

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES CHURCH
Vernon, NJ

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION HANDBOOK
2020-2021



One of the things we are most proud of at St. Francis de Sales is our Religious Education Program. Part of the success of any program is that all those involved work as a team sharing a common goal. We plant the seeds and God, in His love, graces our life with the gift of faith.

It is important that we keep in mind that the Church, in celebrating the Sacrament of Baptism, instructs the parents that “You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so, you are accepting the responsibility of training him/her in the practice of faith. It will be your duty to bring her/him up to keep God’s commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor” [from the Rite of Baptism]. It is presumed you and your children will attend weekend Mass. For Catholics, **Mass is not an option.**

To the best of our ability, we will provide a safe environment and establish a Christian atmosphere where we will try to treat each other the way Jesus would want. We will provide a program involving weekly classes, retreats, service opportunities, special liturgies and opportunities for prayer and the reception of the sacraments. We will also encourage participation in traditional seasonal activities such as Family Advent Day, Stations of the Cross, Holy Week Liturgies, and youth activities. Our curriculum will include Scripture-based material and, therefore, we expect that the children participate in the celebration of Sunday Mass each week.

Communication is most important in this team effort; therefore, we encourage an open dialogue among parents, professional and volunteer staff and students. **If you have any questions or there is something that you wish to discuss, please let us know.**

ADMISSION POLICY

Our Religious Education Program welcomes all **registered** members of St. Francis de Sales Parish. The program runs from Grade 1 through Grade 10 and provides a solid foundation for spiritual growth in the Catholic faith. In addition, we offer continuing fellowship for our young people after Confirmation through our Youth Ministry.

NEW, TRANSFERRING AND CATHOLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS

Any student new to the program must submit a copy of their Baptismal Certificate at registration time (unless baptized here). For transferring students, we also require copies of First Eucharist and Reconciliation Certificates (if applicable) along with an official record of grades completed from the previous parish.

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

At St. Francis de Sales, sacramental preparation takes place over a **two-year cycle**. Therefore, the reception of **First Eucharist and Reconciliation** (generally received in 2nd grade) would require that the child have attended Religious Education classes for 1st and 2nd grades. Parents of Students in Grades 1 & 2 are required to attend scheduled parent meetings and participate in scheduled family activities. Parents of students in the Grade 1 & 2 Sacramental Programs will receive a calendar of required dates at the beginning of the year.

Likewise, the reception of **Confirmation** (generally received in 10th grade) would require that the student have attended Religious Education classes for 9th and 10th grades. Since religious formation is a progression of faith, all course work between grades 3 and 8 must also be completed prior to registering for the First Year of Confirmation Preparation (9th grade).

It should be noted that Home Study in not an option for our sacramental preparation years.

SPECIAL NEEDS

We at St. Francis de Sales Parish are dedicated to address the needs of each of our students and their families. Special-needs students will be mainstreamed when possible. However, please understand that since we are a private, volunteer-based program, there are no medical personnel on site. This being the case, we cannot assume responsibility to administer medication or medical treatment to any student. Should a medical emergency arise, our first line of response is to call 911 and then reach out to the parent or designated guardian. Arrangements will be made to the best of our ability for any child who cannot be placed in a classroom situation.

ATTENDANCE

In order to maintain the continuity of classes, good attendance is expected on all levels of the Religious Education classes. Attendance records are maintained on a weekly basis. When your child **IS ABSENT for any reason**- work that will be covered in class **MUST be completed at home**. *Grades 1 through 8 have a calendar for the chapter to be covered each week. When we need to close due to weather- parents will assist the child in completing that chapter at home. Textbook pages should be completed and the end of chapter review must be completed in the book.*

No more than 3 absences are permitted- without a note from a doctor indicating that your child could not be in attendance due to illness.

