

Religious Education



Parent Handbook

St James the Less Parish
36 Lincoln Avenue
Jamesburg, NJ 08831
September 2022

Dear Parent/Guardian,

St James the Less Religious Education Program welcomes you and your child! You have chosen a Roman Catholic Religious Formation program, which teaches the doctrine of the Catholic Church through current documents, including the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the National Directory for Catechesis and utilizes Diocesan programs to train catechists.

Our program for 2022-23 will consist of weekly in-person classes for Grades 1-7 and a modified schedule for Grade 8. The program will include Sacrament preparation for Reconciliation, First Communion and Confirmation. We do our best to meet the needs of our families and Parish Community.

Sunday Mass attendance is the most important part of our curriculum. As Catholic parents, it is your obligation to model your faith and bring your child to weekly Sunday Mass to fulfill your promise made to God at your child's Baptism. Please take this responsibility very seriously and attend Mass together every week.

Our program is staffed by volunteer catechists who faithfully and enthusiastically give of their time and talents to help with the spiritual formation of your child. Our classes are held once a week – this is little time compared to what is given to all of the other areas of your child's development. As a result, we expect our families to give these classes the highest priority when scheduling your child's activities.

It is our privilege to work with your child but please remember that we have them for only 30 hours per year and so this task of religious formation is a cooperative effort. We bring God's word to your child in the classroom by conveying knowledge. Religion, however, is more than knowledge. Catholic Christianity is a way of life. Therefore, we invite you to be an example of faith and a teacher of your child. The environment you create at home and the example you give in weekly worship of our Lord at Mass provides the key to an enriched faith. Your support of this program enables us to assist you in your responsibility of passing on your faith to your child. Please make an effort to cooperate with us in this important task.

Kindly familiarize yourself with the attached Religious Education Handbook. Please contact me via email or phone if you have any questions.

Please join in my prayer for a successful and joyful Religious Education year!

Best regards,

Linda Rondinelli
Parish Catechetical Leader

General Policies

Arrival/Dismissal

For the safety of everyone, please follow these arrival and dismissal guidelines at Holy Trinity Parish Center:

- At the beginning of class, parents must accompany their child into the main hall. Dropping your off child in the parking lot is not permitted.
- Students are to wait at the designated tables in the main hall for their teacher.
- At the end of class, parents must come into the main hall and wait at the designated tables until the class is brought to the table by the teacher. Students will not be allowed to meet their parents in the parking lot.
- Remember to drive slowly. Be prepared to stop at all times.
- Be mindful of the areas of the parking lot that have been closed off by safety cones.

Early Dismissal

If for some urgent reason, a child needs to be excused early from class, a note must be given in advance to the catechist indicating the reason, the time of pickup and by whom. If your child becomes ill, you will be notified and asked to pick up your child.

Late Policy

Due to limited classroom time, it is imperative that the students arrive on time to begin class. Please plan for an arrival 5-10 minutes before the start of class. **Late arrivals are disruptive to the class and unfair to the catechist and students.**

Please note: The PCL or a catechist will not send a student home with a driver who is visibly impaired. The PCL will call the emergency numbers listed for the student until a driver is located.

Attendance

Every effort should be made to attend class on scheduled days. Religious Education classes must be given priority over any extracurricular activities. Please do not schedule doctor/dentist appointments during class time.

Please call the office, 732-521-1188, if your child is going to be absent. Attendance in class is taken weekly. **The limit on absences set by the Diocese of Metuchen is three (3) for the entire year.** Each course of study is done sequentially. **Excessive absences make it impossible for your child to grasp concepts.** Excessive absences will be addressed by the PCL. Parents are expected to assist their child in making up work that has been missed due to absence.

Attendance at weekly Mass is considered part of the curriculum of the Religious Education Program.

Please note: Two late arrivals and/or early dismissals count as an absence.

Making Up Work

When a student is absent, the completion of missed work and/or homework is expected. It is the parent's responsibility to see that the material that was discussed in the class is covered at home. A Curriculum Calendar, which provides a calendar of the material to be discussed on a particular date, will be established for each grade level and distributed at the first class, as well as posted on the Religious Education page on the Parish website.

Problems with numerous absences and/or tardiness without making up work are serious and the PCL will be notified. This may result in repeating the grade level.

