AQUINAS CATHOLIC MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL

DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAM GUIDE

Growing in Relationship, Identity, and Mission

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations..." **Matthew 28:19**

OUR MISSION

The Aquinas Discipleship Program exists to form students who know Jesus Christ, grow in their identity as His disciples, and joyfully live out their faith with servant hearts through prayer, service, and mission.

WELCOME TO THE AQUINAS DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAM

The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us: **"The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it."** *(CCC 1816)*

The Aquinas Discipleship Program is designed to help students intentionally grow as disciples of Jesus Christ by forming servant hearts through four dimensions of discipleship: **Personal Formation, Service to Parish, Service to School, and Service to Community.**

Through these experiences, students are invited to encounter Christ more deeply, live their faith in concrete ways, and cultivate the habits of lifelong discipleship. Rather than simply recording hours of service, this program encourages students to intentionally pursue opportunities that deepen their relationship with Christ, strengthen their identity as His disciples, and prepare them to live lives of prayer, service, and mission.

The Catholic Church teaches that **parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children in the faith** (CCC 2223). The Aquinas Discipleship Program is intended to strengthen that partnership by encouraging families and the school to work together in forming young disciples of Jesus Christ.

At the beginning of each school year, students will prayerfully develop a Discipleship Plan outlining the projects they hope to complete within each of the four dimensions. Parents are invited to play an active role in this planning process by helping students identify meaningful opportunities for growth, service, and faith formation throughout the year.

As you look ahead together, consider the ways your family already lives the faith or might intentionally grow together. Family Rosary nights during Lent, attending a parish mission, participating in a parish service project, or standing together at the Annual Life Chain are just a few examples of experiences that may become part of your student's journey of discipleship.

Once the plan has been completed, it will be signed by a parent or guardian and discussed during a one-on-one meeting with the student's Society Mentor. Together, these conversations encourage intentionality and provide opportunities for students, families, mentors, and the school to support one another in living the Gospel.

Above all, we hope this program provides opportunities for families to spend meaningful time together in prayer, service, and conversation as they grow together in faith, helping students become lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ who joyfully live out their faith with servant hearts.

YOUR DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

The purpose of the Discipleship Plan (available on the school website or in the school library) is to encourage students to intentionally consider how they will grow as disciples of Jesus Christ throughout each school year rather than simply fulfilling a school requirement.

Each student in grades 6–12 will complete an annual Discipleship Plan during the first quarter of the school year. Students are encouraged to prayerfully select meaningful, age-appropriate projects within each of the Four Dimensions—Personal Formation, Service to Parish, Service to School, and Service to Community—that foster spiritual growth, servant-hearted leadership, and service to others.

Projects should collectively reflect approximately fifteen (15) participation hours throughout the school year. Projects completed during the summer may also be included in the student's annual plan. **A project is considered complete once the required Reflection Page has been submitted.**

The Discipleship Plan will be signed by a parent or guardian and reviewed during a one-on-one meeting with the student's Society Mentor during the first quarter. Transfer students will have their expectations prorated by the administration.

FINDING OPPORTUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

As students create their annual Discipleship Plan, they are encouraged to consult the online **Aquinas Discipleship Calendar** for project ideas and upcoming opportunities within each of the Four Dimensions. The calendar will highlight parish, school, community, and personal formation opportunities that align with the mission of the Aquinas Discipleship Program.

While students will create their Discipleship Plan during the first quarter of the school year, opportunities for service and faith formation naturally arise throughout the year. Students and families are encouraged to review the calendar together regularly, as new opportunities will be added throughout the year to help students continue growing as disciples of Jesus Christ.

REFLECTIONS

A Reflection Page will be completed following each project to encourage students to pause and consider not only the impact their service had on others, but also how the experience helped them grow as disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Reflection Page (available on the school website or in the school library) invites students to describe their experience while recognizing how Christ was present through their service, formation, and relationships. Throughout the year, students will also have opportunities to share one of their experiences with their Society as part of their ongoing formation and to encourage one another in discipleship.