TARDINESS

Any student who arrives after the scheduled start of class time is considered late. Once the traffic circle in front of the building has been closed to cars, parents/drivers will be required to park in the parking lot and accompany the child to the building where they will sign the child in with the Office Coordinator. **DO NOT DROP YOUR CHILD AT THE FRONT DOOR IF THE TRAFFIC CIRCLE IS BLOCKED OFF WITH THE ORANGE CONES.**

EMERGENCY CLASS CANCELLATION

In the event of inclement weather, cancellations of Religious Education classes will be announced on our telephone banner announcement. You may also check the parish's website at www.stfrancisvernon.org and on our Parish Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/stfrancisvernon>. **It is not the teachers' responsibility to inform you of such cancellations.**

Grades 1 through 8 have a calendar for the chapter to be covered each week. When we need to close due to weather- parents will assist the child in completing that chapter at home.

BEHAVIOR

Disruptive behavior in the classroom will not be tolerated. If a disciplinary problem arises in the classroom, the teacher will address the situation. If necessary, you will be called to come and pick up your child. Parents that are called more than twice may need to make alternate arrangements for Religious Education. In addition, if at any time it is felt a child is a danger to him/herself or to others, they will be removed from the in-school program immediately. It is felt that by the time a student reaches the Confirmation program, that acceptable behavior is the norm. It is assumed Christian maturity would dictate proper behavior. However, if this is not the case, the student will be sent home immediately and an automatic absence will occur. Since only three absences are permitted each year, this could affect the date of Confirmation showing us that he/she is not ready to make this commitment at this time.

DIOCESAN BEHAVIOR CODES

The following behavior code for the children and young people in our Religious Education Program has been issued by the Diocese of Paterson to maintain and support a safe environment for everyone: Our program is in compliance with the stipulations and guidelines set forth by Protecting God's Children and the Diocese of Paterson.

1. Use of the internet, computer, and video materials must fall strictly within the guidelines of the parish or Religious Education program.
2. Hand-held electronic devices including but not limited to cell phones, iPods, should not be in use during any part of the parish or Religious Education program.
3. There will be zero tolerance for disrespect, violent or abusive behavior of any type. Bullying in particular will not be tolerated.
4. There will be zero tolerance of harassment of any kind, including, but not limited to, verbal harassment, gender bias, threats, sexual harassment, or foul language.
5. There will be zero tolerance for substance abuse of any kind, including, but not limited to, drugs, inhalants, alcohol, and tobacco.

SUNDAY MASS ATTENDANCE

Mass is not an option. Families in the Religious Education Program are expected to attend weekly Mass. This is the BEST way to grow in your faith, and it helps you and your children to fully experience the beauty of our faith that is offered through the Liturgy and through reception of the Eucharist. Children are given Mass cards which they should fill out and hand to the priest at the end of Mass as they leave. Please attend with your family.

Schedule of Masses: Saturday evening at 5:00pm. Sunday AM 8:00am 10:00am 12:00 Noon.

TUITION CREDIT FOR ENVELOPE USE

Attending Mass on a weekly basis and using your parish envelopes will give you a credit of \$20.00 per child on next year's Religious Education tuition.

ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL Tuesday and Saturday

Arrival

Tuesday classes are from 4:30 PM – 5:45 PM
Saturday classes are from 9:00 AM -10:15 AM

We make every effort to begin our Religious Education classes on time. **Please assist us by having your child here 5 minutes before the scheduled class time but not more than 10 minutes early.** We appreciate your cooperation in this matter. **On the first day of class only, parents are permitted to walk their child to the classroom.** Subsequently, parents may drop their children at the main entrance on the upper level of the Family Life Center. There will be volunteers ready to direct and assist the children to their classrooms. All of our volunteers are easily recognizable by their name badges.

Please make sure that your child exits the car on the sidewalk side; not into the traffic circle. Also, we ask that parents remind their child to use the restrooms when they arrive in the building to reduce the number of trips during class time.

Parking

The lower level parking lot is designated for the Religious Education staff ONLY! Parents are requested to park in the main upper lot in designated parking spaces. **Please do not create a safety hazard by double parking or parking on the driveway.**

Please follow the one way arrow for the proper traffic flow. This is done for the safety of your children.

Dismissal

All students are dismissed on the circle outside of the main entrance to the Family Life Center at 5:45pm on Tuesday and on 10:15am on Saturday. (Each grade level is clearly marked on the circle with a sign that identifies the grade.

