

PARENT HANDBOOK



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Dear Parents,

Congratulations! We are pleased that you have selected St. James School of Religion for your family's faith formation/education. This program helps your family to grow in faith, teaches the traditions and doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, supported by Church documents, including the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

The ultimate goal of the Religious Education Program for children and families is to advance the Kingdom of God. By promoting the true human dignity of each person as created in the image and likeness of God, we strive to lead all to a personal and living relationship with God.

Our most basic mission is inviting others to follow the Way of the Lord Jesus, and to form a community of disciples. Through the power, grace, and inspiration of the Holy Spirit we strive to lead all to a life of prayer and communion with God that expresses love in service to others who are in need.

Sunday Mass attendance is the most important part of our faith. As Catholic parents, you are expected to model your faith and bring your children to weekly Sunday (or Vigil) Mass. Worshipping together as a family is what makes us Catholic. It is our hope that families will take this responsibility very seriously. We have seen the transforming power of families together at Mass.

This handbook provides parents with the structure and policies of the Religious Education program for the children of St. James parish family as directed by the Diocese of Metuchen, the Pastor and the Parish Catechetical Leader.

Please sign the agreement contained in this handbook, stating that you have read the contents and agree to our policies. It will be kept on file in the parish religious education office.

Thank you for your support and cooperation.

Monsignor Sylvester Cronin
Pastor of St. James Church

Sister Marie Luu, SCC
Parish Catechetical Leader (PCL) of St. James

PARISH MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to be a Faith Community centered in the Eucharist, proclaiming Christ's message of love and service, and living as true Disciples of Christ.

GOALS OF THE PROGRAM

- To provide a solid instruction in Catholic doctrine and morality.
- To initiate children into the life of the church by instruction and experience in its sacramental activity.
- To help children develop a personal and living relationship with God.
- To challenge young people to a life of love for and service to their neighbors.
- To help the youth find ways of connection with the Church.
- To be a partner with the parish families in the religious education and faith formation of their children.

SACRAMENTAL CATECHESIS

OVERVIEW

“The liturgical life of the Church revolves around the sacraments, with the Eucharist at the center. The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is given to us and celebrated. The Church celebrates seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony.” (NDC, 35)

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

Attendance at parent formation sessions is required to help parents fully participate in their child's preparation. (Diocesan Policy 3.1)

Reception of the Sacraments of Reconciliation, First Communion and Confirmation requires a minimum of two-years of preparation for Catholic school children and for children in the parish religious education program. Formal faith formation is a continuous, developmental process that begins with First Communion preparation and continues through Confirmation and beyond. (Diocesan Policy 3.3)

Sacraments are celebrations of the entire parish community. To support this reality, it is the policy of the Diocese of Metuchen that the Sacraments of Reconciliation, First Communion and

Confirmation be celebrated together with children and families from both St James parish religious education program and St. James Catholic School.

Children and families from St. James School of Religion and St. James School are to participate jointly in all parish preparatory activities, as well as instructional formation. (Diocesan Policy 3.2)

It is recommended that children enrolled in St. James School affiliated with parishes other than St. James Church undertake their preparation for sacraments within their home parish community. (Diocesan Policy 3.3)

We do not deny any request of parents or candidates to receive the Sacraments of First Reconciliation, First Communion and Confirmation with school classmates or others with whom they have been prepared for a sacrament in a setting outside their home parish. (Diocesan Policy 3.3)

RECONCILIATION

The experience of forgiveness is at the heart of the Gospel message. Jesus came to show us the Father who is loving and forgiving. This is the Gospel message we wish our children to experience in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Catechists should always portray the Sacrament as an encounter with a loving and forgiving God, who rejoices with those who try to live as Jesus did.

Children must receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before receiving the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Only those who have the use of reason are capable of committing serious sin. Nevertheless, even young children and persons with mental disabilities often are conscious of committing acts that are sinful to some degree and may experience a sense of guilt or sorrow. As long as the individual is capable of expressing a sense of contrition for having committed sin, even if he/she cannot describe the sin precisely in words, the person may receive sacramental absolution. Those with profound mental disabilities, who cannot experience even minimal contrition, may be invited to participate in penitential services with the rest of the community to the extent of their abilities. (Diocesan Policy 3.4)

Children and their families are to be encouraged to receive the Sacrament on a regular basis.

