

TEACHER E-MANUAL



pietra
Kids!

Pietra Fitness Kids



Grade School

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Welcome!

Thank you for your role in bringing Pietra Fitness to young people. We are very excited about this opportunity to work with you to enrich your students' minds, bodies, and souls through physical exercise and prayer.

Within this manual, you will find information about:

- Pietra Fitness
- The many benefits of our whole-person workouts
- The structure of a Pietra Fitness class
- Best practices and recommendations for facilitating Pietra Fitness classes in your classroom

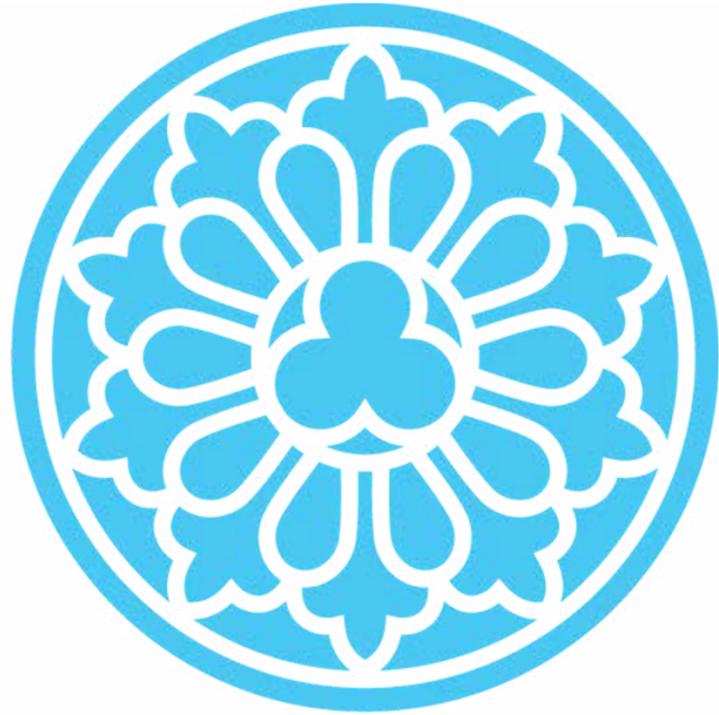
We have also included information to share with your students prior to the first Pietra Fitness class.

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to us at info@pietrafitness.com.

Please know that we are praying for you and your students. It is incredible what God can do when we use our bodies, minds, and souls to give Him glory.

May God bless you, your students, and the work that you do,

The Pietra Fitness Team



About Pietra Fitness

Pietra, meaning “rock” in Italian, is a word that reminds us of the importance of having a solid foundation when building anything that is to have strength, stability, and longevity. Pietra Fitness believes that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, a beautiful cathedral for God’s glory. And every cathedral needs a strong base upon which to stand.

By combining Christian prayer and strengthening exercises, Pietra Fitness will help you build an unshakeable foundation—both physically and spiritually.

Pietra Fitness KIDS strives to help children with that through physical exercise paired with Catholic prayer and meditation created just for kids! We have created a program that exposes kids to the goodness, truth, and beauty of the Catholic Church while developing the whole person in mind, body, and soul. We seek to teach children of all ages to glorify God with their entire human person.

You may be interested to know that Pietra Fitness has received approval from two Archbishops, Archbishop Dennis Schnurr (Cincinnati, Ohio, US) and Archbishop Joseph Naumann (Kansas City, Kansas, US). We also have a chaplain, Fr. Ezra Sullivan, O.P., who has provided prayers, support, and guidance.

It is important to understand that Pietra Fitness is not yoga, Christian yoga, or Catholic yoga—Pietra Fitness is an alternative to yoga so that people can enjoy the benefits of stretching and strengthening exercises without exposing themselves to the possible spiritual dangers of yoga. If you would like more information about our position on yoga and what makes Pietra Fitness different, please visit pietrafitness.com/pf-is-not-yoga and pietrafitness.com/faqs.



