



Parent Handbook

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Introduction

St. Joseph's Religious Education Program provides instruction in the Catholic faith to all parish children who do not attend Catholic schools. At the baptism of their children, parents undertake the responsibility for their children's Christian formation, and by word and example, teach their children the Catholic faith from birth throughout life. St. Joseph's Religious Education Staff assists parents in the spiritual formation and ongoing moral development of their children through a formal program of continuous religious education from kindergarten through eighth grade.

The National Directory for Catechesis states "Catechesis aims to bring about in the believer an ever more mature faith in Jesus Christ, a deeper knowledge and love of his person and message, and a firm commitment to follow him." This publication, along with *The General Directory for Catechesis* outlines six fundamental purposes in the ministry of catechesis

1. Knowledge of Faith
2. Liturgical Education
3. Moral Formation
4. Learning to Pray
5. Education for Community Life
6. Missionary Initiation

St. Joseph's Religious Education Program provides the catechesis and skills for each child to grow and mature in the faithful practice of and positive attitudes toward the Catholic faith. The staff assists children in committing themselves to a personal relationship with Jesus characterized by a vigorous sacramental life, a lifelong pattern of prayer, and Christian service. Committed to this active partnership between parish staff and families, we place our efforts with confidence in God's loving hands.

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Session Times

Session A	Sunday 8:30 – 9:45 a.m.	Session C	Monday 4:45 – 6 p.m.
Session B	Sunday 10:00 – 11:15 a.m.	Session D	Monday 6:15 – 7:30 p.m.
	Session E	Wednesday 6:00 – 7:15 p.m.	

The availability of sessions depends on registrations and the availability of teachers and space and cannot be guaranteed.

Admission Policies

Registration begins in March for the following school year. This “early-bird” registration allows for a discounted rate but does not guarantee the 1st choice session, due to other variables. All students must re-register each year. Families who register in St. Joseph’s Religious Education Program must be registered members of this parish community.

Except for children transferring from another parish religious education program, any child coming into the program after Thanksgiving may not have their partial attendance count towards the completion of the entire year’s program, and may not be able to advance to the next grade. The reception of a sacrament may also be deferred until the next year. New families transferring from another parish’s religious education program or from Catholic school must submit a copy of each child’s baptismal certificate, copies of certificates for any other sacraments received, a letter from the previous parish pastor acknowledging the change of parish (if applicable), and a letter from the previous parish or school verifying prior religious education or Catholic school completion (report card or letter from prior parish).

Students who register for the program but have not yet celebrated the sacraments appropriate to their grade level will be placed in the same grade they attend at their daily school. In order to prepare students for the sacraments, they will be placed in additional classes as part of our Sacramental Preparation Program.

Children with special learning needs are welcome and included, to the extent possible, in our programs. Parents must indicate their children’s special needs and/or Individual Education Plan (IEP) when they complete the registration form, so that any additional help or materials needed in the classroom may be obtained. If the special need is diagnosed after registration is completed, the parents must notify the office in writing of the child’s special needs and/or IEP. The religious education office will notify the catechist of the special needs, but the parents must stay in regular communication with the catechist to ensure the special needs are met. Children with special needs that cannot be met within the regular classroom setting may be directed to the religious education program at St. John of God School.

Course Content

The Catechetical Curriculum of the Diocese of Camden is used as a guideline to provide consistency throughout the diocese. Parents are encouraged to access the curriculum on-line at the religious education site at www.camdendiocese.org. "Prayer and Precept" pages at the end of the curriculum are provided for families to assist them with their children's learning.

St. Joseph's Church Religious Education Program's current textbook series is the Faith and Life Series by Ignatius Press.

Kindergarten – Focuses on God and creation. Stresses the dignity of each child made in God's image. Each lesson includes Bible stories and concepts of faith. Prayers to learn by heart: Sign of the Cross, Our Father (Lord's Prayer), Hail Mary.

Grade 1 - Introduction to the Trinity, with emphasis on the life of Jesus, the plan of salvation, and the child's part in the plan. Special emphasis on growing to know, love, and trust God. Acquaints child with Mary, angels and saints. Prayers to learn by heart: in addition to those listed under kindergarten, Glory Be (Doxology), Grace before Meals, Guardian Angel Prayer.

Grade 2 - Preparation for the first reception of the sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion, with the law of God and salvation history as background. Emphasis on God's mercy and love, the commandments, the order of the Mass, creation and redemption. Prayers to learn by heart in addition to those for the previous grades: the Act of Contrition.

