



CHURCH OF THE SACRED HEART

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Religious Education Office Program Handbook

2023-2024

www.churchofthesacredheart.net

Welcome to the Church of the Sacred Heart Parish Religious Education Program

Religious Education is a primary focus of parish life. We are happy to have the opportunity to provide quality and compassionate instruction. Our program provides instruction and practice in the doctrine, scripture, ritual, culture and customs of the Roman Catholic Church.

This handbook explains the necessary and current policies of our program and will be amended as necessary. We encourage you to join us in the full active participation of parish life with complete cooperation in the process of Faith Formation for all our parish children.

Sunday (or Vigil) Mass attendance is the most important part of our curriculum. As Catholic parents, it is your obligation to model your faith and bring your children to weekly Sunday (or Vigil) Mass. Worshipping together as a family is what makes us Catholic. We expect families to take this responsibility very seriously.

Mission Statement

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son so that all who believed in Him would never die but have eternal life.” John 3:16

Our mission is to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ. We believe God is the source of all truth. We believe that, by faith, we are all saved in Jesus Christ. We are each called by name to be His disciples and faithful stewards of His good gifts. As good stewards we are called to lead others to Jesus Christ through prayer, good works and example. Beginning at Baptism and continuing through life, we hope to enable the members of our parish community to discover, grow and mature in their faith experience. We make every effort to help others to deepen their relationship with Christ and His Church.

Statement of Philosophy

“Parents, you have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring them up to keep God’s commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?”
(from the **Rite of Baptism**)

During the Rite of Baptism, parents make a promise to God “accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith.” It is primarily the responsibility of the parents to train their child in the practice of the faith. While we can assist parents, the primary responsibility and obligation is that of the parents. Ultimately, only parents can teach their children to walk in the ways of faith. This is not a responsibility that can be handed off to the parish. Parents must always be involved and intimately connected with the faith formation of their children. This can only be done when each family places Jesus Christ and His teachings in the center of their lives through Sunday worship, family prayer and daily living of the Christian mission.

As partners in faith formation, we look forward to sharing the task of communicating Catholic Christian values to your children. As we pray together, talk together, and work together, we can fully integrate ourselves as believers of Jesus Christ. We embrace the Catholic standard of living by using as our guide Sacred Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium (teaching authority of the Catholic Church). Together, we can support each other in instilling these values in our children.

A strong foundation in the Catholic tradition of faith in the Most Holy Trinity will help our children navigate all the challenges throughout their lives. Living life in the Catholic lifestyle means being a witness to Jesus Christ everyday by what we say, what we do at home, at work, at school, and at play. We join together each week in celebration of that witness when we gather for Mass.

Programs

Church of the Sacred Heart offers several programs for religious education.

- Flipped Classroom – Off-site electronic classes and parish participation at Mass and other liturgical celebrations ten times between September and June.
- RCIA Program Adapted for Children – Available for children who are unbaptized and who have reached the age of 7 or above and for children who were baptized in a non-Catholic Church who have reached the age of 7 or above. Sundays weekly September through May.

Detailed explanations of each program are given below.

Religious Education Office

Our office is located in the Parish Center at 200 Randolph Avenue, South Plainfield, NJ 07080. The Parish Center office hours are Monday through Thursday 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM and Friday 8:00 AM to 2:00 PM (8:00 AM to Noon in July & August), closed for lunch 12 Noon to 1:00 PM.

The Religious Education Office is staffed by one fulltime, permanent employee as Director. The Director of Religious Education is a fully credentialed individual as set forth in the standards held by the Diocese of Metuchen Office for Catechesis.

The Faith Formation Team members are volunteer catechists, aides, and hall monitors. All employees and volunteers of the Diocese of Metuchen, 18 years of age or older, who have more than a one-time contact with a minor as defined under New Jersey State Law, undergo a criminal history background check and fingerprinting in accordance with the policy set forth in the Policy on Criminal History Background Checks. All employees and volunteers at the Church of the Sacred Heart have completed this process and are in compliance with New Jersey State Law.