Catechists

We have a very dedicated and passionate group of catechists and aides who serve the program and help your child grow in their faith. Please treat them kindly, encourage them and cooperate with them in this ministry. For safety and compliance with our diocesan policies, all of our volunteers have been vetted. See requirements below in next section.

If you are interested in taking an active role in your child's religious education, please call the office to explore the role of catechist or classroom aide.

Child Abuse/Protecting God's Children

If a catechist or the PCL suspects that a child has been abused, New Jersey State law requires that the Division of Youth and Family Services be notified. The Office of Child and Youth Protection of the Diocese of Metuchen will also be notified. All volunteers over the age of 18 in the Religious Education program are required to have a criminal background check and be fingerprinted. In addition, they must receive training through the Protecting God's Children program (Virtus).

Communications

Each child is given a folder at the beginning of the school year. It is the parent's responsibility to check the folder for information and communication from your child's catechist and the Religious Education Office. Notices, fliers, homework and progress reports will be distributed through the folders. Please ask your child for this information. In addition to the Religious Education page on the church website, group emails and the church bulletins will also contain announcements concerning Religious Education and Sacramental preparation.

Crisis Management Plans and Drills

St James has in place policies for lockdowns, evacuation, and fire drills. The catechists will explain the procedures to their class in the beginning of the year and they, along with the aides, are asked to maintain order and account for their students. Drills are conducted to ensure the safety of all.

Curriculum

The Curriculum for Religious Education is established by diocesan policy which includes both faith formation through classroom instruction and family faith formation through attendance at weekly Mass. The curriculum is cumulative. The concepts taught in the lower grades will be revisited and tested in the upper grades.

Texts Used

Grades 1-7 Christ In Us, published by Sadlier

Grade 6 presented with a Bible

Grades 1,3,4,5,6,7 Growing with God: Safe and Sacred, published by Loyola Press

Family Life Education

As mandated by the Diocese of Metuchen, our program includes Family Life education. Texts/worksheets are published by Loyola Press and include Safe Environment Training appropriate to the developmental level of the child. Material is available for parental review in the Religious Education office and Opt-out Forms are available in the office as well.

Family Life concepts are not addressed as a separate subject in grade 2 and grade 8, as they are included while focusing on sacramental preparation.

Prayers

Parents are asked to teach their children the prayers assigned to each grade level. The most effective way for them to learn these prayers is for you to pray with them every day. Periodic testing of the student's knowledge of prayers is to be expected and the catechists will work on prayers in class as well. A list of prayers by grade level can be found in this Handbook. Prayers are located in the back section of the books. All students are to learn their prayers before their promotion to the next grade level.

Homework and Testing

There will be times during the year when your child's catechist will assign supplemental work that will need your supervision, meant to reinforce work that is done in class. In addition, the students will be tested periodically on prayers and concepts being taught at the discretion of the catechist. At the end of the second semester, assessments may be given at a grade level. Failure to do well does not necessarily mean that a student will

not proceed to the next grade level. Assessments are also given to pinpoint focus of study for a particular grade.

Special Learning/Behavioral Needs

In order for every child to function and learn at his or her best, the PCL and Catechist need to know if there is a specific learning or behavioral issue. This information will be kept confidential and needs to be disclosed annually at registration. Please be aware that if you do not disclose specifics about a child's needs, the child will be expected to perform and behave as any other child in that grade level without any accommodations. Please be sure to communicate any specific strategies to the PCL and your child's Catechist that have been developed either at home or in your child's school.

Liturgy

Family worship at Mass is the most important part of our curriculum and an integral part of the Sacramental Preparation years. Parents and children are required to participate in weekly Mass.

Preparation for Class

Every student will be provided a book and folder at the beginning of the year. Each student is expected to come to class prepared and must have the necessary materials every time they come, including 2 sharpened pencils or pens and their book and folder. It is suggested that each student keep a tote or drawstring bag designated for their Religious Education materials. The replacement of a lost book or damaged item is the responsibility of the parent. The cost of a replacement book is \$25.00 and a Bible is \$15.00.

Custody

In cases where custody of children has been restricted by the courts, a copy of the court document (referring to custody issues only) must be kept on file in the Religious Education Office, in order to carry out the provisions provided for in the document. If the court document is amended, withdrawn or changed in any way, it is the parent's/guardian's responsibility to give an updated copy to the PCL.

Discipline

The catechists at St James are volunteers and are not expected to handle serious or ongoing discipline problems. Parental cooperation is necessary to help your child live God's law of love in the classroom. Please see the Student Code of Behavior in this Handbook and discuss it with your child.