Grade 3 - Focuses on God's plan of salvation, from creation to the Incarnation and Redemption to the birth of the Church at Pentecost. Emphasis on our life in the Church, love for God's law, and the importance of Confession, Communion and the Mass. Students are shown that they belong to God's chosen people and the child's family is an important part of God's family, the Church. Prayer to learn by heart: in addition to those for the previous grades: the Apostles' Creed.

Grade 4 - Concentrates on God's plan to save his people from sin (Salvation History), how we participate in that plan, and the many ways God helps us in our pilgrimage on Earth to Heaven through his word, his law, and his Church. Helps students understand their purpose and goal in life. Prayers to learn by heart in addition to those for the previous grades: the Hail Holy Queen.

Grade 5 - A thorough study of the articles of the Creed as the basic belief of our Catholic faith, with a special emphasis on careful understanding of definitions through the words of the Gospels, and the prophets, and the prayers of the Church. First year of preparation for Confirmation. Prayers to learn by heart in addition to those for the previous grades: Come Holy Spirit.

Grade 6 - The blueprint for a life of love: the law of God, especially in the Ten Commandments, and the presence of Jesus in the Holy Mass. The interaction of the challenges of God's law and his gifts of grace that help us fulfill his law. Second year preparation for Confirmation Prayers to learn by heart in addition to those for the previous grades: Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel and The Memorare.

Grade 7 – Focuses on grace as our link with God, His gift to us to bring us to Himself and His eternal life, with an emphasis on transmission of grace through the seven sacraments and on God's loving gifts of revelation, of Himself through the prophets, the Incarnation, and the Church. The role of grace in developing the virtues. Prayers to learn by heart: same as grade 6.

Grade 8 - The history of the Church--its founding by Christ, its birth in the Holy Spirit, the marks of the one, true Church, the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, the saints and the role of the religious and laity up to the present. The structure of the Church Jesus planned, the role of the Magisterium (the teaching authority of the Catholic Church, able to teach and interpret the truths of the Faith), the clergy, the religious and the laity and our own vocations. Help the teenager know and love the Church as Christ's Body and the Magisterium as the sure voice of Jesus, so that the young person may be strengthened through his life in the Church to face the confusion and secularism of modern-day society. Prayers to learn by heart: same as grade 6.

Sacramental Preparation

Although it is the custom at Saint Joseph's Church for a child to be in second grade at the time of First Holy Eucharist and First Penance and to be in sixth grade at the time of Confirmation, the reception of a sacrament is never automatic. Sacraments must be requested through the completion and submission of an application available from the religious education office. The request is then evaluated based upon the proper disposition, formation, and readiness of the candidate. Approval is dependent upon submission of required assignments and documents, as well as parent and/or student attendance at required meetings and retreats.

Parents of students preparing for First Penance, Eucharist, and Confirmation are required to attend Parent Sacramental Preparation meetings and interviews. These dates are listed on the religious education calendar and parents are notified of specific dates and times generally through e-mail, unless an e-mail address is unavailable, and through correspondence sent home with the child at regular religious education classes.

Celebration of Mass

Celebration of Mass is essential to developing our relationship with God, and is therefore integral to the religious education program, and is stressed throughout the curriculum. The importance of attendance at Sunday Mass and Mass on Holy Days of Obligations is at the core of the Catholic Faith. The love and gratitude for God which parents and catechists share with children in the home and in the classroom make sense only if the children faithfully attend Mass with their families.

Children's donation envelopes are provided to each family. These envelopes help instill in the children a sense of stewardship to the parish community as the student learns to give to the Church, even a minimal amount. (Stewardship is taking care of things God gives us, whether through time or through money, as a way to thank Him.)

Spiritual Formation

Parents train their children in the Catholic faith and help them develop their relationship with Christ by taking them to Mass, teaching them the Bible and Catholic traditions at home, sending them to religious education classes, and more. Along with daily and weekly Mass, as well as religious education classes, St. Joseph's Church offers a wealth of opportunities for spiritual formation. Eucharistic Adoration is available twice a week. Procession ceremonies honor Saint Joseph and Saint Alfio on their feast days. Advent and Lenten Family Celebrations, as well as Vacation Bible School are held annually, and weekly prayer of The Rosary at church, among other events, lead children to a deeper relationship with Jesus. As part of the religious education program, each child is expected to attend **at least** one of these spiritual exercises. Spiritual Exercise Journal forms, (appendix of this handbook and on St. Joseph's web site), must be completed by the student and recorded by the catechist in order to have the spiritual exercise acknowledged on the progress report.

Service

As Catholics, we strive to become more like Jesus, the definitive servant leader. Children should be trained to know service as a way of life. Parents are expected to take the lead in this training. Service is an integral part of religious education. Service Completion forms available in the appendix of this handbook and on St. Joseph's web site, must be completed by the student and recorded by the catechist in order to have service acknowledged on the progress report.