Goals

The goals of Pietra Fitness KIDS are to:

- Develop strength of mind by:
 - Learning basic muscles and stretches
 - Learning parts of scripture
 - Exposure to writings of the saints and fundamental beliefs of Catholic teaching
 - Calming the mind and nervous system with deep breathing, soothing music, and prayer
- Develop strength of body by building:
 - Strength
 - Flexibility
 - Joint mobility

- Develop strength of soul by:
 - Putting into practice the five types of prayer
 - Use of bodily prayer poses
 - Discovering a deepened personal prayer life
 - Learning how to live the elements of our Catholic faith.
- Seek to learn about and grow in virtue
- Learn to put forth an effort to praise God in all things.
- Introduce the concept of the Cathedral of You.
- Develop an understanding that God has made each one of us differently, but with the same inherent dignity, and to honor ourselves as well as others
- Combat anxiety and stress
- Develop a better self-image
- HAVE FUN!

Patron Saints

Since the founding of Pietra Fitness, we have discovered many saints in heaven whose prayers, teachings, and examples have guided us along our journey. We are incredibly grateful to these saints and Mary and have entrusted Pietra Fitness to their intercession. Here is a look at two of our patron saints. We invite you to learn about the others at pietrafitness.com/patron-saints.



St. Peter is the foremost patron saint of Pietra Fitness. Since the very beginning of this practice, his intercession has played a key role—especially in choosing the name Pietra, which means rock.

St. Peter is the rock of the Church. We are confident that his intercession will keep Pietra Fitness firmly grounded on the strongest of foundations: Christ himself. ***St. Peter, pray for us.***

“And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18)

St. Thomas Aquinas is considered the Church's greatest theologian and philosopher. Pope John XXII canonized him in 1323, and Pius V declared him a doctor of the church in 1567.



St. Thomas Aquinas is the patron saint of universities, colleges, and all Catholic schools—and the patron saint of the Pietra Fitness program for schools.

St. Thomas Aquinas, pray for us!



BENEFITS OF PIETRA FITNESS

BODY

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”
-1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Our Catholic faith has always recognized the importance of the body. In fact, Pope St. John Paul II expressed this extensively in his Wednesday audiences popularly known as the Theology of the Body. While the soul always has to take precedence, taking care of our bodies is a great duty and privilege.

The stretching and strengthening exercises in Pietra Fitness classes are designed to:

- increase flexibility
- naturally, calm and relax the body
- improve muscular and core strength, range of motion, posture, and stability

Bodily Prayer

A unique aspect of Pietra Fitness is our emphasis on bodily prayer. Bodily prayer is simply using your body in a way that allows your entire person—body, mind, and soul—to be immersed in the action of loving and adoring God; it allows us to unite our entire being to God.

Bodily prayer is ancient, and we find examples of it throughout the Old and New Testaments. For example, the Magi adored Christ on bended knee, and both Jesus and the apostles prayed on their knees. The saints have also demonstrated a great love for bodily prayer, especially the Desert Fathers and St. Dominic.

It is a blessing to be able to enter into bodily prayer on earth because it provides a glimpse of what we will joyfully be doing in heaven. In Pietra Fitness, we use bodily prayer positions in every class, incorporating them with a short prayer that goes along with the class’s theme.

MIND

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

-1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Many mind-body-soul workouts attempt to benefit the mind simply through relaxation. God designed the mind to be used rather than emptied, so at Pietra Fitness, we strive to both relax and strengthen the mind.

Pietra Fitness classes relax the mind through deep and calm breathing, soothing music, Scripture, prayer, and Catholic meditation. Our workouts strengthen the mind by building knowledge with brief but solid formation on Church teachings as well as the physical aspect of the class. Depending on the age group, this may include:

- Providing Scripture and solid Catholic material to focus on
- Discussing specific techniques to help students get the most from the physical exercises
- Reminding students to be aware and attentive to the muscles they are using and stretching. This helps them know their bodies better and to be in better control of their bodies, which aids in balance and ease in everyday movement.