The Safe dismissal of your children is of great concern to us. Parents are responsible for advising who picks up the child(ren) on a regular basis, and for notifying us in writing if there is any party that is specifically NOT ALLOWED to pick up your child(ren). If someone other than the regular pick-up person will be picking up your child on any given day, you must send a written note to your child's teacher on that day. **If an emergency arises at the last minute, and you were unable to send a note, the person that you contact to pick up your child will need to report to the Religious Education Office and Sign Out your child. Please call the office in advance to let us know to anticipate this arrangement.**

Early Dismissal

Since weekly complete attendance is our goal for each student, no student may be released early for any sport, dance or other recreational activity. If a situation arises that requires your child to be released early, a note must be given to his/her teacher at the beginning of class containing the following information:

- The name of the child;
- The teacher's name.
- The reason the child requires early dismissal;
- The time the child will be picked up;
- The name of the adult authorized to pick up the child;

To pick your child up early, go to the doors of the Parish Family Life Center and wait for the door to be opened for you. Go to room Religious Ed. Volunteer Office and speak to the office coordinator to sign your child out. Your child will be escorted to you by a volunteer staff member. In order to minimize the disruption of class time, we ask that children only be picked up early when absolutely necessary.

Arrival and Dismissal Sunday Evenings

Students are expected to arrive by 4:50 PM on the Family Life Side for their 5:00 PM class. Students will be dismissed to the parking lot at 6:30 PM.



SACRAMENTAL GUIDELINES

Diocesan guidelines for each of the sacraments are available in the Religious Education office. Baptismal certificates must be on file in our office prior to the reception of any sacrament and should be included in any new registrations. A parent meeting prior to the beginning of the preparation of any sacrament is required to show commitment and to answer any questions concerning the theology or celebration of the sacrament. It is expected that the children will be at Mass on a weekly basis especially during this time of sacramental preparation.

RECONCILIATION AND FIRST COMMUNION

1. Weekly classes take place in a classroom setting.
2. Children must have attended Religious Education classes for two consecutive years.
3. A copy of the baptismal certificate must be provided unless baptized at St. Francis de Sales.
4. Reception of Reconciliation typically takes place in December and First Communion is scheduled in May. Both sacraments are received in 2nd grade.
5. Materials are covered in the classroom and reinforced at home to ensure that all students are adequately prepared for their interview session.
6. There is a meeting for First Grade parents to explain the two-year cycle of our First Communion Program, as mandated by the Diocese of Paterson.
7. Second Grade Parents will attend informative and educational meetings to help them work with their children on their journey to the reception of Reconciliation and Communion.
8. **Second grade students must attend Jesus Day, a Saturday retreat in the spring as well as attend both scheduled rehearsals for First Communion Day.**

Any Questions or concerns about the Religious Education Program for Grades 1-8 may be directed to Mrs. Petrina Garrity. You may call Petrina at 973-827-3248 ext. 327 or e-mail: petrina@stfrancisvernon.org

CONFIRMATION

1. Class and Meeting Attendance:

As mandated by the Diocese of Paterson, our Confirmation Program takes place over a two-year cycle. Instruction takes place in a large group setting on Sunday evenings over two semesters. Attendance is monitored carefully and carries the same limit on absences. No more than 3 absences (excused or unexcused) are permitted. More than this may result in a postponement of the sacrament. Please contact the Religious Education Office when you are absent (973) 827-3248 extension 327 and leave a message for Mrs. Petrina Garrity. Please note that if the behavior of a first or second year Confirmation student is not respectful, the student will be asked to leave the session and it will result in an automatic absence.

2. Mass Attendance:

For first and second year Confirmation students, **Mass is not an option**. Attendance at Mass is tracked through the students' use of weekly envelopes. A box of envelopes is distributed to each student at the Parent/Student Meeting in September of their first year. It is the responsibility of each student to bring an envelope with them to Mass and place in the collection basket. It should be noted that the purpose of the envelopes is for tracking attendance at Mass in a way that is the least intrusive. Financial contributions are entirely optional, but encouraged. Part of living the stewardship way of life is sharing our time, talent and treasure. Always encourage your children to be cheerful givers. Attendance at Mass is addressed at the Confirmation interviews conducted during the second year of Confirmation preparation.

