

# *Religious Education Parent Handbook*

## *Church of St. Joseph Religious Education Program*

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# Welcome~

Dear Parent:

Thank you for registering your child in our parish program for Religious Education. This handbook is designed to provide an overview of our religious education program for children in public schools.

The Elementary, Middle and High School programs are vital to the complete religious education of your child. However, they are not meant to be the sole provider of your child's religious education. Rather, they are intended to supplement the religious formation you are already giving your child at home, and the experience of joining with our parish community for the celebration of the Mass and sacraments.

Consistent with this approach, this handbook describes our curriculum and administrative policies. It is our hope that it will give you an understanding of our program and encourage you to actively participate if you can. Please keep the success of our programs in your prayers,

Sincerely,

Annette Tracy  
Parish Director of Religious Education.

## ***Philosophy***

Our Parish Religious Education Program is structured to provide catechetical instruction on the Catholic faith to all parish children who are attending non-Catholic schools.

Parents, by word and example, are the primary teacher of their children and teach them from birth throughout life. At Baptism, the parent undertakes the responsibility of providing for their child's Christian formation. The Religious Education staff is here to assist parents in the spiritual formation and ongoing moral development of their child through a formal program of continuous religious education.

In our program, we seek to provide the catechesis and skills for each child to grow and mature in understanding, positive attitudes, and faithful practice of the Catholic faith.

Through the process of catechetical instruction, we hope to deepen the faith and sense of belonging to the Catholic Church in our children, so that they will be moved to sharing of their time, talent and treasure in the life of the Church, now and throughout their lives. We strive to assist children in committing themselves to a personal relationship with God characterized by a vigorous sacramental life, a lifelong pattern of prayer, Christian service, and growth in understanding the Catholic faith. This process is achieved with the joint efforts of our parish staff, catechists, parents, and students.

Committed to this active partnership between parish staff, catechists and families, we place our efforts with confidence in God's loving hands.

## ***Catechist Training and Appreciation***

We encourage parents to becoming involved by volunteering as Catechists. Catechists serving in the parish need to be informed, formed and skilled, and are trained in their ministry by the catechetical leaders of the parish and diocese. These leaders see to the ongoing support and development of those who teach the children in our schools and parishes.

These words describe the need for parish Catechists to be “informed, formed and skilled” in order to insure that their ministry is carried out as faithfully and skillfully as possible. The Director is committed to providing this ongoing training.

**Initial Interview:** In order to determine each catechist’s skills and training needs, an initial interview is done for all new Catechists. This interview is intended to assess the candidate’s prior catechist training, experience in the classroom, preference of grade level, and areas of growth suggested by the candidate.

**Diocesan Certification/Parish Training:** The Director will keep the catechist informed about all area catechist-training opportunities. Records of completed coursework will also be kept on file in the Religious Education office, and applications for maintaining current or new certification levels will be made from our office. Catechists are urged to keep their own record of courses taken and certification levels achieved. Should a catechist request it, they may receive a copy of certification records from our office. Certified Catechists are required to complete an ‘Annual Record of Validation’ for placement in their file.

Two general Catechist meetings are held annually for all catechists involved in our Religious Education Programs. One meeting is held prior to the beginning of the Religious Education school year and the other is held at the completion of the school year. Participation in these meetings is mandatory. Additional Catechist meetings may also be convened by the Director or Pastor during the year.

**Catechist Appreciation:** In support of our catechists, the parish staff of St. Joseph’s will provide a caring staff able and willing to serve the catechist needs, ongoing training of catechists, regular communications, payment for catechist certification and workshops, and reimbursement of approved out-of-pocket expenses.

Catechists with children in the Religious Education Program, will be offered reduced or waived tuition. (Family fee is waived 100% for Catechists teaching alone. Family fee is waived 50% for Catechists who co-teach with another Catechist)

## ***Roles and Responsibilities***

**Pastor** – The pastor is responsible for the overall spiritual well-being of the parish community.

**Director of Religious Education (DRE)** – The DRE is responsible for the overall administration of all Parish Religious Education Programs and reports directly to the pastor.

**Catechist/Co-Catechist** - This Catholic person is called upon to be teacher and model of the Catholic life for their students. To insure their faithful and effective ministry, catechists need to commit themselves to ongoing growth in their understanding and practice of the Catholic faith, as well as to deepening their catechetical skills. They are assisted in their ongoing development by their parish and diocesan religious education staff and the periodic training programs offered.