We offer the Sacraments of Reconciliation during the Advent and Lenten seasons for all families. Parishioners receive e-announcements regarding the

Confession Schedule: Saturdays, 8:30 AM- 9:00 AM and 4:00-5:00 PM.

HOLY COMMUNION

The preparation for, and reception of First Communion should be seen as an opportunity to introduce children to fuller participation in God's family, the Church, through which they became members at baptism. Their desire to receive Jesus in the Eucharist must be established by participation at liturgy with their families.

First Holy Communion is the beginning of a life-long relationship with Jesus.

Diocesan guidelines require **two years** of formal religious education/formation before reception of First Holy Communion that must be preceded by the reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

An unbaptized child of catechetical age (approximately 8 years and older) must be initiated according to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults adapted for older children. This is not an option. (Diocesan Policy 3.5) Please contact the Religious Education Office for more information.

A person who has special needs may receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion if he/she is able to distinguish the Eucharistic bread from ordinary bread. (Diocesan Policy 3.5)

Mass attendance is the most important part of your child's formation and preparation to receive the sacraments that will bring them life in Christ. Please see the church bulletin for Mass schedule.

CONFIRMATION (Based on the Diocesan Policy 3.6)

The Sacrament of Confirmation for children of catechetical age is conferred upon those who have been baptized, received the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion, have been instructed in their faith and have demonstrated a capacity and willingness to participate in the life of the Church.

The parish will offer one Confirmation preparation program to all eligible parish children, whether enrolled in the Religious Education program, the Catholic school, a private or regional Catholic school.

Immediate preparation, in exceptional cases, for the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation consists of a minimum of two years of spiritual formation and education.

Sponsor Requirements

In the Diocese of Metuchen, a sponsor may be 14 years of age, or older. A sponsor must be a fully initiated Roman Catholic, having received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, worship at Sunday Liturgy on a regular basis and participate in the life of his/her parish. Moreover, if married, the sponsor must be in a valid Church marriage, may be male or female, and may NOT be the candidate's parent. (Code of Canon Law, c.873, 874)

St. James requires a letter of eligibility (sponsor certificate) from the sponsor's registered parish.

A **proxy** may take the place of the sponsor of record if pastoral considerations warrant. Because parents are not eligible to act as a sponsor, it is best to **not use a parent as a proxy**.

Confirmation Name

The chosen name should be in concurrence with the teachings of the Catholic Church (Name of a Saint) A newly chosen name does not need to be gender consistent.

Stewardship Service

Stewardship/outreach projects reinforce our Christian responsibility to witness to our faith by using our gifts of time, talent and treasure.

Stewardship must be accomplished over the two-year formation period (Grades 7 and 8)
Stewardship must be approved by the Director of Religious Education (DRE) and overseen by parents, sponsors and the DRE of the parish.

THE CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF OLDER CHILDREN (Diocesan Policy 3.7)

1. Unbaptized and/or uncatechized

Particular Canon Law specifies that children and youth over the age of 8 who have not been baptized, or does not have a Catholic Baptism, and/or uncatechized **MUST** participate in the RCIA process adapted for older children.

2. Baptized as an infant, but has not received First Communion and/or Confirmation.

If the older child was baptized as an infant, but has not received First Holy Communion, the PCL will determine the best placement for the child after an interview with the older child and his/her parents. A minimum of 2 years of catechesis is required before a sacrament is received in such cases.

3. Youth who have not received Confirmation.

Youth (high school students) who have not received the sacrament of Confirmation ONLY should participate in the parish's adult Confirmation preparation.

SACRAMENTAL YEARS (GRADES 2 AND 8)

The Reconciliation/Communion process is a 2-year program in Grades 1 and 2. All children enrolling in 2nd grade must have completed the 1st grade school of Religion program.

The Confirmation process is a 2-year program in grades 7 and 8 (unless the student attends another Catholic school.)

Children preparing for First Holy Communion and Confirmation are expected to:

- participate in the Sacramental life of the Church (regular Sunday worship),
- participate in parish life, stewardship services, special events, meetings, gatherings.
- participate in retreats for First Holy Communion and Confirmation.
- live faith in the family.