If you have questions or concerns, it is best to leave us a voicemail at 908-756-0633 ext. 143 or email us at religioueducation@churchofthesacredheart.net. The program director will be happy to make an appointment to meet with you at your convenience. All forms and program information are posted on our web page on the parish website. (www.churchofthesacredheart.net)

MASS ATTENDANCE

Regular attendance at Mass with your children is an essential part of their religious education and Catholic faith formation. Our Catholic tradition reminds us that Jesus is present in the Word (Scriptures), Sacrament (Eucharist), and in the people who have assembled. We join together in praise, thanksgiving and worship of God who is ever-

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present to us in the Most Holy Trinity. The songs we sing and the scriptures we read inform us about the teachings of Jesus. Together, we are renewed, validated and affirmed. We make the choice to grow deeper in faith and love with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As the song by the contemporary composer Marty Haugen proclaims, “*All are welcome in this place!*”

PARISH MASS SCHEDULE

Saturday 5:00 PM (Vigil)
Sunday 9:00 AM & 11:30 AM
Holy Days 6:30 AM, 9:00 AM, 7:00 PM

Daily Mass 7:00 PM Monday (except on National Holidays at 9:00 AM)
9:00 AM Tuesday through Saturday

CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

Jesus told us that the Kingdom of God is within each of us. He gave us the ***Beatitudes*** to help us to be good stewards of the Kingdom of God. As Catholics, we adopt an “attitude of gratitude” while we share our Time, Talent and Treasure for the benefit of the entire community of faith. We live out the Gospel message through our participation in the ***Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy***. We reach out to the global community in ***faithful stewardship*** to our neighbors. If we want our children to be good stewards, we need to help them live in faithful stewardship.

Attendance

Religious education is continuous and expected to be ongoing from Grade 1 through Confirmation. It is not permissible to skip grades and merely attend grades in which a sacrament is celebrated. Children have spiritual needs every year. Religious education is not “rehearsal” for the events of Eucharist and Confirmation. In exceptional cases only will a request for two immediate years of preparation before a sacrament be considered. (Sports or extracurricular activities **do not** count as exceptional cases.)

A child’s attendance at religious education, retreats, sacrament preparation sessions, etc., is protected by the United States Supreme Court 343, US 206 (1952). This decision was cited with approval in the New Jersey Attorney General’s Formal Opinion No. 4, 1965 and is still in effect. State law [NJSA 18A:36-14-16 and NJAC 6:20-1.3(j)] prohibits school districts from assessing a penalty to a child who is absent from school due to the observance of a religious holiday.

Likewise, children cannot be penalized for missing sports and extracurricular activities for attending religious education/formation.

PROGRAM CREDIT FORFEITURE

- Failure to complete more than 2 months' electronic and hardcopy homework will result in no credit for that grade level, or
- Failure to attend 10 Sat. evening/Sunday morning Masses between September and June, will result in no credit for that grade level.

Discipline Policy

CODE OF BEHAVIOR

- Children are expected to comply with standard school-type rules.
- Cell phones **MUST** be turned off during Masses and any Religious Education retreats and/or events. Catechists can require children to turn in their cellphones for the duration of the session time.
- Children are expected to show self-control while on the church and school campus.
- Children are expected to show respect for all persons in words and actions.
- Children are expected to respect the property of the church and school campus and are not to remove or damage property on/from the church and school campus.
- Candy, chewing gum, snacks, water or other beverages are not permitted in the parish buildings.
- Zero Tolerance Policy consequences for physical harm to one's self or others.
- Zero Tolerance Policy consequences for drugs, alcohol, or weapons on the church and school campus.
- Zero Tolerance Policy consequences for any and all verbal and non-verbal threats.

CONSEQUENCES

- If a child is found to be in possession of any illegal substances or weapons, makes any verbal/non-verbal threats, or physically hurts one's self or others, the child will be detained. The police will be notified. The child will be immediately dismissed from the formal program.
- Parents are financially responsible for all church property that has been damaged by their child.