PROGRESS AND DEADLINES

Because the goal of the Aquinas Discipleship Program is intentional growth in discipleship throughout the school year, students are expected to maintain regular communication with their Society Mentor to review progress toward the goals outlined in their Discipleship Plan.

Projects and accompanying reflections should generally be completed within thirty (30) days of each experience. Beginning in the second quarter, Student Assistant Time (SAT) days may be used to help students who are falling behind complete projects, reflections, or additional service opportunities. Society Mentors will communicate important deadlines to students, and the school will provide deadline reminders to parents throughout the year.

Students who have not completed the expectations of their Discipleship Plan by the established deadlines may be required to attend additional SAT work sessions or complete additional approved projects before the conclusion of the school year to fulfill the expectations of the Aquinas Discipleship Program.

THE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF THE AQUINAS DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAM

The Four Dimensions provide a comprehensive approach to discipleship by inviting students to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ while serving the Church, the Aquinas Catholic school community, and the world around them. Students are encouraged to prayerfully select projects that reflect their God-given gifts, interests, and stage of life as they continue to grow as disciples of Christ.

General Guidelines

- Projects should reflect the mission and philosophy of the Aquinas Discipleship Program.
- Projects must be completed without compensation.
- While middle school students may complete age-appropriate projects within their family or neighborhood, high school students are expected to primarily serve individuals and organizations beyond their immediate family.
- Students are encouraged to seek a variety of experiences throughout the year that foster growth in all four dimensions of discipleship.
- Students should complete projects in each of the four dimensions. The combined participation expectation is approximately fifteen (15) participation hours (or the equivalent participation value assigned by the Discipleship Program Committee). Students who complete all four dimensions and exceed twenty (20) participation hours during the school year will receive special recognition.
- Assigned participation hours for the most common Personal Formation experiences are listed in this guide.
- Projects not included in this guide or on the Discipleship Opportunities Calendar require prior approval from the Discipleship Program Committee (DPC).
- *Projects completed to fulfill the required obligations of an extracurricular activity, athletic team, organization, class, or club may not also be counted toward the Aquinas Discipleship Program.*

PERSONAL FORMATION: "*Come, follow me.*" (Matthew 4:19)

A disciple's first calling is to grow in relationship with Jesus Christ. The Catholic Church teaches that parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children in the faith (CCC 2223). The Aquinas Discipleship Program seeks to partner with families by encouraging students to intentionally pursue opportunities that deepen their faith and strengthen their relationship with Christ.

Please note: Because experiences within the Personal Formation dimension are recognized for their formative value, assigned participation hours do not necessarily correspond to the actual time spent participating. Rather than measuring time alone, the Aquinas Discipleship Program recognizes the unique role these experiences play in helping students grow as disciples of Christ.

The Discipleship Program Committee (DPC) establishes the assigned participation hours for approved formation experiences and reviews requests for new or unlisted opportunities. Current approved experiences and their assigned participation hours are outlined below and may be updated as new opportunities become available.

Parents who have questions regarding a Personal Formation experience are encouraged to contact the school coordinator.

Formation Experience	Participation Hours

Formation Experience	Participation Hours
TEC Candidate	12
Steubenville Youth Conference	8
School of Identity	8
Sky Camp	6
Totus Tuus	6
Parish Mission	Up to 6
Diocese Canoe Trip	5
Family Faith Formation Project*	TBD (Maximum of 8)
Other Approved Experience*	Determined by DPC

*Examples may include:

- Parish-sponsored faith formation opportunities (e.g., parish youth group)
- Family faith formation experiences such as a weekly family Rosary
- Eucharistic Adoration or parish holy hours
- Attending weekday mass during the summer (for the following year's discipleship hours)
- Bible studies or Catholic book studies
- Spiritual retreats (outside of school)
- Approved Catholic pilgrimages (hours TBD)
- Going on a family pilgrimage to Holy Family Shrine or other shrine
- Serving as a retreat team member
- Giving a witness or testimony
- Leadership opportunities that foster the faith of others

SERVICE TO PARISH: *"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."* (Acts 2:42)

Our supporting parishes generously make an Aquinas Catholic education possible. Service to Parish encourages students to actively participate in the life of the Church while **responding in gratitude** through the sharing of their time and talents.