**Catechist Aide** - This volunteer may be a high school youth or an adult who is willing to support the classroom catechist in the classroom. The time commitment involves presence at regularly scheduled classes, plus room preparation and clean up immediately before and after class. The Catechist Aide will be welcomed and oriented to the program by the DRE and given specific instructions by the classroom catechist they are assisting with regard to the tasks they may be asked to complete. Typical roles include assisting students needing individual attention, helping students - especially in the primary grades - with arts and crafts projects, individual drill/recitation of prayers, small group discussion or work projects, etc.

**Parent Volunteers** - Catechists are urged to take every opportunity to communicate with and involve their students' parents. Catechists may wish to invite grandparents or other extended family members to come as guests or speakers (e.g., a grandparent is asked to share their memories of first sacrament reception, celebrating lent or advent, etc.). Parents could also be asked to supply a snack for special occasions.

**Attendance Helpers** - Parents who volunteer will be given written instructions on their duties such as keeping the log book of absences and calling parents if their child is absent. Attendance Helpers also act as "hall monitors" and help with the dismissal process at the end of class.

## **General Policies**

**Confidentiality** – It is important that strict confidentiality be maintained at all times. Catechists are not permitted to discuss students and student situations outside of the classroom.

**Rights of Non-Custodial Parents** - Both parents have the right of access to a child's religious education progress reports and achievement information unless one parent produces a legal (court certified) document to the contrary. Upon reception of such a document, it will be attached to the child's record and all teachers to whom the child is assigned will be informed of all special directions. A mid-term and final progress report to the non-custodial parent will be provided upon request, which must be in writing. Changes in the child's normal routine must be approved by the custodial parent/guardian. Once received by the Religious Education Office, Catechists will be notified of these changes. No child will be dismissed from the program to the non-custodial parent without the written consent of the custodial parent/guardian.

**Notice of Non-Discrimination Policy** - St. Joseph Parish Religious Education Program admits students of any sex, race, color, national and ethnic origin to all rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to program participants. We do not discriminate based on sex, race, color, or national origin in the administration of our programs or the recruitment of our Catechists.

**Special Needs Policy** - Children with special learning needs (i.e., mentally or physically challenged) are welcome and included in our programs if they do not exhibit behavioral problems. Parents are asked to indicate their children's special needs at registration time that any additional help or materials needed in the classroom may be obtained.

## ***Religious Education Procedures***

**Arrival/Dismissal Times** - We expect students to be on time for class each week. Parents should refrain from dropping the students off too early since we do not allow students in the classrooms without the Catechist present. Students who walk to CCD after school on Monday afternoon should wait in the Gym. Students are to be dismissed at the appropriate time. Parents are required to submit in writing a request for early dismissal of their child. Parents are to come into the building and meet the child at the attendance desk. No child is to leave the building early before reporting to the attendance desk.

**Attendance** - Please use the Attendance Hotline number to report an absence: (973) 543-5950 x 19. We will contact all parents who do not phone in an absence. Parents are asked to cover the material in the syllabus for the date that the child missed and the work will be checked the Catechist. If a child is absent more than two times, parents will be asked to meet with the DRE. Excessive absenteeism may result in having to repeat the grade.

**Building Usage Rules** - It is the responsibility of each Catechist to faithfully enforce the following building usage rules. The Catechist should review these rules with their students at the beginning of the year, and secure their cooperation.

- Food is NOT permitted in the classrooms; due to the limited class time and ongoing issues with children having food allergies, we will not allow snacks.
- Students are not touch items found in the classroom desks.
- Students and Catechists are not to use the classroom electronic "SmartBoards"
- Students are not allowed to run in the halls.

**Child Abuse Policy** - Child abuse includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- engaging in a sexual activity with a child;
- denial of proper or necessary substance, education, medical care, or other care necessary for the child's health;
- use of restraint procedures on a child that cause injury or pain;
- administration of prescription drugs or medication without the ongoing supervision of a licensed physician.
- providing alcoholic beverages or controlled substances;
- commission of any act, other than by accidental means, that threatens or results in any injury or death to the child.

The Parish Religious Education Director is required by the New Jersey Code and Diocesan Policy on Child Abuse to report suspected or actual child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. Catechists who observe actual or suspected child abuse must report the matter in confidence to their Director of Religious Education immediately.

All Volunteers who work with children have been required to attend a Virtus Protecting God's Children workshop and a background check including fingerprinting.

**Class Cancellations** - Whenever inclement weather forces closings for Mendham Borough schools, the Parish Religious Education classes will also be cancelled. In the case of weather or other emergencies that occur toward the end of the school day, we will notify the Catechists to announce our cancellation. Announcements regarding cancellation of any Parish Religious Education classes will also be recorded on the R.E. phone answering machine (973-543-5950 x 19) and posted on the parish website.