- If a child comes to a Religious Education class or event with an electronic device of any sort, the device may be kept in the office until that class or event is concluded.
- If a child causes any of the above listed disruptions, the child will be removed from the class or event and appropriate measures will be taken, i.e., notifying police, notifying parents and/or dismissal from the program.

SCHEDULES

- Calendars for all Religious Education classes and events are posted on our parish website (www.churchofthesacredheart.net).
- When South Plainfield schools are closed, no Religious Education classes and events are scheduled on those weekdays.

COMMUNICATION

- Our event calendar is published on the Religious Education page of the parish website (www.churchofthesacredheart.net).
- All communication from the Religious Education office is sent via email. If you do not have internet service, please notify us by phone or regular mail.
- Please check our parish bulletin for other relevant information.
- Leave a phone message at our office 908-756-0633 ext. 143; we will return your call as soon as possible.
- Please add our email address to your email account. Our email address is: religiouseducation@churchofthesacredheart.net.

FAMILY CONTACT INFORMATION

- Please keep us up-to-date with your contact information.

FOOD ALLERGIES

- Parents of highly allergic children must make known the special needs of their child to the Director of Religious Education.
- We do not have a nurse on the premises.
- A parent whose child has a life-threatening allergy is required to remain in the building while their child is in class. Another family member may be designated to remain with the child.

CHILD ABUSE POLICY

- If the Director of Religious Education or a catechist suspects a child has been abused in any way, State of New Jersey statutes require that the Department of Children Protection and Permanency (DCPP) be notified immediately.
- At the discretion of the Director of Religious Education or a catechist, a child will not be sent home with a driver who is visibly impaired and unable to drive.
- The Director of Religious Education reserves the right to call an emergency number to arrange an alternate means of transportation.

LEAVING THE PARISH

Please notify us if you are moving out of town and leaving the parish. We will provide a letter of completed grade levels for the Religious Education program when you register at your new Catholic parish.

VALUABLES AND LOST AND FOUND

- We strongly recommend that all valuables be left at home.
- We are not responsible for lost or stolen items.
- All lost articles that are turned in may be claimed at the Religious Education Office.

RE-REGISTRATION PROCEDURE

- All children must be enrolled every year, whether or not they are preparing for a sacrament. Discipleship is lived and deepened every year of a child's life, especially while they are in the process of initiation, which goes from Baptism through Confirmation. (The three Sacraments of Initiation are Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation.)
- All families participating in Religious Education programs must be registered parishioners or have a permission letter from the parish where they are registered.
- Children **MUST** make up all missed years of religious instruction before being admitted to the grade level concurrent with their public school grade level, especially before enrolling in a sacramental year.

TUITION AND FEES

- Registration Fees: Tuition per child for the monthly program is \$150. If there are more than three children in a family, the tuition for the third and all subsequent children is \$100 each.
- Grade 2 Eucharist: Tuition + Sacramental Fee \$50.00
- Grade 8 Confirmation: Tuition + Sacramental Fee \$50.00
- Tuition and fees are collected for every child in all of the programs.
- All sacramental fees are collected for all candidates.
- Monthly tuition payment plans are available upon request.
- To pay by credit card or debit card, please use our Online Giving portal located on the home page of the parish website (www.churchofthesacredheart.net).
- All registrations received after the published deadline will be subject to late fees per student.
- Please call the Director if you wish to discuss tuition options; no families will be turned away for financial reasons. (908-756-0633, ext. 143)

NEW ENROLLEES

- All families participating in the Religious Education Program must be registered parishioners.
- Please call the parish office if you are not sure you are registered or considered an active registered parishioner.
- Parish Registration forms are available at the Parish Center Office.
- A Baptismal Certificate is required for all new students in addition to any previous records if a child has attended a Religious Education program in a different parish or diocese.

INTERPARISH STUDENTS

- The Diocese of Metuchen does not encourage shopping for religious education programs among parishes. Children should receive their religious education in the parish at which the family worships and is registered. The pastors of the parishes involved have the final say.