Based on the grade level, the **minimum** service requirements are as follows:

Grade K, 1 & 2 1 service activity per year

Grades 3 through 8 1 service activity per semester

(plus 2 additional service activities for 6th grade/final year Confirmation preparation candidates)

Of course, any service above the minimum required which the student provides to the Parish and/or the community is strongly encouraged.

"A Plan for Service," a helpful guideline, is available on the Parish website.

Progress Reports

To encourage student accomplishment and accountability for learning, students will be monitored and tested throughout the year. If a student is having trouble meeting the requirements, the Coordinator of Religious Education will contact the parent and a conference may be held. A student who fails to meet the learning objectives may be required to work with a parent and the religious education office during the summer to complete all work.

Progress reports are distributed mid-year and in May. Areas assessed include grasp of content, class participation, homework, prayers committed to memory, conduct, attendance, participation in an extraordinary spiritual exercise and completion of service.

Attendance Policies

No matter the grade level, students are expected to attend every class in order to gain the full knowledge and experience that the catechists have to offer them. However, if absence from class is unavoidable, it is the responsibility of the student with the parent's supervision to complete the scheduled class work and homework for the missed class before the next class. Lesson schedules can be found stapled in the front of every student textbook and on the Parish website by grade/session.

Absentee notes, explaining the reason for the absence must be provided to the catechist in order to be admitted to the next class. Absentee notes are kept on file in the religious education office.

Tests are also listed on the Lesson Schedules and students who have missed a class prior to a test are responsible for their own test preparation. Upon returning to class, the student must complete the missed test.

After a second absence, the family will receive a telephone call from the religious education office. Three absences per school year will be cause for a meeting with the pastor and religious education coordinator. Poor attendance may cause sacrament deferral.

Late arrivals to class are disruptive and distracting to the catechist and the other students. It is important to keep late arrivals to a minimum as a courtesy, out of respect and for the benefit of your child who is entitled to a full evening of religious education. A pattern of late arrival to class, will trigger a telephone call from the religious education office.

If a child must leave class early, a note from a parent must be presented to the catechist before class starts. The parent must go to the parish center school office shortly before the early dismissal time. To show identification and sign the child out. Office staff will go to the classroom to escort the child to the parent in the office.

Discipline Policies

Our Faith is grounded in the belief that every person is created in the image and likeness of God and therefore worthy of respect. Student behavior must be characterized by genuine Christian care, mutual respect, and honesty. Disruptive behavior is disrespectful to rest of the students and the catechist, a volunteer serving the Church for the love of God and the good of 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. Removal of a student from the classroom may lead to suspension. Repetitive discipline issues may result in expulsion.

The normal steps for disciplinary action will be:

1. Verbal correction by the teacher
2. Student sent to the office to meet with the coordinator
3. Parent notified by the coordinator and a conference held
4. Parent and child meet with the coordinator and pastor
5. Child removed from the program and student record documented
6. Sacraments may be deferred

For any of the following violations, a student will be removed from the classroom immediately and temporarily suspended until disciplinary actions are taken:

- drugs/alcohol/substance abuse
- verbal or physical harassment or fighting
- stealing or damaging parish property
- jeopardizing a person's safety
- carrying any object of a harmful nature (e.g. knives, razors, etc.)

Dress Guidelines

St. Joseph's Religious Education organization adheres to the dress code as defined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

Modesty protects the intimate center of the person. It means refusing to unveil what should remain hidden. (CCC part 3, article 9,2521-2527)

(continued on the next page)

Our dress code regulations are as follows:

- No shorts, skirts, or dresses that are higher than mid-thigh, with slits higher than mid-thigh, or that do not fit properly around the waist
- No halter tops, off the shoulder tops, sleeveless shirts, or tops that reveal bare midriff, abdomen, or back
- No sundresses with straps less than three inches wide unless worn with a tee shirt underneath
- No sheer garments that reveal undergarments
- No garments that display printed material that could be offensive, including but not limited to pictures promoting alcohol, tobacco, violence or inappropriate sexual nature, and no pants with writing across the buttocks
- No pajamas, bedroom slippers or shoes with wheels
- No shirts with low necklines
- No tight-fitting clothes

In order to enforce our guidelines, if a child comes to class inappropriately dressed the following steps will be taken:

- 1st offense: Parent will receive a phone call notifying them of the offense
- 2nd offense: Parent will be called to deliver a change of clothes
- All other offenses: Parent will receive a phone call to deliver a change of clothes and the child will remain in the office until the clothes are delivered

Books, Supplies, and Assignments

Students in grades 1 through 8 are given textbooks and activity books. Kindergarten students are given one book. Fifth graders are given Bibles. Each sixth grader is given a *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Parents must provide a pocket folder and a pencil and/or pen for each child. It is recommended that students keep all religious education materials in a backpack or carry bag dedicated for this purpose.