Stress

Stress levels are high these days. According to the U.S. National Library of Medicine, “Childhood stress can be present in any setting that requires the child to adapt or change. Stress may be caused by positive changes, such as starting a new activity, but it is most commonly linked with negative changes such as illness or death in the family... Even small changes can impact a child’s feelings of safety and security”(1) It seems the stress level for teens is even worse. “According to data collected by the American Psychological Association for the Stress in America Survey, teen stress rivals that of adults.”(2)

When we are confronted with danger or under undue stress, our bodies respond with a fight-or-flight reaction. This is a good response because it helps us respond to serious situations. But, if this response is constantly being triggered by normal everyday events such as exams, peer pressure, relationship problems, family issues, or the COVID 19 crisis, major health problems and behavioral symptoms can occur. “The stress response suppresses the immune system, increasing susceptibility to colds and other illnesses. Moreover, the buildup of stress can contribute to anxiety and depression.”(3)

While we can't avoid all the causes of stress in our lives, we can help students find healthier ways of responding to them. Through deep breathing, calming music, prayer, and stretching and strengthening exercises, Pietra Fitness classes will help students relax their nervous systems and feel quiet, calmer, relaxed, and more peaceful in everyday situations—especially when conflicts arise. They will also grow in their relationship with Christ as they come in contact with His Word in a very different way than what they are used to.

Mind-Body Connection and Exercises

While creating a unified whole between our thoughts, emotions, and physical actions can be a good thing, not every approach is compatible with Christian theology. Yogic techniques often aim to clear the mind and draw students inward psychologically and emotionally. These techniques can include chanting in Sanskrit, unnatural breath control, mantras, emptying the mind, and yogic meditation. These techniques are avoided in Pietra Fitness.



At Pietra Fitness, we consider the mind to be a great gift from God—one that, like all profound gifts, we must be grateful for and take good care of. St. Padre Pio emphasized the power that good spiritual reading has to build, transform, and renew. Scripture encourages us to actively engage and grow our minds on topics that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, excellent, and praiseworthy (Phil 4:8). That is why every Pietra Fitness class features meditations on worthy topics such as faith, hope, love, courage, and joy. These topics elevate the mind and meditating on them is a markedly different approach to building a healthy mind-body connection—it truly helps us in ways deeper than we can comprehend.

This approach, along with God's grace, helps us to govern our thoughts, exercise self-control, and advance in virtue. In this way, we grow stronger physically, mentally, and spiritually. Reading about spiritual goods will always have a unique, irreplaceable role in every Pietra Fitness class.

SOUL

*"Hyperactivity and love of noise and chatter characterize our age. [. . .] One of the most powerful means of overcoming the externalization of life is to find support in prayer and meditation."
-Archbishop Fulton Sheen*

While we strive to care for the body and mind, we must remain diligent to keep our efforts in proper order of importance. The health of the soul must always take precedence, and in nearly all fitness programs, it is neglected completely or is not rooted in Christ. Scripture tells us, "Train yourself for devotion, for, while physical training is of limited value, devotion is valuable in every respect, since it holds a promise of life both for the present and for the future" (1 Tm 4:7-8). To nourish the soul, Pietra Fitness incorporates prayer and meditation in the Catholic tradition. We begin and end each class with the Sign of the Cross, making the whole time in class a prayer and an offering to God.

Guided by St. Paul's exhortation to focus on that which is true, honorable, just, and pure (Phil. 4:8), each workout has a particular theme (i.e. healing, joyfulness, peace, living in the present moment, trust, Theology of the Body, love, etc.). The theme is supported by Scripture, bodily prayer, and a meditation that is read during a long hold. Near the end of each class, time is given to reflect on the meditation while letting the body completely rest and relax.

Every Pietra Fitness class provides an opportunity to love, thank, and seek help from Our Lord. The goal is for participants to leave class knowing that they are loved by and connected to God—an experience that is truly good for the soul.

Prayer and Meditation

A vitally important part of caring for the soul is prayer. We incorporate meditation into our classes because many saints throughout the ages have stressed the importance of a daily mediation and have described it as the most transforming expression of prayer. Most people—including many Catholics—have come to equate meditation with yoga-style meditations. They might not even realize that meditation (a.k.a. mental prayer) is as old as the Church itself. Many saints, including St. Francis de Sales, St. Theresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, St. Ignatius, and more, have taught about it as well as the necessity of it. In fact, St. Theresa of Avila is a Doctor of the Church and a patron saint of Pietra Fitness because of her teachings on daily mental prayer.