Students who have been sent to the office due to classroom disruption will be held to the following policy:

- **First Offense:** The incident is documented and if necessary, parents will be notified. An apology from the student to the catechist is necessary to gain entry back in the classroom.
- **Second Offense:** Parents will be notified of the incident and a letter will be sent home requiring a return signature.
- **Third Offense:** A conference will be required with the parents and the PCL to discuss options for returning to class or program withdrawal.

Emergency Closings

In the event of inclement weather, please call the Religious Education Office, 732-521-1188, for a recorded message regarding cancellation of classes. Please note that if the public schools are closed due to weather, then the Religious Education classes will be immediately canceled. This applies also to public school after-school activity closings due to weather. Please do not call the Parish Rectory Office.

Food Allergies

It is the goal of St. James to provide an allergen free environment for children with food allergies, so that they may enjoy a safe place to grow in their faith. Recognizing that strict avoidance of the allergen is the only way to prevent a potentially life-threatening reaction, we ask your cooperation with the following policy: **No food or drink of any kind is permitted during the Religious Education Program. This includes foods that are considered to be “safe”.** Notification will be sent in advance for any exceptions to this policy, such as distribution of Oplatki at Christmas.

Illegal Substances and Weapons

Drugs, alcohol, tobacco and/or weapons of any kind are not permitted on the St James or Holy Trinity premises by any student. If a student is found to be in possession of any of these, the student will be detained until the police are notified.

Progress Reports

Progress reports are distributed midyear and again at the conclusion of the year. Midyear reports are to be signed and returned. The catechist may ask for a phone conference to further discuss the student's performance.

Promotion

A student can be retained especially if they are severely delinquent in attendance, assignments or in their preparation for a Sacrament. Students recommended for retention are referred to the PCL for a meeting with the parents to discuss placement options. Retention is our absolute last measure, reserved for a student who is not ready to proceed to the next grade level, in spite of parents and the catechist working together.

Registration

Registration for the coming school year is held in the spring. Families seeking to register their child for Religious Education must be registered parishioners of St James the Less Church. New student registrations require Baptismal certificates if they were not baptized at St James. Forms are distributed through the classes to the students already enrolled in the program. In addition, registration information is listed in the parish bulletin and on our website from spring until the opening of classes in September. Our registration is a rolling enrollment and classes are filled on a first come, first served basis. Preference and placement in a session is based on the date of the submitted completed form and payment.

We make every effort to place your child in your preferred session but due to the number of children in the program and the availability of our volunteers, it is not always possible. Once classes start, there will be no refunds issued if you remove your child from the program.

Fees

No child shall be refused Religious Education due to finances, however all families are expected to support their parish. If there is a financial hardship, the parent should contact the PCL to make arrangements for payment options.

Transfer Policy

The Diocese requires that a permanent record card for each student in the program is retained. In the event that a family moves in or out of the area, the record of their child's religious education can be sent to the new parish office.

Behavior

All students are expected to show proper respect for themselves, others and Parish property while attending classes. Catechists will assist students in setting classroom guidelines that reinforce Christian attitudes. Oppositional behavior is not tolerated.

Appropriate attire is required. Students must dress modestly to show respect for themselves and others.

Any use of cell phones while in class will result in collection by the catechist and given to the PCL for pickup by a parent.

Students are expected to listen, cooperate with others, follow the student code of behavior and use appropriate choices to solve their problems.

Student Code of Behavior

- Students are expected to show respect to all in their words and actions.
- Students must conform to the attendance policy stated in the handbook.
- Students should comply with the classroom rules set out by the Catechist in the interest of providing a good learning environment. Disruptive behavior is not allowed in class.
- Students should not do anything that could cause physical harm to themselves or others. Fighting is not permitted.
- Students must not destroy, deface or remove property from the building.
- Students are responsible for completing all in-class and homework assignments to the best of their ability and according to the time schedule allowed.
- Students are not to bring food or drink, chew gum or wear a hat during class time.
- Students are not to leave the classroom without permission or leave the premises without the appropriate adult.
- Students are not permitted to use cell phones or entertainment devices during class. They must be turned off and kept out of sight.
- Students are not permitted to use abusive language.
- No bullying of any kind will be tolerated.
- Students who exhibit any inappropriate behavior (in the judgment of the Pastor and PCL) may be asked to withdraw from the program.