It is the responsibility of the parents to ensure that their children complete all work assigned by their catechists, including memorization of prayers. Parents are expected to assist their children in remembering to take their completed assignments and books to class each week.

If a textbook, activity book, *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and/or Bible is lost, the student will be required to purchase a new one. Contact the office for the replacement fee.

Arrival and Dismissal

Child safety is paramount during arrival and dismissal. Please adhere to the following rules:

Students should always exit cars on the sidewalk side of the street.

Cross Second Street at the cross walk.

If a crossing guard is on duty, follow his directions.

If students arrive for class from the Second Street entrance, they must use the walkway that leads directly to the parish center school doors and not the driveway entrance.

Arrange with your child exactly where he/she is to be picked up. Students in kindergarten through grade 2 must be picked up at the classroom door by a parent unless arrangements to be picked up by an older sibling attending class at the same session are made, in writing, with the coordinator. Students in grades 3 through 8 should be picked up outside the school doors.

If parents enter the parish center school before dismissal time, they must wait in the entrance hallway until after the closing prayer.

Adults and children must be mindful of safety, especially between the two sessions held on Sundays and Mondays when almost 300 students are arriving or leaving the premises. Families attending the earlier class should leave as soon as possible so that those arriving for the later class have room to park. Families attending the later class should not arrive too early, keeping in mind that the earlier class is being dismissed.

Parking

In order to insure the safety of all students, parental cooperation is necessary. Parents are not permitted to drive into the school parking lot and must park on the street, away from the crosswalk. Only catechists and aides are permitted to park in the school lot.

Class Cancellations

Whenever inclement weather forces closings for local schools, religious education classes will **NOT automatically be cancelled**. Announcements of cancellation of religious education classes will be listed on the KYW website www.kyw1060.com, and aired over KYW Newsradio1060. St. Joseph's registration number is **1245**. If there is sufficient time, e-mails may be sent but, should not be relied upon. Telephone calls will not be made. Cancellations may also be posted on St. Joseph's Parish website.

Communications

The weekly church bulletin is an essential vehicle of communication. The weekly bulletin is available at all Masses and at www.sjcswednesday.org.

All parents will be provided with a calendar of activities and important dates in the beginning of the school year. As the need arises, additional information will be distributed to all students via a flyer distributed in class as well as through e-mail and a notice in the bulletin. In rare cases, notifications may be sent via U.S. mail.

On the religious education registration form, all parents are required to give emergency and health information. If this information or e-mail addresses change during the course of the year, please notify the religious education office. The burden of keeping this information updated rests on the family in order that communication flows freely between the family and the religious education office.

Substance Abuse Policy

Substance abuse is defined as the possession of, use of, or trafficking in any unauthorized, illegal drug, chemical, alcohol, tobacco, 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.

Child Abuse Policy

The religious education coordinator, catechists, and aides are required by the New Jersey State Law and Diocesan Policy on Child Abuse to report suspected or actual child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. Parents who observe actual or suspected child abuse are encouraged to report the matter in confidence to the coordinator of religious education immediately.

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 *Child Lures Prevention* program required by the Camden Diocese Office of Safe Environment is used to educate children in all grade levels concerning personal safety skills. Parent participation in this program through reinforcement of the lessons is essential. One parent guide per family is provided.

Catechists or parents who witness an act of child abuse perpetrated by a cleric, employee or volunteer of the parish, suspect that such an act has occurred, or receive a report of such an act, must report the incident immediately to the diocesan office. The telephone number is 800-964-6588.

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 catechists to whom the child is assigned will be informed of all special directions. Progress reports 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 and communicated to 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.

Financial Policies

Each family's tuition is based upon the number of children enrolled. Families are expected to pay their tuition in full at the time of registration. A late fee of \$25 will be charged to those registering after the registration deadline. New parish members will not be charged a late fee.

Families experiencing financial difficulties are asked to contact the pastor or religious education coordinator to explain their situation and request a payment plan or a partial or full waiver. Such requests will be kept in strict confidence. No child will be denied religious instruction due to a financial hardship.

In addition to the tuition fee, there is an activity fee for all children who are celebrating sacraments. This fee will help to defray the cost of the retreats, certificates, program booklets and other costs incurred with the celebration of the sacraments. It is due with the sacrament application form.

Families who withdraw children from the program before the scheduled start date will be entitled to a refund. Those who withdraw from the program after the starting date will receive a percentage of the fee paid. New parishioners who register after December 1st will be charged a pro-rated fee.