Christian meditation is very different from Eastern non-Christian meditation, where meditation involves trying not to think about things—clearing the mind. Catholic meditation is just the opposite: it is a very active and thoughtful kind of prayer. It is astounding that meditation can have such opposite meanings.

Let's take a look at what the Catechism of the Catholic Church says about mental prayer/meditation:

2705: Meditation is above all a quest. The mind seeks to understand the why and how of the Christian life, in order to adhere and respond to what the Lord is asking. The required attentiveness is difficult to sustain. We are usually helped by books, and Christians do not want for them: the Sacred Scriptures, particularly the Gospels, holy icons, liturgical texts of the day or season, writings of the spiritual fathers, works of spirituality, the great book of creation, and that of history the page on which the "today" of God is written.

2706: To meditate on what we read [or what we hear in this case] helps us to make it our own by confronting it with ourselves. Here, another book is opened: the book of life. We pass from thoughts to reality. To the extent that we are humble and faithful, we discover in meditation the movements that stir the heart and we are able to discern them. It is a question of acting truthfully in order to come into the light: "Lord, what do you want me to do?"

2708: Meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion, and desire. This mobilization of faculties is necessary in order to deepen our convictions of faith, prompt the conversion of our heart, and strengthen our will to follow Christ. Christian prayer tries above all to meditate on the mysteries of Christ, as in lectio divina or the rosary. This form of prayerful reflection is of great value, but Christian prayer should go further: to the knowledge of the love of the Lord Jesus, to union with him.



STRUCTURE OF A PIETRA FITNESS CLASS

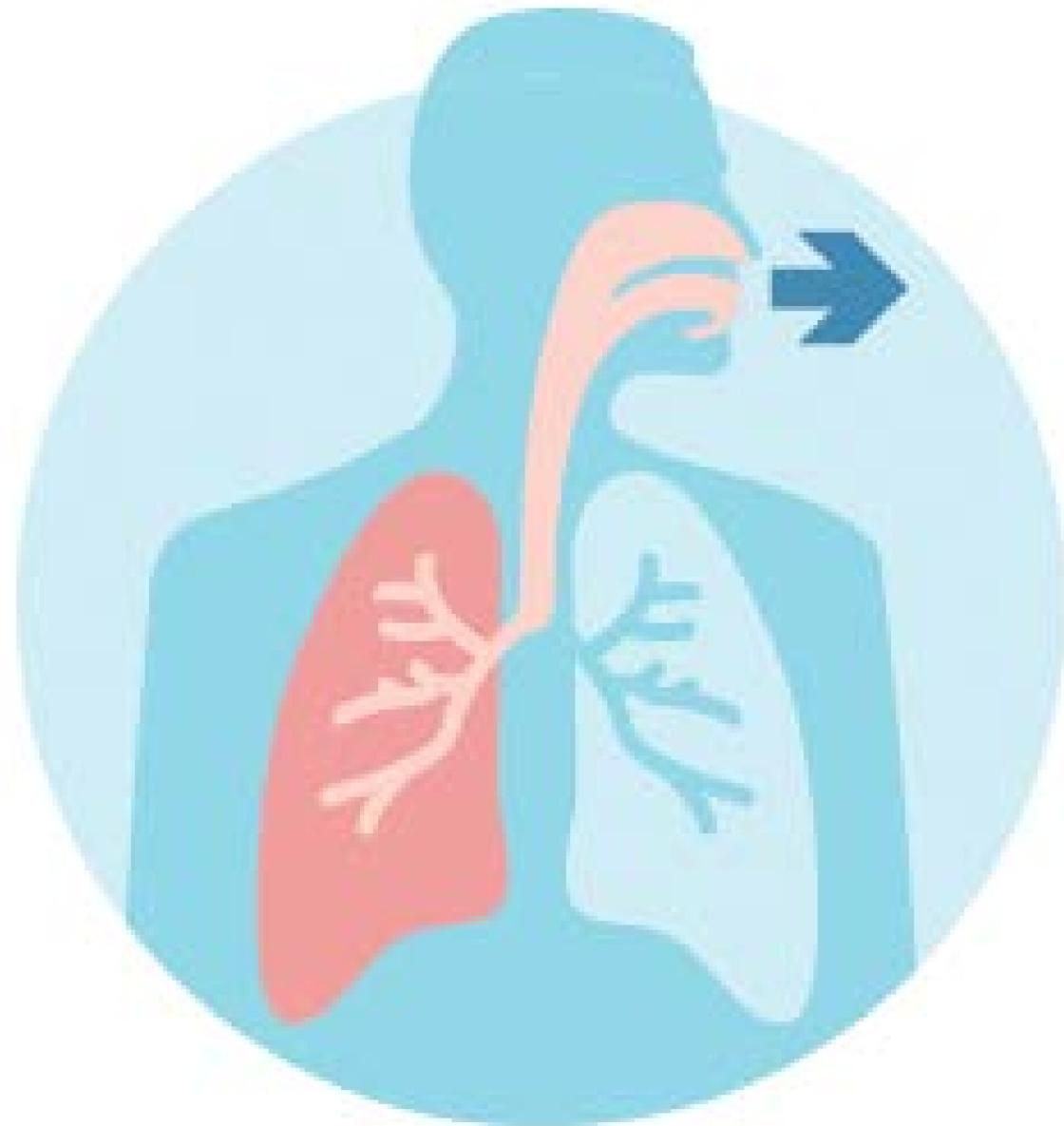
Intentions: Class begins with intentions in which we always include our Pope and all bishops, priests, and religious—especially the chaplain of Pietra Fitness. In the kid's program, we include teachers and family. Feel free to pause the video if you want to give the students time to add their own intentions.