CLASS PLACEMENT

- Becoming a Catholic requires three sacraments: Baptism, through which we become Christians, Eucharist and Confirmation. It is only after the reception of all three sacraments that one is a Catholic. The period between Baptism and Confirmation is a period of initiation. Just like adults joining a religion, children must learn the beliefs of the Catholic faith and make a good faith effort in

practicing the Catholic faith. Religious Education is continuous and is expected to be ongoing between Grades 1 and 8.

- Candidates for First Eucharist must complete the first two years of the program and receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before receiving First Eucharist.
- Candidates for Confirmation must complete religious education from Grade 1 to Grade 8. Please speak to the Director if your child has missed any of the grade level preparation.
- A child older than age 7 who has not been baptized is eligible for the RCIA Program Adapted for Children. (See below for more details.)

Programs

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FLIPPED CLASSROOM

For 2023-2024, our Religious Education Program is a flipped classroom approach. Families learn at home electronically, then return to the parish to practice what they are learning about the Faith. In a traditional classroom, the teacher presents material and children go home to practice by completing homework. In the flipped classroom, children learn at home, then return to practice what they learned.

Details for preparing for First Communion and Confirmation are provided separately below.

Benefits

We'll be following Church law and guidelines. Religious Education standards and practices are actually set by Church law which many people don't realize. For example, Church law says that if someone isn't practicing the faith (ie, going to Mass) and doesn't plan to, the sacraments (First Communion, Confirmation) shouldn't be celebrated for that person. Not only a period of preparation is required, but participation in the Faith is required as well. (Church Law §§226, 773-777, 843)

Families will actually experience how great it is to be Catholic, not merely hear about it. Limiting children to Religious Education class but never having them experience parish life (such as Mass and other liturgical celebrations) is similar to telling a child they've joined a soccer team, but they're not allowed to play soccer. We don't go it alone in our relationship with God. Catholics have the spiritual richness of the Sacraments and the parish community to help us grow closer to God and have more fulfilling lives.

Families will be able to have flexibility in scheduling. Religious Education cannot be the way it was in the 1980s and 1990s or even a couple of years ago. Parents not only have to be involved in their children's Religious Education at every point, they must be the motivating force behind it. There's no outsourcing faith formation. Studies show the key factor as to whether a child identifies as Catholic is whether or not their parents take being Catholic seriously.

Adult Faith Formation

Electronic and in-person offerings are provided so that adults can continue to deepen faith and knowledge.

How Children's Religious Education Works

1. **Complete the standard Religious Education registration form** with payment (or pay online at the parish website) and submit it to the Parish Center starting July 1. Registration ends on Labor Day, September 4, 2023.
2. After Labor Day, instructions will be emailed on how and where to **register online for the electronic part of the program**. The program runs from September through June.
3. **Three online lessons will be available on the first of the month at catholicbrain.com**. Login to your child's account. Complete the lesson on your own schedule, either each week or by the end of the month, as you choose.
4. **Have each child complete one homework assignment per child per month and submit it to the Religious Education Office located in the Parish Center**.
5. **Having learned at home, families are required to come back to the parish to participate in a daily, weekend or Holy Day of Obligation Mass for a total of TEN times between September and June**. At least one parent (or other family adult, such as a grandparent or aunt) must accompany children on church property at all times. Children may NOT be dropped off for Mass by themselves. Christmas Mass counts as does Easter Vigil Mass, Easter Sunday Mass, and Holy Days of Obligation. Check in and out with the Religious Ed volunteer at the Mass.

FAQs

Can my family get credit if Church of the Sacred Heart is our parish but we actually go to Mass elsewhere? For credit in our Religious Education program, you have to participate in the parish life of Church of the Sacred Heart at least ten times between September and June. Catholic spiritual life is connected to a specific parish community and this is where the family should choose to register.

How many months of Religious Education do we have to complete between September and June? Your family has to complete every month. Lessons must be completed during the month they are assigned. For example, the October lessons must be completed at some point during the month of October. They can be done once a week, a couple one week, or all of them during one week at the end of the month, but they must be done during that month.

