



**PARISH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM
PARENT HANDBOOK
Revised July 2020**



July 2020

Dear Parents,

Welcome (back) to PREP! Whether this is your first year of religious education or your eighth, we hope this *Parent Handbook* will facilitate communication of the policies and practices of the St. Mary of the Lakes Catholic Church Parish Religious Education Program (PREP) and answer any questions you may have. PREP recognizes that you, the **parents**, are the first and foremost educators of your child(ren). The following quotation, taken from the *General Directory of Catechesis*, defines your role in your child's faith development, as well as the partnership that is the foundation of our program:

The witness of Christian life given by parents in the family comes to children with tenderness and respect. Thus, children...live in the closeness of God and Jesus made manifest by the parents in such a way that this first Christian experience...lasts throughout life. This childhood religious awakening which takes place in the family is irreplaceable.... And this is made even more powerful when parents connect it to the methodical catechesis their children receive in the parish program. (226)

At St. Mary of the Lakes, we strive to create a positive atmosphere that allows for the ongoing faith formation of all students. Sharing our faith is a privilege and a joy for us. Our curriculum uses the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as its foundation, source, and inspiration. Liturgy, scripture, and lived experiences are the three sources through which our children are invited to encounter God with a deeper awareness of the meaning of God's unique love for each child. Hopefully, your child will come to know and love God and then grow in the knowledge of how he/she can serve God by serving others.

Catholic morality and values are essential components of our program. Students are taught that they are images of God and that the qualities of truth, love, respect, peace, and justice should be our standards. **We also stress that attendance at the weekly Sunday Liturgy is by far the most important way that you as parents can form your child in the Catholic faith.** Weekly attendance at PREP classes and weekly participation in the Liturgy are both necessary to enable them to flourish in their faith.

May this year be one in which we work together to lead the children of our Parish to a greater knowledge and love of God!

Sincerely in Christ,
MaryPat Scordato
Director of Religious Education



PARISH and PROGRAM OVERVIEW

St. Mary of the Lakes Parish

40 Jackson Road, Medford, NJ 08055
(609) 654-8208

Pastor

Fr. Daniel Swift

Associate Pastor

Fr. Roy Ballacillo

Parish Religious Education Program

196 Route 70, Medford, NJ 08055
609-654-2546 x 310
smlprep@smlparish.org

Director of Religious Education

Mrs. MaryPat Scordato

PREP Staff

Mrs. Gerrie Buzash
Ms. Amanda Carpenter

Office Hours

Monday - Wednesday: 9:30AM – 6:00 PM
Thursday: 9:30 AM – 8:30 PM
Friday: Closed

PREP In-Person Schedule

Grades 1 through 6

Tuesdays and Wednesdays
4:15 PM - 5:30 PM

Grades 7 and 8

Thursdays
7:00 PM - 8:30 PM



GENERAL POLICIES

A. Registration and Re-registration

Registration for September classes begins in June; early registration is recommended if a special day of the week is required.

All information must be updated when re-registrations are completed. The registration fees and sacramental expenditures (for First Eucharist and Confirmation) are due at the time of registration.

Baptismal certificates are required for all new registrants. Any student who is transferring from another Religious Education Program must present a letter of transfer showing attendance and the dates of sacraments received.

Children are expected to attend religious education classes for eight years. Home study is permitted for two years in Grades 3, 4, 5, or 6 (Grades 1 and 2 and 7 and 8 are Sacramental preparation years; therefore, home schooling is not permissible). During the pandemic of 2020-2021, virtual classes are allowed for all grades.

B. Attendance and Preparedness

Regular attendance at PREP classes is an important factor in deepening a child's understanding of faith through the study of Scripture, Church teaching, prayer experiences, and community. A calendar for the year is found on the Parish Website at smlparish.org/prep. We also ask that you check your email frequently for any changes to this calendar.

When a child is going to be absent, the PREP Office must be contacted at least one hour before class. Parents should email the Catechist to inquire about missed work. If the child has a contagious illness, please advise the PREP office immediately! A child who has **three unexcused absences** may jeopardize the completion of the year's course of study. A parent conference will be requested to discuss appropriate solutions.

Attendance at the weekly Sunday Liturgy is the most important way that you as parents can form your child in the Catholic faith. Weekly attendance at PREP classes and weekly participation in the Liturgy are both necessary to enable children to flourish in their faith. As a reminder, all families registered in PREP should be registered in SML Parish. Envelopes must be used as proof of attendance at weekly Mass.



C. Arrival and Dismissal

Changes must be made to current drop-off and pick-up procedures as a direct result of the Coronavirus. Once these changes are finalized, they will be distributed to PREP parents and incorporated herein.

Students are not permitted to enter a classroom before the Catechist is present. No student may leave the premises during PREP classes without proper authorization. If it is necessary for parents or guardians to pick up early, the parent/guardian must sign out the child at the PREP Office; the parent will receive a dismissal slip from the Office to present to the Catechist. The Medford Police Department requires that we know who is in the building at all times.