Sign of the Cross, Prayer, and Scripture: After the intentions, we make the sign of the cross and read our prayer. It is at this time that we ask Our Lord to be with us as we contemplate the theme of the class.

Warm-Up: We begin the warm-up with deep breathing to calm the mind and the nervous system so that we can focus on Christ and the class. We always also incorporate gratitude at this time.

The movements utilized in the warm-up are intended to get circulation moving so that oxygen-rich blood is pumped to all areas of the body. This prepares the body for the increased demands of a more intense workout. Cold muscles and joints are more susceptible to injury, so the warm-up helps to create internal body heat to make muscles and tissues more pliable.

The warm-up also includes the first Bodily Prayer Posture. You may choose to pause the video to spend more time in this prayerful position if there is time.



NOTE:

Everyone has a different lung capacity, and there may be students in your class who have a breathing disorder. While we do give breath cues, the students need to know that it is okay to breathe at their own pace if they are not able to breathe along with the instructor. If someone has a breathing disorder, they should follow what their doctor has taught them regarding breathing during exercise. We cue inhales on movements that expand the chest to allow space for the lungs to expand and cue exhales on movements that contract and fold which naturally helps the body expel air. The most important thing is that they do not hold their breath and that they continue to breathe throughout the class.

Workout: The workout portion of the class includes exercises that strengthen and lengthen the body. We work to hit every major muscle group but sometimes focus more on one area of the body, for example, the core or the arms and shoulders. In our one-hour classes, we incorporate two Bodily Prayer Postures, but in shorter classes, there may only be one Bodily Prayer Posture.

Wind Down: The wind-down portion of the class includes a physical cool down from the workout, an Extended Hold while a Pietra Fitness meditation is read, a prayerful “Resolution” time, the closing prayer, and the sign of the cross.

During the physical cooldown, the emphasis is on decompressing, restoring, and relaxing the body and mind. Once the cooldown movements begin, we do not go back to active poses. The final pose in the cooldown is a twist because it helps to loosen tight areas in the spine and works out all of the kinks. The cooldown provides students time to transition from an active workout physically and mentally to the stillness of the Resolution portion of class.



Extended Hold

During this time, we get into a position that we hold for a little longer period of time. If any of your students feel uncomfortable or the pose gets to be too much, they should come out of the posture, and come back into the pose when they are ready.

It is at this time that we will read a meditation that goes along with the theme of the class. During a live class, we sometimes stay in this longer hold for three to five minutes. We do not do that for video classes, but you may want to pause the video after the meditation is read to give them more time to contemplate what they heard. If you do this, it is best to only start out with one minute and then gradually work up to a longer time.