Examples may include:

- Altar serving (this project may include a year of serving at your assigned Masses)
- Singing in the choir or serving as a musician at Mass
- Assisting with religious education or Totus Tuus
- Youth ministry leadership in your parish
- Assisting with sacramental preparation
- Helping with parish dinners, fish fries, festivals, or bazaars
- Cleaning the church, parish hall, rectory, or parish grounds
- Cemetery care

- Office or clerical assistance
- Assisting parish clergy or staff
- Other approved parish service opportunities

SERVICE TO SCHOOL: "*Let all that you do be done in love.*" (1 Corinthians 16:14)

Aquinas is more than a school—it is a faith community. Service to School encourages students to use their gifts to strengthen our Catholic school community and contribute to its mission.

School service projects should be completed outside of the regular school day unless otherwise approved.

Examples may include:

- Assisting teachers or staff during personal/free time
- Tutoring younger students
- Peer mentoring
- Helping with school event preparation or clean-up
- Serving as a Catholic Schools Week parish speaker
- Assisting with admissions or Open House events
- Working concessions *beyond organization member requirements*
- Campus beautification
- Maintenance or improvement projects
- Assisting with school ministries outside the school day
- Other approved opportunities that strengthen the mission of Aquinas MS/HS
- Recording assigned participation hours for the annual Aquinas Day of Service

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SERVICE TO COMMUNITY: "*Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.*" (Matthew 25:40)

Jesus calls His disciples to recognize Him in those around them, especially those who are poor, vulnerable, lonely, or in need. Service to Community encourages students to put their faith into action by serving others with generosity, compassion, and joy.

Examples may include:

- Volunteering for nonprofit organizations whose mission aligns with Catholic teaching
- Serving the elderly or homebound
- Visiting nursing homes
- Assisting individuals with disabilities
- Serving at food pantries or meal ministries
- Organizing or participating in clothing drives
- Community clean-up projects
- Pro-life service opportunities
- Coaching or mentoring youth without compensation
- Serving neighbors, family friends, or members of the community in need
- Other approved charitable service opportunities
- Recording participation hours from the annual Aquinas Day of Service

AQUINAS CATHOLIC MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL

DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAM REFLECTION PAGE

"We love because He first loved us." **1 John 4:19**

Student Name: _____ **Grade:** _____ **Date Completed:** _____

Project/Experience: _____ **Participation Hours:** _____

Dimension (check one)

☐ Personal Formation ☐ Service to School ☐ Service to Parish ☐ Service to Community

Prayerful Reflection: *Please Complete Question 1, then choose TWO of the remaining questions to reflect on. Please share your answers in 2 or more complete sentences.*

1. Describe your experience. ***(Required)*** *What did you do? Who did you serve or learn from? What happened during this experience?*

2. Where did you encounter Christ? *How did you see Christ working through this experience—in another person, in yourself, or in an unexpected moment?*

3. **How did this experience help you grow as a disciple?** How did this experience deepen your **relationship with Christ**, strengthen your **identity** as His disciple, or prepare you to live His **mission** more fully?

4. What is one way God may be inviting you to continue growing? *What is one next step you can take because of this experience?*

Parent Signature _____

(if applicable) Person served (Name) _____ Person served (Signature) _____

Mentor Initials: _____ **Hours received:** _____ **Recorded on (date)** _____ *Comments (optional):* _____