If the parent is late, the student will be waiting safely in the PREP Office. Staff is not allowed to drive children home.

Students are not to open outside doors for anyone. Doors are locked 10 minutes after classes begin and are unlocked 10 minutes before the end of class. In the interest of safety, only doors that are manned by a volunteer will be open for parents and students to enter the building. If we do not have volunteers to serve as monitors, only the PREP entrance (on the Route 70 side) will be used.

Parking is not permitted in the Fire Lane along the curb, by order of the Medford Township Police Department.

D. Weather Emergency

If local schools are closed due to an emergency weather situation, PREP classes will be cancelled. If you have any questions about cancellations, please check the Parish Website (smlparish.org). Also, if the decision to cancel is made during the day, local schools will be notified and asked to announce PREP cancellation.

E. Field Trips and Playground Use

No student may leave the school campus, with or without an adult, without written permission from the DRE. A Permission Slip approved by the DRE and signed by the parent/guardian must be given to the Catechist before any student is permitted to attend any activity that takes place off the premises.

PREP students may not use the playground equipment at any time.

F. NO Food in the Classrooms

Food is never allowed to be consumed during PREP. Many of our students have allergies and keep EPI Pens in the PREP Office. Also, several children who attend school here during the day have severe allergies, so certain rooms have been declared as "clean rooms." Consequently, food is never to be brought to or eaten during PREP classes. Gum is not allowed in the school.



G. Appearance

Students are expected to dress appropriately; specifically:

Clothing should be mid-thigh or longer in length.

Clothing that is revealing is not permitted.

Clothing imprinted with questionable vocabulary, inappropriate images, or double-meaning slogans will not be allowed. The DRE will decide what is appropriate.

Cleats, belly shirts, tank tops, and muscle shirts may not be worn to class.

Hats and sunglasses may not be worn in the building.

H. Behavioral Expectations

Students are to behave in a manner that fosters Christian values at all times, demonstrating respect for and working cooperatively with adults and other students. Furthermore, students should actively participate in classroom activities and discussions. They are to attend class regularly; complete any assignments or homework; bring textbooks to class; and treat those textbooks respectfully and not deface them. (A fee of \$30 will be charged for a replacement book.)

**POSSESSION OF TOBACCO, ALCOHOL, OR DRUGS IS PROHIBITED.
WEAPONS (REAL OR PRETEND) ARE FORBIDDEN ON THE SCHOOL PREMISES.
BULLYING IN ANY FORM WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.**

Our primary purpose is to serve the religious education needs of our children. Consequently, all students are expected to participate respectfully and actively in the faith learning experiences of PREP. If a child's behavior disrupts the learning process, the following steps will be taken:

- At the first incident, the child will be reminded of expected behavior and the consequences of misbehavior.
- After the second incident, the child will be sent to the PREP Office.
- If inappropriate behavior continues, the student will be sent to the DRE and a parent will be contacted for a conference.
- If the disruptive behavior continues, alternate solutions will be discussed with the Pastor.

In addition to protecting the feelings and rights of others, we must also respect school property. While the school does belong to the Parish, the contents of each classroom desk belong to a child enrolled in SML School. If a PREP student takes or vandalizes someone's belongings, he or she must take responsibility for the damage done. If the damage is significant, parents will be asked to replace what has been taken or vandalized.

At no time should anyone sit at or remove anything from a teacher's desk. The white boards mounted in each classroom may only be used under the guidance of a Catechist and only for classwork.

I. Cell Phones

Cell phones are to remain out of sight. If a student is texting or using his/her personal phone for any reason, the phone will be confiscated, and a parent will have to retrieve it from the DRE. This is nonnegotiable.



J. Noise in the Halls

Always knock before entering a classroom. Because of COVID restrictions, only authorized staff, students, and volunteers are allowed in the building. All are encouraged to maintain respectful silence in the common areas of the school.

K. Communication

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, please share them with your child's Catechist or call the PREP office. We welcome and encourage communication between the Catechist, parents, DRE, and Pastor.

L. Safety Procedures

The safety and well-being of the children you have entrusted to us is of primary importance. We follow the same guidelines mandated for public and private schools in New Jersey. We will practice procedures throughout the year for fire, bomb scare, lock down, and shelter in place. Students are instructed not to use their cell phones during drills or actual incidents. We need to control the situation and the response as much as we can. We also ask parents not to call their children directly or the PREP Office during a drill or actual event. Information will be conveyed via the website or email when we are able.

We are also responsible for the physical and emotional well-being of each individual child, as outlined by the Trenton Diocese Department of Child and Youth Protection. To provide a safe environment for the children and youth in religious education programs, we are mandated to implement the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. This involves criminal background screenings (fingerprinting) and training certification programs that advance the safety of our children (VIRTUS and RCL Family Life).

Refer to Arrival and Dismissal section of this handbook for the proper procedures.