HOME INSTRUCTION (HOME-BASED CATECHESIS)

Community experiences are integral parts of the preparation for the Sacrament that cannot be experienced in isolation from the parish. All children are expected to complete the program both virtually and in-person as the program dictates by St. James School of Religion. For this reason, we do not offer the option of Home-School instruction.

PARENTS' COLLABORATION WITH CATECHISTS

For Catholic parents, the mission to catechize is rooted in the Sacrament of Marriage, which consecrates them for the Christian education of their children. *“This Sacrament enriches them with wisdom, counsel, fortitude, and all the other gifts of the Holy Spirit in order to help the children in their growth as human beings and as Christians.”* **(On the Family, Pope John Paul II, 1981, 38)**

By virtue of this sacrament, parents are the primary educators of their children. By enrolling your children in our Religious Education Program, you are asking us to assist you in that process by providing a foundation in Church teachings and morals.

The encouragement of the parents is the single most important factor in the education of a child. Therefore, please become familiar with your child's course material and make every effort to participate in the program as much as possible.

COMMUNICATION

Please communicate with your child's catechist **directly** throughout the school year so that a collaborative effort may be made to provide a foundation in Roman Catholic doctrine and morals for your child(ren.)

Parents are asked to inform the Religious Education Office when a child will be absent or absent for several consecutive weeks.

Parents are encouraged to contact the PCL whenever a question arises or suggestion can be offered.

If a child must leave class early, parents must write a note to the catechist and come to the Religious Education office for the child.

SERVICES AND RECORDS

REGISTRATION

In order to register for Religious Education at St. James, parents must **first be enrolled in the parish**. Registration for classes should be completed online from our Church website: stjamesbr.org. Click SPIRITUAL RESOURCES and then ST.JAMES SCHOOL OF RELIGION TO complete the registration process.

At the initial registration, we will need:

- A copy of the **Catholic** Baptismal Certificate for all new students including those who are baptized at St. James. If a child has been baptized in a non-Catholic Church, the child needs to have a **Catholic Baptism** before the child can enroll in our Religious Education Program.
- A record of your child's religious education from the former parish.
- A copy of the court document outlining child custody (specifically, only the page/s detailing guardianship) must be kept on file and remain confidential as long as the child/ren are registered in religious education. Parents/guardians must provide an updated copy if legal custody changes.

Registration Fees:

- Grades 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: \$150.00 per child.
- Grades 2 and 8: \$200.00 per child to cover the cost of additional events.
- Late fee: \$50.00 per family. Late registrants cannot be guaranteed requested days or particular catechists.

STUDENT TRANSFERS

Parents should inform the Religious Education Office before transferring their child to another program.

When a child transfers to St. James Church, the Religious Education Office of St James will need: a copy of his/her Catholic Baptismal Certificate and a copy of his/her permanent record card.

CUSTODIAL STATUS

In cases where the 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 St. James religious education office in order to carry out the provisions stated in the document. It is the responsibility of the parents to notify the Parish Catechetical Leader of custodial status and any restrictions concerning the non-custodial parent. For the safety and well-being of your children, we will not disclose any information about a child, or dates of sacraments to anyone other than who is listed on the registration system.

Non-custodial parents should be given access to academic records and kept informed, unless there is a court order specifically stating that the non-custodial parent is denied access to such information.

MEDICATION POLICY

Catechists do not administer any medication. If your child is taking medication that would affect the child's participation, or will need to self-administer emergency medication such as an Epi-Pen or other self-injectors or inhalers, please notify the PCL. You will be required to complete a Self-Administration of Medication form. A copy of the form is attached below and can be found on our website.

DRUGS

Drugs of any sort are not permitted on premises. If a child is found to be in possession of illegal drugs, parents and/or police will be notified. The Parish Catechetical Leader reserves the right to call an alternate contact as provided during registration.

Prescribed drugs should be kept in the Religious Education Office with the signed Self Administration of Medication Form.

FOOD ALLERGIES

It is the goal of St. James Parish to reduce the risks posed by food allergies, especially those posed by peanuts and tree nuts, so that children may enjoy a safe and respectful 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 in the classrooms** during parish catechetical formation classes.

