements:

- Putting Jesus Christ as a model at the center of our lives.
- Employing the St. Matthew Statement of Rights & Responsibilities as a daily practical guide for Christlike behavior.
- Understanding and respecting everyone's basic human needs for belonging, respect, freedom and fun.
- Resolving conflict through win/win approaches including negotiation, mediation and group problem-solving.

5. Who is affected by the Peaceable School program?

One of the key aspects of the Peaceable Schools approach is that it involves all the elements of the school community—parents as well as teachers and students:

- Educators—Several times a year, our teachers receive Peaceable school training, so they can understand the program better, support the program, become more peaceable themselves, and teach the concepts and skills to our students.
- Students—Our students receive the elements of the Peaceable School program throughout the school year from their teachers, with the training incorporated into their other subjects rather than as a stand-alone block of instruction.
- Parents—The program includes workshops for parents because we believe it is essential that parents understand and support the program and, as the primary educators of their children, teach and model Christlike behavior.

We believe these three aspects of the program are mutually supporting and all are important if we are to succeed in creating the Christlike environment we desire.

6. Does Peaceable School replace the conduct code?

No, Peaceable School absolutely does not replace the conduct code, but is intended to complement it. If a student violates the conduct code, he or she will be punished according to the judgment of the teacher or principal as guided by the code. Many times, that misconduct will result from a conflict or

misunderstanding that exists. In addition to any disciplinary action that is taken, Peaceable School can be a means for dealing with that underlying conflict or misunderstanding—with the objective of preventing the misconduct from happening again. Peaceable School steps will *never* be implemented as a penalty for misconduct; Peaceable School is not a form of punishment, but a nonjudgmental tool for resolving conflict.

7. It's a rough world out there. If we implement Peaceable School, aren't we at risk of raising a bunch of wimps?

Peaceable School definitely is not a program for wimps. While Jesus taught us to “turn the other cheek,” he also never backed down from conflict, but always faced it and dealt with it peacefully. We are teaching our children to live their Christian virtues in the face of conflict. We are teaching them to stand up to bullies and to stand up for those who are being bullied. We are teaching them that conflict is a fact of life and cannot be avoided, but that there are options for how to deal with it. We are also teaching children that life isn't fair and that sometimes we have to accept that and make the best of it.

8. How long will the program last?

Currently, the program is in the second year of a three-year plan funded by the Parents Club. After three years, and periodically after that, the program will be evaluated for its effectiveness, but we envision that the principles of Peaceable School will become a permanent part of the St. Matthew curriculum.