SACRAMENT PREPARATION

FIRST RECONCILIATION and FIRST EUCHARIST

Preparation for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist begins in first grade and culminates with the reception of the Sacraments in second grade. Children are required to attend first-grade Religious Education classes before enrolling in second grade.

The First Reconciliation program requires parent participation, including a parent meeting in second grade. At this meeting, parents are given a book on the Sacrament of Reconciliation to assist them in preparing the child for the Sacrament. First Reconciliation is celebrated at the Church in winter.

The First Eucharist program requires parent participation, including a parent meeting in second grade. At this meeting, parents are given a book on the Sacrament of the Eucharist to assist them in preparing the child for the Sacrament. A retreat day is offered to the second graders in the spring. First Eucharist is celebrated after Easter.

Older children who have been baptized, but who have not received First Reconciliation and First Eucharist, work with the DRE to prepare them for the Sacraments.

CONFIRMATION

The Confirmation Preparation Program is a three-year program that begins in sixth grade. The sixth graders attend a Mass of Initiation early in the school year during which time they pledge to take their sacramental preparation seriously. Their service commitment begins this year.

During seventh grade, students are introduced to a more in-depth study of the Sacrament. Additionally, each student is obligated to perform service, select a Confirmation name, and choose a sponsor.

The eighth-grade curriculum continues with the study of the Sacrament. The students must complete a Confirmation Project, conclude their service requirements, and participate in a retreat. The Celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation takes place in the spring of eighth grade before Holy Week.

In Grades 6, 7, and 8, students will receive a "Truths of the Faith," test that they are to study for and master as proof of readiness for Confirmation.



CURRICULUM

For Grades 1 through 6, SML PREP uses Sadlier’s newest catechetical series, *Christ In Us (CIU)*, which employs a blended learning system. “Blended learning” is a style of education in which students learn via electronic and online media as well as traditional face-to-face teaching. *CIU* is intended to simultaneously support and inspire all participants (students, catechists, and parents) by linking religious education formation to the parish community.

Lessons in each grade level are developed in a spiraled curriculum format. What this means is that *CIU* gradually introduces a general witness of the Catholic faith as something to be believed, celebrated, and lived, keeping in step with the student’s intellectual and experiential development. Each year builds upon the lessons learned in the previous year. This approach is inspired by the “divine pedagogy” outlined in the *General Directory for Catechesis* (no. 139). It is also inspired by Pope Francis’ call for a Church that accompanies others (Joy of the Gospel, nos. 169, 172). It is intended to develop a life-long commitment to discipleship and a missionary spirit.

In seventh grade and eighth grades, students use the Ascension Press series, *Chosen: Your Journey Toward Confirmation*. Beginning with the Creation story through salvation history, students are shown how the sacraments, prayer, and discipleship are the keys to a happy life. The goal of this 24-lesson blended learning program is to prepare young men and women for a life of discipleship. The program incorporates videos, student workbooks, and classroom experience.

In addition, **Father Dan** teaches in all eight grades as his schedule allows.

FAMILY LIFE SUPPLEMENTAL SERIES

RCL Benziger Family Life integrates child safety education into a holistic approach to family life education. In every lesson of every grade level, children are provided with opportunities to develop the knowledge, self-confidence, and assertiveness skills that they will need to recognize dangerous situations, avoid them if possible, and respond appropriately in time of need. Also, the program is designed to help reduce guilt feelings among children, encourage them to speak frequently and freely with their parents and other trusted adults, express their feelings appropriately, and to practice forgiving themselves and others through the following concept repetition and reinforcement:

- Basic safety rules in an age-appropriate manner.
- The difference between appropriate and inappropriate touching.
- To say “no” to any touch or action that causes them to feel uncomfortable.
- How to respond to situations that cause them fear or discomfort.
- The importance of honest communication with parents or guardians and of identifying people they can trust in times when they need to talk to someone besides their parents.



PREP VOLUNTEERS

All St. Mary of the Lakes Catechists, aides, monitors, and substitutes are volunteers. Each year approximately 100 faith-filled individuals of all ages and professions offer their time and talent so that our children learn what it means to be Catholic.

In order to be a volunteer in PREP, an individual must complete an Application and Code of Conduct, which is kept on file in the PREP Office.

For every volunteer over the age of 18, the Diocese of Trenton requires a criminal background check. Even if the candidate has been fingerprinted previously for a job or other volunteer activity, he/she must be (re)fingerprinted with the correct documentation from the Diocese. If the candidate passes the background check, he/she will be issued a badge from the Diocese; this badge is to be worn at all times when in the building.

Furthermore, every volunteer over the age of 18 must also attend a VIRTUS training session, which addresses appropriate and inappropriate behavior toward children. The Diocese also recommends that every Catechist be "certified." This process comprises two components: Methodology (live classes) and Theology (on-line sessions).

The strength of our program is dependent upon dedicated volunteers. We invite all parents to give serious consideration to participating in this important ministry. Registration fees are waived for all Catechists.