Parents and guardians of highly allergic children **MUST** inform the PCL and catechist so that all precautions will be taken. Please inform us if your child has been prescribed an Epi-Pen, or other self-injector and carries it during his/her time of Catechetical Formation Classes.

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Please inform the PCL if your child has special needs. This important information helps the catechist to meet your child's specific needs and *will not categorize* your child in any way.

Individual instruction is given to students with special needs. Students who are lacking the necessary background to enter into a sacramental preparation program will be given supplemental instruction.

ATTENDANCE (Diocesan Policy 1.3)

More than three (3) unexcused absences in a school model religious education program will be cause for evaluation of the student's placement in the program. Examples of excused absences might be death in the family, illness, etc. Sports or extracurricular activities do not fall into the category of excused absences. A conference will be scheduled with the PCL and parents of children who have excessive absences to evaluate the student's placement in the program and/or postponing the Sacraments.

Absences are monitored by your online progress and required meetings.

For The Gospel Centered Family Catechesis program: because families meet only 9 times, attendance is vital. Only one excused absence is allowed in order to satisfactorily complete the year.

ARRIVAL (DROP-OFF)

Children are asked to arrive 5 to 10 minutes prior to class start time.

Students who walk to and from St. James Church for formation classes will need to fill out the Walking Permission Form. The permission form must be on file with the Religious Education Office before the first day of class. The Walking Permission Form is included at the end of this document and is available on the Parish website.

Parents will need to park in the Church parking lot and walk to the school via the sidewalk. **DO NOT** park in the school lot. Parents may enter the school parking lot via Collyer Lane and proceed up to the entrance of the school. Please be on time. The parking lot will be blocked off shortly after arrival for dismissal procedures.

DISMISSAL (PICK-UP)

The PCL/Catechist will not send a student home with a driver who is visibly impaired, and reserves the right to call an alternate contact number provided during the registration process. Parents can park their cars anywhere other than the school lot. Walk to the school parking area where children are dismissed. Older children may meet their parents at an agreed-upon location or walk to their cars

FIRE DRILLS/EVACUATION

One fire drill and one lockdown drill will be conducted per year. Every organization is vulnerable to intruders. In case of emergency when everyone must be evacuated and moved to a safe place, the **Ridge High School, Performing Arts Center** will be our evacuation site. Children are to walk with the catechist out of the classroom to the designated exit and wait outside the building for further instructions.

In case of a fire alarm, parents may not block any exits waiting to find their child. For the safety of everyone, your child must be brought to the designed safe zone. No child will be dismissed until we have accounted for all children.

CHILD ABUSE POLICY

The Diocese of Metuchen directs that if a catechist/PCL/staff suspects a child has been abused, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) be notified immediately, in compliance with New Jersey statutes. The phone number for DCF is 877-NJ ABUSE. Any information that leads a catechist to believe a child intends to harm himself/herself requires the catechist to notify authority.

EMERGENCY CLOSING

In case of inclement weather, we will follow Bernards Township Public Schools for closing or early dismissal. Please remember to register with Honeywell Instant Alert System. Even though you are registered with Bernards Township's Honeywell System, this must be completed separately for St. James School of Religion as we send out different alerts to different families.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

DRESS CODE

Modesty is a sign of respect for the dignity both of oneself and others. Students must dress modestly when they attend classes or events related to the formation program. We encourage clothing that covers the chest, torso and all undergarments. Clothing that promotes alcohol/drugs and tobacco products and/or inappropriate language/messages must not be worn.

DISCIPLINE

In the case of repeated disruptive, disrespectful or inappropriate behavior, lack of effort, or a poor attitude on the part of a child, the following steps (if the behavior persists) will be taken.

- Catechist will speak privately with child about behavior.
- The PCL will meet with the child.
- Parent notification by the catechist and/or PCL.
- A face to face conference with the parent, child and PCL.

If the difficulty persists, the child will be withdrawn from the program until alternative solutions are reached. If the child continues in the program, a method of on-going evaluation will be put into effect.

LATE ARRIVAL, EARLY DISMISSAL

Chronic lateness impacts not only the individual student, but also the entire class. We encourage students to be on time so they do not miss information that is shared at the beginning of class. We want your children to experience smooth-running classrooms where learning time is valued by the entire St. James school of religion.

