

2021-2022

Religious Education Handbook

*Saint Matthew
Parish*

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**Saint Matthew Parish
Religious Education Handbook**

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Saint Matthew Parish Mission Statement

We, the members of St. Matthew Parish, believe that we are the people of God, committed to establishing the Kingdom of God in the south section of Southborough. Our mission is to center our shared lives on Christ, knowing that we are called brothers and sisters serving each other's needs in humility and love.

We are dedicated to becoming a strong faith community, united to our Bishop, and serving the needs of our immediate civic community, our diocese, our nation and our world. In this way, our parish will become a family united in the love of Christ to all the peoples of the universe.

We are a Catholic parish, anxious to share our faith, our doctrine and our spirit of community with all persons. We extend a warm invitation to all to join our Catholic Community.

Through prayer and our witness to our faith in Christ, we hope to grow in union with Him.

We, the people of St. Matthew, are Church, committed to one another in love and witnessing by our works and example that Jesus is the Lord and center of our lives.

Directory of Personnel

Pastor	Rev. James B. Flynn	jflynn@stmatthewsb.org (508)485-2285
Director of Religious Education	Mrs. Amy Comcowich	acomcowich@stmatthewsb.org (508)229-2429
Assistant Director Religious Education	Mrs. Elizabeth Siber	lsiber@stmatthewsb.org (508)229-2429

Dear Friends in the Lord,

Welcome to the St. Matthew Parish community. I am very happy that you have chosen to be a part of our faith community. We, the people of St. Matthew's, have a vision of what we want our parish to be. We hope this parish will be part of your extended family. Being part of a family is a wonderful privilege, but it is also a tremendous responsibility: a privilege because we can grow, love and share our lives together in the joy of being God's people; a responsibility because this is our parish, and all of us are called to be involved in the life of this parish.

I believe that our parish is a very special gathering of God's people, called to love and serve one another and to reach out to poor and needy everywhere. We extend our hands and hearts to all who wish to belong to this parish: the young and the old, the married and the single, the divorced and the separated; the lonely and the alienated, the poor and the needy, the rich and the mighty, and the lost and forgotten. Our invitation goes forth to all who will commit themselves to love one another as Jesus has loved them. It is my heartfelt desire that each of you finds a home at St. Matthew's. The parish staff and I are here to serve you and to help lead you to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ, but we also call you to serve God's people.

Once again, I would like to welcome you in the name of the people of St. Matthew Parish. May God's spirit anoint you with peace, love and joy.

Let us love one another.

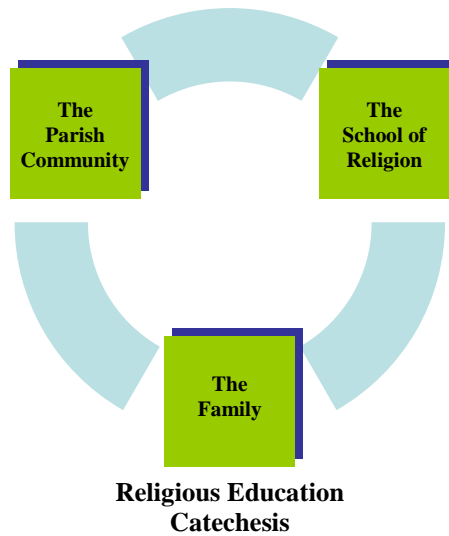
Father Flynn

Dear Parishioners,

Welcome to the Saint Matthew Parish Religious Education Program.

If you are new to the parish, or if your child is just starting out in our religious education program, welcome! I am hopeful that this handbook will serve as an introduction to our philosophy of religious education. If you have already been part of our program, it should serve as a reminder of how the Saint Matthew parish program works.

At Saint Matthew Parish, we believe that there are three groups that must work together and complement one another in order to provide a complete and balanced faith education for our children. These three groups are The Family, The Parish School of Religion, and The Parish Community. Each plays a major role in the learning process of our children. When one of the three groups is active, the other two are complementary and supportive.



The roles of the parish community, the school of religion and the family are presented in more detail in the following pages. If you have any questions or concerns about your child's faith development, or our programs at St. Matthew's, please be in touch. I look forward to supporting you and your children on their journey of faith.

God Bless,

Mrs. Amy Comcowich
Director of Religious Education
(508)229-2429

Religious Education Catechesis - **The Family**

St. Matthew Parish strongly supports the belief that parents are the primary educators of their children. As adults, we must live out our Catholic values for ourselves, but, at the same time, we must also model them for our children. The family is the domestic church - a safe, supportive and faith-filled environment for children to grow and learn.

The success of our Parish School of Religion depends on the support of each family. When the family understands, reinforces and lives out the lessons which are taught to its children, it forms a foundation for living that goes far beyond the classroom experience.