Sacramental Policies

Preparation for the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Confirmation entails two years of formal class instruction at each level. However, completion of religious education classes in grades 3-6 is necessary to enter the Confirmation Preparation Program. Sacrament programs require both formal religious education classes as well as attendance at practices, activities and special liturgies held on days other than regular class days. You will receive these dates through letters and notices.

Parent Meetings

Sacrament Parent Meetings are mandatory and advance written notice is given as well as posted in the church bulletin and on the Religious Education page.

Dates

Dates for your child's reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and First Holy Communion are posted on the Religious Education Calendar, which is distributed at the beginning of the school year.

Date for Confirmation is given to us by the Bishop's office, usually in December or January.

Preparation Requirements

Reconciliation and First Holy Communion: Preparation for receiving these Sacraments requires a two-year commitment to the Religious Education Program. In addition, attendance at weekly Mass is expected. Students also attend a Saturday morning retreat.

Confirmation: Preparation for receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation is a two-year commitment. Attending weekly Mass and receiving the Eucharist is an important part of the commitment. Class attendance reflects an understanding of what it means to make this important commitment in Faith, and because of this, **absence for sports or other extracurricular activities will not be accepted.** At the end of the second year, an exam will be administered to determine that the student is properly prepared to make the commitment of Confirmation. A student may be postponed from the reception of Confirmation by his/her own choice or by a mutual agreement between the student's teacher, the Pastor, and the PCL, if the student is not ready to make Confirmation at that time.

Confirmation candidates will participate in the following:

- **Community Service Project**
- **Retreat**
- **Weekly Mass Attendance and Written Reflections**
- **Letter and Meeting with the Pastor**
- **Selection, Research and Report of Confirmation name**
- **Mandatory twice per month classes**
- **Sponsor Selection**
- **Confirmation Practices**

Children's Catechumenate

For children not baptized entering grades 3 through 7 OR for those who have been baptized as infants but have not received their First Eucharist, **it is a two-year process.**

- **First Year**

The child will attend regular Religious Education classes on their grade level and after the first year will be accepted into the Children's Catechumenate.

- **Second Year**

The child will attend regular Religious Education classes on their grade level and during their second year, **will receive additional separate instruction.** The PCL and the catechist will determine the child's readiness to receive initiation Sacraments during the Easter season. Parental support, guidance, example and Mass participation are **mandatory** during the catechumenate process.

Curriculum Overview by Grade

Grade 1

God, Father and Creator of the Word
Jesus, the Son of God and our Friend
The Holy Spirit, Giver of Strength and Joy

Grade 2

The Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist
Jesus, Model for Christian Living

Grade 3

The traditions and beliefs of the Catholic Church
The Apostles Creed and the seven Sacraments

Grade 4

The Beatitudes
Catholic Christian Moral Values

Grade 5

The Sacramental Life of the Church

Grade 6

God's Plan of Salvation as recorded in the Bible

Grade 7

Synthesis of Catholic Beliefs: Trinity, Christian Community, Sacraments,
Commandments
Confirmation: Gifts and Fruits of the Spirit
Developing knowledge and relationship to Jesus Christ

Grade 8

The Church in the modern world, Catholic Christian Morality, Ecumenism
and Social Justice

Family Life Education

Our text, Growing with God: Safe and Sacred, is grounded through Christ's teachings and the Catholic faith. Children are empowered to respond to troubling and potentially dangerous situations using the strategies and techniques they're taught as part of the program to see themselves as children of God.

The material of the Family Life Program is organized according to the six themes:

- **God Creates Us:** Building confidence, growing spiritually and physically
- **Boundaries:** Abuse Prevention
- **Friendship and Bullying:** Fostering healthy relationships
- **Safety Awareness:** Abduction prevention
- **Digital Discipleship:** Safe and healthy habits in online environments
- **My Sacred Self:** Catholic family living

Prayers

Grade 1

- The Sign of the Cross
- The Our Father
- The Hail Mary
- The Glory Be

Grade 2

- The Act of Contrition

Grade 3

- The Apostles Creed

Grade 4

- Review of all prayers learned in previous years

Grade 5

- The Memorare
- Review of all prayers learned in previous years

Grade 6

- The Rosary, which includes the Fatima Prayer and Hail, Holy Queen

Grade 7

- Mass Prayers/Responses