If your child needs to leave early, please notify the office before the beginning of the class session. You may email the Religious Education office at stjamesccdsec@gmail.com. For all grades, parents must come to the office to pick up your child. No students may leave the building without a parent or guardian.

CELL PHONES AND ELECTRONIC DEVICES (Diocesan Policy 4.2)

The use of electronic devices of any kind is disruptive to the spirit of learning and prayer that takes place when children and catechists gather to grow in their faith. However, cell phones may be brought to parish religious education/formation under the following conditions:

1. Phones **MUST** be turned off for the entire duration of any and all activities including, but not limited to, classroom instruction, church visitation, prayer experiences, liturgies, etc. Cell phones must be kept out of sight upon entering the building and until the student has exited the building.
2. If a parent needs to contact his/her child(ren) regarding a late pick-up or other problem, please call the Parish Office for Religious Education/Formation, and we will relay the message directly to your child(ren) and their catechists. In this way, we can monitor their safety until the child(ren) are picked up.
3. No cell phones may be used for picture taking, video games, music, gambling, email or making purchases of any kind.
4. No harassment or threatening of persons via cell phones is permitted.
5. No pagers, iPods, MP3 players or other communications devices.

Catechists have the right to collect cell phones and electronic devices from children/adolescents as they gather together if these rules are not adhered to. Those who violate any of the rules regarding cell phones or other devices will forfeit their privilege of bringing cell phones to religious education/formation.

HOMEWORK

Homework is any activity or assignment directed by the catechist to be performed outside the classroom that may include practicing skills learned in class, reading, studying, projects, or completion of assignments.

Students will complete their homework as assigned by their catechists in order to satisfactorily complete each grade level.

WALKING PERMISSION FORM

I gave my child _____ age _____ permission to walk without adult supervision to and/or from St. James parish for the Religious Education program. I assume the responsibility to ensure that my child knows and will follow traffic safety rules.

I hereby release the Diocese of Metuchen, the Parish of St. James and any, and all of their representatives or agents from any and all claims or liability arising from, or related to, my child's travel to and/or from the parish Religious Education program.

Parent / Guardian Name:

Parent/Guardian Signature:

Date:

Office Use Only:

Date Received _____ By _____

SELF-ADMINISTRATION OF MEDICATION FORM

Permission for child/youth to carry and/or use emergency medication for potentially life-threatening condition.

Child's / Youth's Name _____ DOB _____ Class _____

Parish _____ City / Town _____

HEALTH CARE PROVIDER:

Diagnosis _____

Name of Medication _____

Dosage and Instructions _____

Possible Side Effects _____

I certify that the child named above has allergies that are potentially life-threatening, as listed above, and is permitted to self-administer the listed medication. The child has been instructed in the proper techniques of self-administration and has demonstrated to me competence in this technique.

Name of Health Care Provider (PRINT) _____

Signature of Health Care Provider _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Date _____

PARENT / GUARDIAN:

I authorize my child to self-administer the listed medication during religious education hours, if necessary. I acknowledge the parish of Saint James Church **DOES NOT** have a nurse **OR** trained staff member on the premises during religious education hours. In the event my child must self-administer epinephrine (Epi Pen), I understand that 911 will be called and my child will be transported to the local hospital. It is my obligation to provide the Parish Religious Education Office with working telephone numbers where I can be reached at all times and my responsibility to attend to my child once the emergency squad leaves the parish program. I understand that the Diocese of Metuchen, the parish of Saint James Church and any and all of their representatives or agents against all claims arising from the self-administration of the listed medication.

Signature of Parent / Guardian _____

Date _____

Cell Phone or Emergency Contact number: _____

EFFECTIVE FOR ONE (1) YEAR.

ALTERNATE PICKUP PERMISSION FORM

I gave permission to

_____ (Name of person picking up your child)

to pick up my child

_____ (Your child's name)

from Religious Education class at St. James parish on the following

date(s): _____

I assume the responsibility to ensure that my child is picked up.

Parent / Guardian Name

Parent / Guardian Signature

Date

Office Use Only: Date Received _____ By _____