The family plays an important part in the children's education by determining if the children are ready for sacramental preparation. At our parish, we support the belief that the reception of all sacraments should be based on readiness rather than on age or grade level. We depend on the family to work with us and advise us as to the readiness of their children to prepare for sacraments.

With your family as the domestic church, consider these suggested activities for spiritual growth:

- Teaching and saying morning and evening prayers
- Saying prayers before meals
- Attending Mass together as a family
- Keeping Sunday as a family day
- Subscribing to a Catholic reading material
- Attending a family retreat
- Working on a service project as a family
- Being responsible to the religious education requirements
- Discussing the week's readings and homily

Religious Education Catechesis - **The School of Religion**

The Parish School of Religion provides the academic aspect of the religious education program for all students in grades 1-12. The majority of children fall into one of two groups: grades 1-8 and grades 9-12. The Religious Education Calendars reflect these grades and include information of dates and events for each grade. These calendars can be found on our website: www.stmatthewsb.org/religious-ed.

We believe our programs allow enough flexibility for families to participate in various activities and meet religious education requirements. Regular attendance at religious education is expected of those who enroll, and we strongly encourage families to make Mass attendance a part of their routine to further support the faith development of our children. We ask that parents carefully review the program calendars referenced above and invite you to contact our office with question at (508)229-2429.

Religious Education Program offerings include:

- Little Church School – Preschool through kindergarten
- Religious Education – Grades 1-8
- High School Religious Education – Grades 9-12
- Sacrament Preparation for children – please see the Parish Community section of this handbook for more information.
- Grade 5 Human Sexuality Program
- Stations of the Cross for Children – on Good Friday; all children are welcome
- Liturgy of the Word for Children – Ages 5-12

These programs are described in more detail on the next two pages. Children in grades 1-12 are asked to adhere to the St. Matthew Code of Conduct; a copy can be found on the last page of this handbook.

Only registered families with St. Matthew Parish can enroll children in our programs. To register your family, contact the Parish Office at (508)485-2285.

St. Matthew Parish reserves the right to amend, change or make exceptions to the policies of our religious education programs.

Religious Education Programs

Little Church School

Children ages 4-6, including those in pre-k and kindergarten programs, will meet in the Parish Center Hall once a month, October through May. Registration for this program begins in September and is open throughout the religious education year. This is a program geared to the liturgical calendar and/or the seasons of the year. There is normally a gathering activity, music, prayer, stories, and crafts appropriate to the theme. Parent information is often sent home with the children.

Parents must escort their children inside to the Parish Center Hall and pick them up there at dismissal time.

Grades 1-8

Classes for students in grades 1-8 are held monthly, September through June. Typically, each class meets for two hours with a ten minute break. Parents are encouraged to send a peanut-free snack and drink with their children. During the Covid Pandemic, class times are condensed to one hour and there is no snack break.

Grades 1-3: attend either Sundays mornings or Wednesdays after school.

Grades 4-6: attend Mondays or Tuesdays after school.

Grades 7-8: attend Mondays or Tuesdays in the evening.

Typically, each class session begins with Opening Prayer in the Parish Center Hall. Parents of younger children are encouraged to walk their children downstairs to the Hall for drop off. Following Opening Prayer, children are lead by their teachers to their classrooms. During the Covid pandemic, children report directly to their classrooms where opening prayer takes place with only children in their class.

At dismissal time, parents pick up their children at the classrooms. A list of students and classroom assignments is posted in the Parish Center lobby for reference.

Please notify the Religious Education Office in advance if anyone other than a parent is to pick up a child.

Registration for this program takes place during the end of August and the first week of September. Registrations are processed in order of receipt.

Religious Education Programs

Grades 9-12

High School students are encouraged to attend religious education through their senior year, regardless of whether or not they have received the sacrament of Confirmation. In other words, the sacrament of Confirmation does not equal graduation from religious education.

Freshmen, sophomores and juniors meet on Sundays, three times per semester. Families can choose a morning or afternoon session for each semester. Seniors are offered a separate class, *Christian Morality and the College Experience*. This class meets six times throughout the religious education year after the 6:00 Mass.

Please see the HS Religious Ed Calendar on the website for specific dates of classes during the religious education year: www.stmatthewsb.org/religious-ed.

Registration occurs during the last week of August and the first week of September. Registrations are processed in order of receipt.

Grade 5 Human Sexuality Program

This program is offered in late winter or early spring to all parish children in grade 5. The curriculum teaches human development and sexuality from a faith-based perspective. For children to participate, parents must preview the program materials and complete a registration form.