Resolution

During the Resolution portion, participants quietly rest and prayerfully consider the meditation. It is called “Resolution” because it not only concludes the class but also encourages each person to make a concrete resolution regarding how they might make the topic from class more tangible in their lives.





BEST PRACTICES &
RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR FACILITATING
PIETRA FITNESS IN
THE CLASSROOM

For safety, it is best to have a sticky mat for each person and for the students to remove their shoes and socks. The students will be moving from pose to pose, including standing, prone, and reclined positions, and they may slip if they wear only socks, which can cause injury. If there are no mats available, it is best to keep shoes on.

Separating Genders

Live Pietra Fitness classes are always either all-women or all-men. We feel it is just as important, if not more important, to separate 6th or 7th through 8th grade boys and girls. We highly recommend this separation for a couple of reasons:

- **Modesty:** The purpose of keeping boys and girls separate during the sessions is to maintain modesty and ensure that they can exercise and pray without distraction, especially in the intimate setting of a smaller gym class.
- **Self-Conscious:** “Teens [and pre-teens] are famous for their self-consciousness and suspicion that everyone is watching them.” An Association for Psychological Science study in 2013 proved this to be correct.⁽⁴⁾ Also, the findings from researchers at the University of South Carolina-Columbia conclude that high school girls exhibit higher levels of vigorous activity if they participate in single-sex gym classes.⁽⁵⁾ In Pietra Fitness classes, we ask the students to breathe deeply, pray, and think about how their body is moving and what is being stretched and what is being strengthened. If someone is concerned that others are watching them and judging how well they are doing, closing their eyes in prayer or seeing how inflexible they are, etc., they will not fully benefit from the classes. If someone feels comfortable and engaged, they will benefit much more.

If it is not possible to separate the boys from the girls at this time because of prior scheduling issues, we suggest having the boys on one side of the room and the girls on the other, or the boys in the front of the room and the girls in the back. We hope that if you continue with Pietra Fitness, you will consider the incomparable benefits each student, as well as the school, will receive if you separate them.





IMPORTANT
INFORMATION TO
PRESENT
TO K-5TH GRADE
STUDENTS
BEFORE THE FIRST
PIETRA FITNESS
CLASS

Pietra Fitness is a fitness program that combines physical exercise with prayer. In this class you will experience bodily prayer, sacred art, Gregorian chant, and Catholic meditation.



What is Bodily Prayer? Bodily prayer is praying with your body so that your whole person—body, mind, and soul—can love and adore God. Bodily prayer has been around for a long time. For example, the Magi adored Christ on bended knee, and both Jesus and the apostles prayed on their knees. Many saints have also shown a great love for bodily prayer, especially St. Dominic. A couple of times during the Pietra Fitness class, we come to a more prayerful position and say a short prayer.

What Sacred Art is Used? The San Damiano Crucifix, or the Cross of St. Francis, is present in every Pietra Fitness class. The San Damiano Cross is the one St. Francis was praying before when God asked him to rebuild the Church. The original cross now hangs in Santa Chiarra (St. Clare) Church in Assisi, Italy.

Why is Gregorian Chant Used? There is relaxing music during the class, but at the end of class, sacred music or Gregorian chant is used. One reason we use it at the end of class when we are relaxing and thinking about what was read is that this type of music is the musical language of the Church and can take our minds and hearts to God. Gregorian chant helps us to think about God. It can also help us to relax. During this time in class, try to let the music help you to think about and talk to God.

Pietra Fitness is
not Yoga.

Pietra Fitness is not yoga
but is done instead of yoga
so that you can help the
body while having Christ at
the center of your thoughts.



How to Approach the Class: It is important during this class to listen to your own body when it comes to how far to stretch and how much to do. If something doesn't feel right or if you feel any pain you can come out of the pose we are doing.

Breathing: Breath cues are given during the class, but not everyone can breathe with the same capacity or length of breath. Listen to your own body, and breathe at your own pace, even if it does not match the instructor's pace. If you have asthma or other difficulties with breathing, breathe how your doctor has taught you to breathe for exercise. Do not follow the breath cues given. Sometimes people have a tendency to hold their breath when they do an exercise that is a little more difficult or they hold a pose. Please continue to breathe throughout the class. It is not about matching the breath cues of the instructor but continuing to breathe calmly.