Are parents required to go to Mass with children or can the children be dropped off? At least one parent (or other family adult, such as a grandparent, aunt or uncle) must accompany children on church property at all times. Children may NOT be dropped off by themselves. If they are, it will not count toward the family participation in the parish life requirement.

My child is an altar server. Does this count toward Mass attendance? Yes, if a parent or another family adult are also present at the same Mass. Please check in with the Religious Ed volunteer on duty.

My child is in the children's choir. Does this count toward Mass attendance? Yes, participation in the children's choir at Mass (not rehearsals) counts. Members of the children's choir need to check in and out with the Religious Ed volunteer on duty.

Will my child have to attend classes this year? There will be no on-site, in-person classes. All class work will be done online at home.

I would like First Communion for my child but I am not interested in Religious Education. How can I arrange for this? The Catholic Church does not offer First Communion, or any sacrament, on demand. First Communion is a sacrament and actually the second step in being initiated into the Catholic faith. (Baptism is the first step; Confirmation is the third and final step.) Church law requires a period of preparation and a lived faith experience before any sacrament is celebrated. The local bishop sets the length of time (two years for us) and the local bishop and pastor of the parish decide the format of the program. Knowledge of and growth in the Faith is a lifelong experience.

RCIA ADAPTED FOR CHILDREN

This program requires the participation of the parents and regular attendance at weekly Mass as well as class sessions. There is no set time for this program but parents should expect that it will last at least two years. The child is determined to be ready to be baptized when he or she desires to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and a member of the Catholic Church.

RCL BENZIGER FAMILY LIFE PROGRAM

- The RCL Benziger Family Life Program is mandated for all students in parish schools and Religious Education programs in the Diocese of Metuchen.
- The series provides a comprehensive moral catechesis for families.
- The series is designed to complement the religious curriculum in our school or parish.
- The series integrated child safety education into a holistic approach to family life education.

Sacramental Policies

- All children seeking the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation must have a valid Baptism.
- Formal Religious Education is a continuous developmental process that begins with two years of preparation for First Communion and continues through Confirmation. Children who miss years of religious instruction are not permitted

to celebrate a sacrament the year they normally would based solely on their age. With the permission of the pastor, per the policy of the Diocese of Metuchen, they must complete at least two years or more of preparation before celebrating the sacrament.

- Sacramental preparation takes place in formal religious education classes.
- Attendance at rehearsals, workshops, retreats and special liturgies are part of the preparation process.

FIRST RECONCILIATION

- Preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation takes place in second grade. Children must complete Grade 1 before entering Grade 2.
- First Reconciliation is usually celebrated in early December before First Communion.
- Religious Education is a partnership effort of parents and the Religious Education Faith Formation Team.
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation continues the forgiving and reconciling work of God. We are acknowledged by the Father through the accomplishment of Jesus who is God the Son and by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Catechesis of children for Reconciliation must always respect the natural disposition, ability, age and circumstances of individuals.
- A clear understanding of the relationship of the sacrament to the child's life helps the child recognize moral good and evil, repentance of wrongdoing, and turning toward God for forgiveness.
- Encouragement and parental example lead the child to approach the sacrament freely and regularly.
- Regular attendance at Sunday Mass with your child is an essential part of their sacramental preparation process.
- Attendance at the First Reconciliation Retreat is required of all candidates.

FIRST EUCHARIST

- Children must complete Grade 1 before entering Grade 2.
- Instruction for First Eucharist (First Holy Communion), a Sacrament of Initiation, is conducted separately from religious education for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- First Eucharist is usually celebrated on the first Saturday in May.
- A clear understanding of the relationship of the sacrament to the child's life helps the child recognize that the Eucharist is the heart of Christian life and our Catholic belief that Holy Eucharist is the real presence of Jesus Christ in His Body and Blood.
- Encouragement and parental example lead the child to approach the sacrament freely and regularly especially during the Sunday Mass.

