



Religious Education Catechist Handbook

2017—2018 School Year

A Special Note from Our Pastor

Dear Catechists:

Thank you for cooperating so generously in God's plan for His people here at The Co-Cathedral of St. Robert Bellarmine. Your decision to teach the children of this parish is a wonderful example of your Christian commitment to share your faith in a most meaningful way; a way which will profoundly impact our young parishioners for the rest of their lives.

Please be assured that my staff and I will do everything we can to assist, encourage and support your mission. We are all available to you whenever help is needed.

This handbook is given to you as a resource guide. Please read it carefully and keep it handy. If you have any questions or comments, please let me know.

Always remember that we are involved in the most exciting work of the Spirit. Let us pray for each other every day as we go about doing the Church's work evangelization.

May God Bless You,

Rev. Msgr. Sam A Sirianni, V.F.

General Catechist Information

It is the policy of the Diocese of Trenton that all persons who teach Religion (herein referred to as catechist), in addition to being faith-filled Catholics, must complete catechist formation through an approved Faith Formation program. Therefore, we strongly encourage our catechists to further their own faith formation. Additionally, all catechists must have up to date fingerprinting and background check documentation.

Please contact the Religious Education for further information.

Catechists are granted a tuition credit for one child in the program. This credit is provided at the time of registration.

Requirements for a Catechist

- ❖ is a believing, practicing Catholic and who participates in the liturgical life of the community.
- ❖ believes deeply in Jesus, in the Catholic tradition and wants to share this belief with others.
- ❖ is committed to the teaching of the Catholic Church and her Magisterium.
- ❖ is comfortable with and able to communicate effectively with the age group they will be catechizing.
- ❖ is able to deal with conflict and disagreement in a sensitive and understanding manner.
- ❖ **is willing to make the time to prepare for and conduct their catechetical sessions as well as participate in regular in-service and planning meetings.**
- ❖ is committed to continuing growth and enrichment as a catechist.
- ❖ is at least 18 years of age.

A Catechist should be able to:

- ❖ articulate one's Catholic faith
- ❖ communicate with students
- ❖ plan and conduct a catechetical session
- ❖ use a variety of catechetical methods and resources effectively
- ❖ use a variety of teaching and learning experiences
- ❖ evaluate one's efforts

Catechist Supplies

All teachers will be provided with the following materials:

- ❖ Grade Level Catechist Manual
- ❖ Catechist Handbook
- ❖ Religious Education Parent Handbook
- ❖ Class Roster - This list will have the children's contact information and email address.
- ❖ Student Books
- ❖ Religious Education Calendar
- ❖ Attendance Record

Religious Education Calendar

The Calendar provided will note the following:

- ❖ Lesson # to be presented each week- **There is no exception to this.**
- ❖ Holidays and Liturgical Celebrations
- ❖ Dates that classes will not be in session
- ❖ Dates for catechist meetings - your presence at these meetings is **REQUIRED** in order to facilitate a viable Religious Education Program.
- ❖ Important dates: Sacrament dates, rehearsal dates, parent meeting dates, etc.

Our Program

The texts chosen provide our students with a catechesis based on "Sacred Scripture, Tradition, Liturgy, and the Magisterium: the teaching authority of the Church.

The scope and sequence of the series text provides a complete and accurate Vatican II Theology distributed across the grades K—8. It is spiraled so that each year the students' catechetical program is both deepened and expanded. Each year of the program provides students with:

- A growing experience of and a reverence for the Sacred Scriptures.
- A faithful presentation of the Church's teachings.
- Encouragement to make a lived response to the faith presented.
- A meaningful participation in the communal, sacramental and liturgical life of the Church, especially the Mass.
- More and more profound prayer experiences
- An appreciation both for the lives of the saints and Catholics today who are valiantly trying to transform our world.
- A stimulation of their religious imaginations so they learn to think more critically, and are better prepared to proclaim and live their faith.
- A religious literacy that will support an enthusiasm for growing up Catholic in today's world.

All students will be required to complete unit assessments and demonstrate their knowledge of the required prayers per grade level in order to advance to the next grade level.

Family Life

This program was promulgated by Bishop O'Connell in 2014 and provides a catechesis for moral living focusing on each grade level on five unit themes:

- God's Gift of Family
- God's Gift of Self
- God's Gift of Life
- God's Gift of Love
- God's Gift of Community

Through these five unit themes across all grade levels, Family Life will help support families through a moral catechesis. The gift of Catholic family living is understood and appreciated at each level and a continual process that is a life-long journey. Using these five unit themes will equip children with the skills and knowledge to navigate their way through life according to Catholic values.