3. Retreats:

Two retreats are required for the reception of Confirmation at St. Francis de Sales.

Options are:

- Attend 1st year "Evening of Reflection" in the first year; if you miss this retreat in your first year you will need to attend it in your second year. 20/21 grades 7th, 8th, & 9th will attend this retreat. 8th & 9th will have an additional full day retreat
- One Antioch weekend during the second year of Confirmation preparation 20/21 only 10th grade will attend this retreat.

To receive credit, the student must attend each retreat in its entirety.

4. Christian Service:

“For I have set you an example that you also should do as I have done to you”
John 13:15. Jesus spoke these words to his disciples after he washed their feet at the Last Supper, a visible sign of service to others that is at the heart of being a follower of Jesus. Stewardship, which is what we are called to, is a very important part of who we are as Christians. It is this reason that our criteria for readiness to receive the sacrament of Confirmation include a service component. If, in Confirmation, we are asking our young people to commit to being followers of Jesus, then they also need to commit to service. Our purpose and our responsibility is to make sure that our candidates realize that the sacrament of Confirmation incorporates them more firmly in Christ, strengthens their bond with the church, helps them to bear witness to the Christian faith in words and deeds and associates them more closely with Jesus’ mission of service. We want them to realize that this is the beginning of a lifetime lived in the generosity of a gracious God - not a graduation or completion in any way.

Confirmation, with the gifts the Holy Spirit brings, will ask students to become more active participants in today’s living church through love and service. **Candidates will be expected to complete forty (40) hours of Christian service during the two year preparation period.** It is yet another step of affirming their commitment to their faith and the continuation of a life committed to Christian service.

5. Interviews:

The Confirmation program includes two interviews with each candidate and a staff member. Both interviews are conducted during the second year of preparation. It is the student’s responsibility to listen for announcements for the opportunity to sign up for their interviews. Interviews are scheduled in 15 minute increments and are held on weeknights between the hours of 5:00 – 7:15 PM.

- The first interview is scheduled in the fall of the 2nd year of preparation, where goals and service are assessed and Christian maturity evaluated. Also at this time, attendance at weekend liturgy and Confirmation Prep. Class is reviewed and the candidate has an opportunity to discuss/clarify other paperwork requirements. *This interview is with the Candidate and the Parent.*
- A second interview takes place in the winter of the 2nd year of preparation. At this time, the candidate must be ready to demonstrate that all requirements for Christian service projects and sponsorship paperwork are met. In addition, the candidate must be able to articulate his/her faith during this knowledge-based interview. Interview questions are based on the content of the Confirmation Preparation Process Handbook given to the students at the parent meeting in September of their first year of preparation, it is also available online. *This interview is with only the candidate.*

6. Parent Meetings:

At least one parent is required to attend the parent meeting (with their candidate) at the start of the program year in September. In addition, at least one parent is required to attend any scheduled Faith Sharing Sessions that may be scheduled during the year.

As the primary teachers of the faith to your children, we ask the high school parents to participate in their child's faith journey by being available to them should questions arise about what they have learned. As a committed Catholic Christian yourself, we hope your assistance with the preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation will provide opportunities for faith exploration and service between you and your young adult. It is a given that you will take your child to Mass each week.

Any questions about the Confirmation Program can be directed to Petrina Garrity, high school coordinator, at petrina@stfrancisvernon.org or call 973-827-3248 ext. 327.

EMERGENCY CLOSING

In the event of inclement weather, cancellations of Religious Education classes will be announced on our telephone banner announcement. You may also check the parish's website at www.stfrancisvernon.org; or see our Facebook page. It is not the teachers' responsibility to inform you of such cancellations.

RIGHT TO AMEND

If for any reason we feel these guidelines need to be amended, we will do so in writing promptly to all parents/guardians.

The policies of this handbook were enacted September 1, 2020.