- Regular attendance at Sunday Mass with your child is an essential part of their sacramental preparation process.
- Attendance at the First Eucharist Retreat is required of all candidates.
- Regarding a dress code for First Eucharist, we ask that families dress their candidates in their “Sunday Best” outfits: a dark colored suit for boys with white shirt and a plain, white or solid-color tie (no logos, no patterns). No sneakers, flip flops or boots may be worn. Girls should wear a white dress and veil or headpiece. They may not wear gloves. They may not carry flowers, purses, rosaries, etc.

CONFIRMATION

- As one of the three Sacraments of Initiation, Confirmation is thoroughly related to Baptism and the Eucharist. In fact, a person is not fully a Catholic until he or she has received all three sacraments. If a person has not been confirmed, he or she cannot be a godparent or a Confirmation sponsor for another.
- Candidates for Confirmation must complete Religious Education from Grade 1 to Grade 8. Please speak to the Director if your child has missed any of the grade level preparation. At a minimum, he or she will be required to complete two years of Religious Education before celebrating Confirmation.
- A clear understanding of the relationship of the sacrament to the candidate’s life helps the candidate recognize that, through “the laying on of hands” and anointing with Chrism by the bishop or his delegate, they become more perfect images of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. They are renewed and strengthened in their baptismal call to continue the mission to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ. They are welcomed into full membership in the Church to live and to share the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- Encouragement and parental example lead the candidate to approach the sacrament freely.
- Regular attendance at Sunday Mass with the candidate is an essential part of their sacramental preparation process.
- Each candidate is required to complete the entire process of preparation by actively participating in the following:
 - Completion of the Confirmation Registration Form;
 - Provide proof of a valid Baptism;
 - Completion of all scheduled lessons and homework assignments;
 - Attendance for the entire time of the Confirmation Retreat;
 - The reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to Confirmation; and
 - Provide the Sponsor Certificate of Eligibility.
- All forms and documents are available on the parish website (www.churchofthesacredheart.net) and from the Religious Education Office.
- Regarding the dress code for Confirmation: we ask that candidates and sponsors be dressed in their “Sunday Best”: a dark colored suit or suit jacket for boys with white shirt and a plain, white or solid-color tie (no logos, no patterns). No

sneakers, flip flops or boots. Girls should wear a dress that is no more than two inches above the knee or a dressy pantsuit or jumpsuit. No spaghetti straps or halter tops may be worn. No backless clothes, no bare shoulders, no low cut front clothing. No gowns. The longest a dress can be is tea length (mid-calf). No sneakers or flip flops. Confirmation candidates neither wear a gown nor a stole.

Parental Rights and Responsibilities

The religious education and formation of children demands that there be a partnership between the family and the parish. Church documents are very clear that the first and most important catechists of children are their parents. Without a lived faith in the home and family attendance at Sunday Eucharist, religious education and formation of children will be nonexistent. A covenant between parents and parish is essential in order to help the entire family grow in faith and relationship with Christ.

Parents and parish should be aware of the following parental rights and responsibilities.

PARENTAL RIGHTS

- To have your child's safety be a priority.
- To have your child receive an authentic Catholic religious education in a Catholic environment.
- To have your child's learning needs met if the program can reasonably accommodate them.
- To have a competent, compassionate catechist who respects and cares for your child.
- To have your questions and concerns heard and answered in a timely manner.
- To review your child's records.
- To participate in the sacramental life of the parish and the religious education program.

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- To worship at Sunday Liturgy with your child.
- To be a partner with the parish in the religious education and formation of your child, to pray with your child and to assist your child in understanding the Catholic faith.
- To understand and abide by the policies of your parish religious education program.
- To behave appropriately during religious education sessions and parish functions, including demonstrating respectful and cooperative behavior at all times.

- To review all communications from the pastor, Director of Religious Education and catechist, and request clarification if necessary.
- To know your parish clergy, Director of Religious Education and your child's catechist.
- To attend parent meetings, family gatherings and conferences.
- To be actively involved in your child's religious education and volunteer assistance when possible.
- To promote your parish and speak well of your parish community.
- To appreciate that Catholic education and formation is a privilege.