Stations of the Cross for Children and Families

This program is offered on Good Friday at the Church from 12:45-1:30pm. No registration is required.

Liturgy of the Word with Children

This program is offered to children ages 5-12 during the 10:00 Mass on Sundays. No registration is required.

Religious Education Catechesis - **The Parish Community**

The third setting in which religious education takes place is the Parish Community. Like the family, the Parish Community exerts its influence on the religious education program outside of the classroom. The viability of parish life is a major factor in understanding what Church is, why we celebrate together, why we are called to ministry, and how we can live out the Gospel message. The Parish Community should model the basic truths of the Catholic Christian faith to each other in order for the effectiveness of the lessons learned in the classroom to take root.

The life-giving Parish Community calls its members to the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, as well as to the healing sacrament of Reconciliation. Specific programs in Christian Formation are offered to candidates whose desire and readiness cause them and/or their families to seek sacramental preparation. All sacraments are ungraded and begin with a period of discernment to determine the readiness of each candidate.

Sacrament Preparation

Students must pre-register to attend. Families should make every effort to attend all class dates, parent meetings, and retreats. A complete list of dates for sacrament preparation is found in the Religious Education Calendars on the website: www.stmatthewsb.org/religious-ed.

Reconciliation and First Communion: Children who have attended at least one year of Religious Education are invited to participate. Classes in the fall prepare students for Reconciliation. Classes in the winter and spring prepare students for First Communion. Attendance at parent meetings and family retreat days are also part of the commitment to receive the Sacraments. Please note all dates for classes, parent meetings and retreat days on the Religious Education Calendar for grades 1-8.

Confirmation: Candidates for Confirmation must be enrolled in a Catholic school or have had good overall religious education attendance in the parish setting, including at least one year of high school religious education. The preparation is open to those in grades 10-12. Candidates must attend an information meeting with a parent in September to determine if they are ready to prepare for the sacrament. The preparation process requires that candidates complete the following before preparation can begin:

- An interview with Father Flynn.
- A letter to Father Flynn stating the reasons why they believe they are ready to prepare for the Sacrament.
- A registration form with payment.
- A sponsor information sheet.

Attendance at the Confirmation Enrollment Mass, retreat and six preparation classes during the Winter/Spring semester is allowed only if the above have been completed. Confirmation preparation classes meet six times beginning in January and concluding before the actual celebration of the sacrament, which is determined by the Bishop. Class attendance is mandatory.

Registration for Religious Education

Religious Education is offered to all children of registered families of St. Matthew Parish. To register your family with the parish, contact the Parish Secretary at (508)485-2285. The Office of Religious Education notifies parish families about program registration via email and church bulletin announcements. Families are emailed program calendars and registration forms but printed copies are also available in the Parish Center. Registration Forms and calendars are also available on the St. Matthew website: www.stmatthewsb.org/religious-ed.

Families are strongly encouraged to return their completed registrations by the specified deadline of each program, but registrations will be accepted while space remains available. Children whose registrations are returned after the registration period may be asked to wait until the following class session to begin.

Once Programs Begin

Absences: Please call the Office of Religious Education at (508)229-2429 if your son or daughter will be absent. For grades 1-8, please also arrange to pick up your child's book to cover the missed chapters at home.

Class Cancellations: In the event of inclement weather, an email announcing the cancellation will be sent to the family email address on file. A cancellation message will also be recorded on our office answering system; simply call (508)229-2429. Classes may be rescheduled or the missed content may be covered during subsequent classes. Students are also welcome to complete missed chapters at home.

Parental Responsibility: The religious education office should be notified of changes in address or contact information, including email and telephone/cell phone numbers. Non-published numbers will be kept confidential. Please inform the Office of Religious Education if your child has severe allergies or requires classroom learning accommodations. If your child has a fever and flu-like symptoms, please do not send him or her to Religious Education class; you can pick up the book from the Religious Education office at a later date to complete missed work at home.

The Board of Religious Education

The Office of Religious Education relies on the guidance and assistance of members of the Board of Religious Education in setting goals and objectives for our religious education programs. The Board serves in an advisory capacity to the Director of Religious Education and generally meets at least twice during the religious education year. Those interested in helping our ministry by joining the Board of Religious Education should contact the Director of Religious Education at (508)229-2429.

Saint Matthew Church

Policy for the Protection of Children and Young People

The Gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us the sacredness of life and commands us to protect it at all stages and circumstances. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to each of these.” Mark 10: 14-16. In this way, Saint Matthew Church is committed to creating a safe environment for the children and young people of our parish community.