Long Holds: Toward the end of class, you will get into a position that you will hold for a longer period of time. If you feel uncomfortable or the pose gets to be too much, feel free to come out of the posture and come back in when you are ready. It is okay to feel a little stretch while in this long hold, but you should never feel pain. Again, please feel free to adjust yourself or come out of the pose if needed. It is at this time that you will hear a meditation that goes along with the theme of the class. Take this great opportunity to relax and be with Our Lord. Stay silent, and let Him speak to your heart.



IMPORTANT
INFORMATION TO
PRESENT
TO 6-8TH GRADE
STUDENTS
BEFORE THE FIRST
PIETRA FITNESS
CLASS

Pietra Fitness is a unique whole-person fitness program that integrates physical exercise with Christian prayer. In this class you will experience bodily prayer, sacred art, Gregorian chant, and Catholic meditation.



What is Bodily Prayer? Bodily prayer is simply using your body in a way that allows your entire person—body, mind, and soul—to be in the action of loving and adoring God; it allows us to unite our entire being to God. Bodily prayer is ancient, and we find examples of it throughout the Old and New Testaments. For example, the Magi adored Christ on bended knee, and both Jesus and the apostles prayed on their knees. The saints have also demonstrated a great love for bodily prayer, especially the Desert Fathers and St. Dominic. A couple times during the Pietra Fitness class, we come to a more prayerful position and say a short prayer.

What Sacred Art is Used? The San Damiano Crucifix is present in every Pietra Fitness class. It is called an icon, a sacred work of art rich with meaning. The San Damiano Cross is the one St. Francis was praying before when he received the commission from the Lord to rebuild the Church. The original cross presently hangs in Santa Chiarra (St. Clare) Church in Assisi, Italy.

Why is Gregorian Chant Used? There is relaxing music during the class, but at the end of class, sacred music or Gregorian chant is used. One reason we use it at the end of class when we are relaxing and thinking about the meditation is that this type of music is the musical language of the Church and can take our minds and hearts to God. During this time in class, try to let the music transport you to a beautiful conversation with God.

Pietra Fitness is not Yoga.

Pietra Fitness is not yoga, Catholic yoga, or Christian yoga—it is an alternative to yoga so that you can enjoy the benefits of stretching and strengthening exercises while having Christ at the center of your thoughts.



How to Approach the Class: It is important during this class to listen to your own body when it comes to how far to stretch and how much to do. It does not matter how flexible you are or what kind of shape you are in; you can modify the class to fit right where you are now. If practiced properly, you will start to see a change taking place in core strength, flexibility, and stamina. Some people are born more flexible, but that does not mean they are in better shape. There is no health benefit to being more flexible; what is important is to target every muscle group and to keep the muscles fluid and moving. This class is for you. If you listen to your own body as you continue to practice Pietra Fitness, you will start to see great results!

Breathing: Breath cues are given during the class, but not everyone can breathe with the same capacity or length of breath. Listen to your own body, and breathe at your own pace, even if it does not match the instructor's pace. If you have asthma or other difficulties with breathing, breathe how your doctor has taught you to breathe for exercise. Do not follow the breath cues given. Sometimes people have a tendency to hold their breath when they do an exercise that is a little more difficult or they hold a pose. Please continue to breathe throughout the class. It is not about matching the breath cues of the instructor but continuing to breathe calmly.

Long Holds: Toward the end of class, you will get into a position that you will hold for a longer period. If you feel uncomfortable or the pose gets to be too much, feel free to come out of the posture and come back in when you are ready. It is okay to feel a little stretch while in this long hold, but you should never feel pain. Again, please feel free to adjust yourself or come out of the pose if needed. It is at this time that you will hear a meditation that goes along with the theme of the class. Take this great opportunity to relax and be with Our Lord. Stay silent and let Him speak to your heart.

REFERENCES & PRINTABLE DOCUMENTS

Questions? Email us at info@pietrafitness.com

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Important Info to Present to K-5th Grade Before First PF Class

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