**Curriculum** – The curriculum used in the Religious Education program must follow diocesan policy. Only those textbooks/series may be used that have been approved by the diocese and that are found in conformity with the Catechism of the Catholic Church by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Catechists are to follow the outline of study as found in the Catechist Guide, which accompanies the book series used in the program. The Director must approve all additional materials and subject content incorporated into the program prior to its use in the classroom.

**Discipline Policies** - Every person is worthy of being treated with care and the respect fitting one made in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, classroom behavior needs to be characterized by genuine Christian care, mutual respect, and honesty.

Disruptive behavior prevents learning for the whole class and can be frustrating for the Catechist and the students. Under no circumstances will a student or an adult be permitted to strike another or use abusive language for any reason. Lack of self-discipline during class will be addressed promptly and parents notified. Removal of a student from the classroom may lead to suspension.

Should an incident occur prior to, during, or after class time while the student remains on parish/school property, the responsible Catechist or adult witness must:

- Intervene to insure student safety
- Notify the Director as soon as possible
- Complete and return to the Director, within 24 hours, an 'Incident Report'

The normal steps for disciplinary action will be:

1. Verbal correction by the Catechist
2. Student will be sent to the office to meet with the Director
3. Parent will be notified by the Catechist and a conference will be held
4. Parent and child will meet with the Director
5. Child will be removed from the program

A student will be removed from the classroom immediately and suspended for any of the following violations:

- Drugs/Alcohol/Substance abuse
- Verbal or Physical Harassment or fighting
- Stealing or damaging parish property
- Jeopardizing a person's safety

A written notice will be given indicating the reason for suspension. The pastor will be notified when such action is taken.

**Emergency Procedures** – Catechists and Aides should be aware of the following procedures in case of a fire emergency or evacuation. Please instruct students about each procedure at the beginning of the year. At the first sound of the fire alarm all building occupants must evacuate the building immediately. Each room has a fire exit sign. The teacher should be the last one out of the classroom. Evacuation maps are posted in each classroom and in each catechist folder.

- Close doors and windows so fire does not spread
- Leave by the exit door in each classroom
- Lead the class away from the school building
- Count to make sure all are present
- Take attendance folder with you as you exit

- Maintain calm and order throughout

**Medications** – No medications or vitamins will be administered during the program.

**Medical Emergencies** – In an event that a child is unable to continue to participate in the classroom activities, the Catechist/aide should bring the child to the office so that their parent may be called. If the parent cannot be reached, the DRE will call the person listed as the Emergency Contact.

**Parent-Catechist Communications** – In addition to the normal parent communications that originate from the Religious Education Office, Catechists are urged to stay in touch with their student's parents.

**Prayers**– It is expected that every class begin and end with prayer. It is recommended that the children be given the opportunity to lead prayer in the classroom.

**Report Cards** – To avoid “grading” their faith, report cards will not be given. However, frequent contact with parent is important. A periodic note home is often helpful.

**Student Textbooks** – Each student enrolled in our Religious Education Program will receive a grade level student textbook. If a student text is lost, a new book must be purchased from the office. We encourage that the textbooks be sent home with the student after each class and brought back for the next class.

**Substance Abuse Policy** - Substance abuse is defined as the possession of, use of, or trafficking in any unauthorized, illegal drug, chemical, alcohol, or tobacco-like substance, which can be introduced into the body through ingestion, inhalation, injection or percutaneous means. Any student found in possession of an illegal or unauthorized substance on parish property will be immediately suspended from the program. Any student trafficking in illegal substances will be formally removed from the program and the matter turned over to the local authorities.

**Testing / Evaluation** – There is an educational value to testing. It is meant to encourage the student and points out the areas that need to be reinforced. Religion teachers must be very careful to distinguish for the children that test scores in religion do not reflect a child's value before God. Tests may never be allowed to diminish a child's self-esteem or feeling of belonging to the Church. Often there are activities which can provide the evaluation without adding the extra label of “testing”.

**Tuition Rates** – A \$200 Family Fee is required for each family with children who participate in Religious Education Grades K-10. There is an additional fee of \$30 per child in Grades K-8, \$40 per child in Grade 9, and/or \$50 per child in Grade 10. Please note: Finances should never come in the way of participation. If any of the costs prove a financial burden to the family, please speak with the Pastor, Fr. Joseph Anginoli. If a parent volunteers to teach, the \$200 Family Fee is waived. If the parent is a Co-Catechist then half the Family Fee is waived.

**Visitors to Classrooms** – All visitors should be introduced at the Attendance Desk and to the DRE. Children are welcome to bring friends to class with prior approval and notification to the DRE as long as they do not disrupt class. Catechists may invite parents or guest speakers. The DRE should be notified of these plans.