This policy applies to all of the parish staff, including paid employees, volunteers, and anyone else engaged in ministry or service at the church. It includes, but is not limited to, bishops, priests, deacons, employees, and ages fourteen and older who work or volunteer in any capacity within the Diocese of Worcester. In addition, this policy applies to all visiting clergy, who must present a letter indicating the successful completion of the Safe Environment requirements of The Diocese from which he came. Exceptions are provided only to clergy who come to attend a funeral at the parish.

Each person identified above must complete a Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI), these forms are sent directly to the Worcester Diocese’s Office of Healing and Prevention, where they are processed. Should any problems arise the Diocese will contact the pastor of the parish.

Each employee or volunteer recognized above is required to complete a Safe Environment Training Program. This program is facilitated by Kim Tynan, our Coordinator of Safe Environment and Protection of Children. It is available at St. Matthew’s multiple times throughout the year, as well as at outside locations. The names of participants are forwarded to the Diocese’s Office for Healing and Prevention upon successful completion.

Each employee or volunteer identified above must also read the Code of Ministerial Conduct and sign a Code of Conduct Acknowledgement Form. A list of these signatures will be forwarded to the Diocese Office of Healing and Prevention.

A master list of all persons who have completed the CORI, Safe Environment Training and Code of Ministerial Conduct, will be kept in a locked file cabinet under the supervision of the Parish Safe Environment Coordinator. Those who refuse to participate in the Safe Environment Training, or complete the required paperwork, will not be allowed to work or volunteer at any capacity with the children and young people of our parish. They will be allowed to attend church events and religious education programs with their own child/children, but will not be allowed to work or volunteer with other children or young people at these events on or off St. Matthew’s property.

One who does not wish to participate in the Safe Environment Training must sign a document confirming their refusal, which will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the Religious Education Office.

The Pastor of St. Matthew Church shall ensure that all visiting or non-permanent clergy are in good standing.

If a person of the Parish suspects that a child is being abused or neglected he/she must immediately report the allegation to the pastor of St. Matthew Church. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) will then be contacted at (508)234-1000. To make a report after 5:00pm or on a weekend or holiday, call the Child at Risk Hotline at 1-800-729-5200. Anonymous complaints are accepted.

If a child is in immediate danger the pastor or designee will contact the local police for assistance.

Any questions or concerns, please contact Judith Audette, L.I.C.S.W, Victim Assistance Coordinator, Office for Healing and Prevention. Diocese of Worcester, 49 Elm Street, Worcester, Massachusetts. The telephone number for all confidential calls is (508)929-4363.

It is mandated by the state of Massachusetts that all professionals or persons entrusted with the responsibility of a child's health and welfare must report abuse. According to state law, a 51B, or written report, must be filed within 48 hours of the initial telephone information. There are shield laws in Massachusetts that protect the reporter.

The Diocese of Worcester will provide support and spiritual outreach to the victims of abuse and their families. In addition, they provide information on victim treatment, support groups, and victim advocacy groups.

This policy has been written in attestation to St. Matthew Parish's commitment to the safety of all of its children and young people.

Rev. James B. Flynn

Saint Matthew Parish Coordinator of Safe Environment and Protection of Children is Kim Tynan. Please leave a message with the Religious Education Office, (508) 229-2429, if you wish to get in contact with her.

Saint Matthew Conduct Code

Our goal is to have all young people experience an enjoyable learning time during our sessions.

In an effort to attain this goal, an environment of safety and comfort needs to exist. We believe this is a part of the learning process. We want our young people and their parents to read the following and for the parents to make sure their young people understand what is expected of them.

1. All young people will respect their peers, the staff, and themselves.
2. All young people will respect the church property and other people's property.
3. All young people will follow the safety rules established by their teachers.
4. Profanity, fighting, hitting, threatening, or disruptive behavior of any kind will not be tolerated in the classroom, the church, the play area, or the snack area.
5. Smoking and/or the use or possession of drugs or alcohol is not permitted.
6. All young people are expected to be willing participants while engaged in our parish program.
7. Appropriate attire is requested.

If a young person violates one of these rules and denies others the full experience of the parish program, the following steps will be taken:

1. The young person will be given a "time-out" whether in the classroom area or an area designated by the director.
2. If there is a second incident, the young person will be given a warning by the Director of Religious Education and the parent/guardian will be notified.
3. If the behavior or attitude has not improved within the time agreed upon the parent/guardian will be asked to take the young person home.

Teachers and aides will adhere to the following:

1. Corporal punishment is prohibited.
2. There will be no severe punishment, humiliation or verbal abuse.
3. No one will be denied food (snack) as a form of punishment.
4. No one will be denied access to the bathroom.
5. No teacher or aide is ever alone with a child.

By enrolling in the Religious Education Program at St. Matthew Parish, the parent and child acknowledge the above Conduct Code. Please be in touch with the Director of Religious Education with any questions or concerns.