This program also satisfies the VIRTUS/Touching Safety Diocesan requirement.

Attendance Record

The Attendance Record must be completed weekly. Attendance should be marked as follows: A check mark for students who are present, an "A" for students who are absent and an "L" for those arriving late. Students are required to make up the work they have missed. This is done using an online program. If a child does not make up the work, the catechist should contact the parent and request that the work be completed. The procedure for completing the work online is posted to the website. When the make-up work has been submitted, the catechist should circle the "A" on the attendance sheet. If the work is not completed and handed in, the student will be required to take a final assessment before being allowed to register for the next grade level. Attendance folders are to remain in the classroom during class time and should be left on the teacher's desk at the end of class.

The attendance folders should not be taken home!

The Religious Education Office should be notified when a student has been absent for a total of 3 times.

MOST IMPORTANTLY: No child may drop out of or be admitted to your class without the approval of the Religious Education Office!

Class Cancellations

If there is a weather emergency, and hazardous driving conditions are expected, classes will be cancelled. Information concerning cancelled classes will be posted on the St. Robert's website: www.strobert.com. We will also send out a general e-mail announcement and a PUSH notification to catechists and parents. **We suggest all catechists keep a copy of the student contact information at home.** In the event we are unable to send out emails from the Religious Education Office, we ask that catechists contact their students directly either by phone call or e-mail.

Class Procedures

You are the catechist! This is **your** classroom! The following guidelines should help you to maintain a sense of order and control in you class:

- ❖ Prepare a **Code of Conduct** for your class. Invite the students to participate in setting it up.
- ❖ Let the students know what is expected of them.
- ❖ Post the Code of Conduct so everyone can see it!
- ❖ Make sure everyone understands the rules, and...
- ❖ **Enforce the rules and follow through!**

Lastly, PLEASE make sure your students know who you are! Please note your name on the white board during class and make sure the parents know your name, as well.

Security

Building and classroom security is a major concern. To that end, our policy is as follows: The Parish Hall doors from the back parking lot will only be open 15 minutes prior to beginning of classes and will be locked 5 minutes after the beginning of classes. The doors will then be opened 10 minutes prior to the beginning of dismissal. Times will be posted on the doors. For any late arrivals or early dismissals, parents are required to escort their children into/out of the building from the front parking lot and sign them in/out in the R E office. In the event of early dismissal, students will be called down to the office. NO Parents are permitted in the classroom wing during class time without prior approval. We will be scheduling Fire and LockDown Drills during the year.

Lesson Plan

It is important that you make up a lesson plan in advance of your scheduled class. The grade level manuals provide a very good outline of the material that should be covered. Many times there is more material that time allows for, so prepare a list of the materials to be used and the main objectives of the class. Please follow the lesson order noted on the calendar. In the event of a teacher or student absence, this will ensure continuity of the material to be covered.

Please begin and end each class with prayer. This is the foundation of our Faith. It also is an opportunity to practice the prayers for your grade level. You may introduce the students to some other prayers and offer them the opportunity to make up their own prayers in order to develop a personal prayer life.

Progress Reports

In order to keep families involved in our program, we ask catechists to contact parents at least twice a year to keep them abreast of their children's progress. We suggest that you contact the families in the beginning of the year to introduce yourself and then contact them for updates in December and again in March.

Discipline Procedures

Most of the children in our program are very interested to learn about their faith. At times, however, issues regarding classroom behavior may arise. We are here to support you, but can do so only if you follow the steps outlined below:

- ❖ Speak with student directly and remind her/him of the expected behavior and the consequences.
- ❖ If the behavior continues, you may contact the parent/guardian and enlist their help in addressing the situation. Please make the Religious Education Office aware that you have taken this action.
- ❖ If the behavior still continues, send the child directly to the office. At this time, depending upon the circumstances, the parent may be contacted to pick up the child and a meeting will be scheduled to discuss the continuing disruptive behavior.
- ❖ The parent will either be required to attend class with their child or be required to complete the year with home instruction.

IMPORTANT! Please do not wait until the year is almost over to address a discipline issue! Addressing behavior when it occurs is the best way to ensure it does not continue!

Steps to Achieve Discipline in Class

- ❖ **Catechist sets the tone!** Children, for better or worse, are great imitators of anyone older than themselves. Set the standards you expect. Give a "good example" and the children will imitate the example set. Speak respectfully to students and act in a dignified Christian manner. **Remember: How you act is as important as how you teach!**
- ❖ **Is it working?** Evaluate the tone you set for your particular class. Are the rules and guidelines understood by each student? We have a variety of students - you may have to experiment with the tone you want to set. Our aim should be to lift the student to a higher level of behavior, if possible. **Remember: We do not stoop to the child's level.**
- ❖ **Give recognition.** This one is important! Each student has to believe that you are genuinely interested in her/him. Make it a point to speak to as many of the students as possible before class begins, as they walk into the classroom. Use greetings such as "Hi,(name). How are you today?...How did school go last week? ...How is your team doing?" ...etc.
- ❖ **What are you doing?** When a child is being disruptive in class, one of the best ways to stop the behavior is to interrupt the disruptive behavior. Question the student: "What are you doing?" This is an opportunity to have the child take responsibility for their actions and for you to reinforce the classroom rules.

One of the most effective tools for regaining classroom control is to just stop!...Stop speaking or doing whatever it is that you are doing. The students will notice and they will stop. THEN you have their attention and can address the situation!

- ❖ **Is it against the rules?** Repeat step #4. If you still do not get a response, or if the response identifies an action that is against the rules, this is the opportunity to point directly to the rules that the class agreed upon. Children must be taught that they are expected to obey reasonable rules. **In all levels of society, rules DO EXIST. As citizens within a society, or as members of a family and of a class, a breaking of the rules cannot be tolerated.**
- ❖ **We've got to work it out.** A continuation of the disruptive behavior needs a "We've got to work it out" dialogue after class. The dialogue should be firm re-emphasizing the need for rules and that the rule breaking behavior is continuing and is unacceptable. The catechist needs to communicate that "this cannot continue" **and mean it!** At this point the disruptive student must know that she/he has to cease depriving others in the class of the benefits of the lesson. It should also be made clear that as a result of their behavior, they will be required to complete a summary of the lesson that you have been trying to teach. **At no time should a student be put out of the classroom and left unattended! No student should be sent home on their own. The student should be directed to the Religious Education Office at which time the parent will be called to pick up the student.**
- ❖ **Parent Meeting** will be held to determine the conditions under which the student may return to class. This meeting will be held with the Director of Religious Education and the Pastor.
- ❖ Should the behavior continue, the parents will be required to home school the student for the remainder of the year.
- ❖ Remember, **Discipline privately; Praise openly!**
- ❖ Any questions regarding this policy, please contact the Religious Education Office @ 732-462-7429 Ext.122 or 134

Electronic Devices

We continue to have issues with cell phones and other electronic devices. The procedure that will be in place is as follows: **All cell phones are to be turned off upon entering the classroom and placed in a basket on the teacher's desk and they are to remain there during class. If a student is seen with their phone in hand at any time while classes are in session, it will be taken and returned only to a parent at dismissal.** Teachers, please be the example for your students. Technology is something that can enhance the classroom experience, but we must take care that it not be abused.

Class Room Celebrations

Due to an ever increasing number of food allergies and restrictions, we cannot allow food or treats to be given out in class. THERE IS TO BE NO FOOD EATEN IN CLASS! We ask, also, that Class Room Celebrations (Christmas and Year-End) not take more than 20 minutes of class time and should be related to Religious Education.

End of Year Procedures

All grade level manuals and supplemental materials, along with ID badges, must be returned to the Religious Education Office by the final week of class. You will also be given a year-end survey. Please be sure to complete it and turn it in. Your feedback is very important to the success of our program!

Key Things to Remember

- ❖ What we teach is the Catholic Religion i.e. what is approved by the Magisterium (the teaching office of the Church); the Pope and the entire Catholic Church, and the Bishop.
- ❖ The physical safety of our children is of primary importance.
- ❖ To facilitate a viable Religious Education Program, your attendance at teacher meetings is very important.
- ❖ No child may drop out of or be admitted to your class without approval from the Religious Education Office.
- ❖ If a child is absent more than 3 times, the Religious Education Office must be notified.
- ❖ To avoid disruption of precious class time, please encourage students to use the bathroom facilities **before** or **after** class.

We will continue to evaluate our policies and procedures to ensure that we address current situations and concerns in a timely fashion.

WE APPRECIATE ALL YOU DO!