

St Mary, Mother of the Church Religious Education Program

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Parish Religious Education Program Parent Handbook

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Letter to Parents

Dear Parents,

Your role as Catholic parents¹ is surely one of the most sacred, challenging and wonderful vocations that the Lord entrusts to His people. You brought your child² to be baptized thus providing the opportunity to begin life as a disciple of Jesus in the Church. As your child grows, you continue to nurture that spiritual life. You enable your child to live joyously in the Love of God made tangible by your own goodness and love. In the intimacy of family relationships, you teach the Catholic faith to your child every day by what you say and do – a profound and irreplaceable witness.

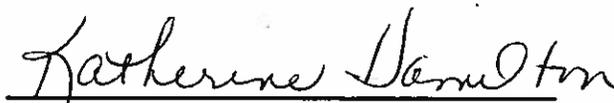
We in the Parish Religious Education Program, have also been given a sacred role by the Lord – that of Catechist for your child. We welcome the opportunity to assist you in teaching your child to walk in the ways of faith. We pledge all the resources of our program to helping your child come to know and better understand the person of Jesus Christ who so loves him/her. We pledge to do all we can to help you instill Catholic beliefs and values so that your child may live in the joy of being Jesus' disciple.

Our experience has shown us that this is most effectively accomplished when the family and the parish work together. The *parents* place Jesus Christ and His teachings at the center of their family life — through Sunday Mass, family prayer, and daily life as disciples of Jesus. The *Religious Education Program* teaches the Catholic life which the child is living at home and experiencing in the Parish. The *Parish* supports and nurtures the parents and provides a “home-place” for the families who choose the Catholic way of life in a world that is increasingly lost without God and in need of the Truth that is Jesus.

May God bless us in the work of Catholic Education which we carry on together in His name.



Pastor : Fr. Joseph Blenkle



Director of Religious Education

¹ For the sake of brevity, the word “parent” will be used to indicate the child’s primary caretaker, whether parent or guardian.

² For the sake of brevity, the word “child” will be used to indicate children and youth up to 8th grade.

Purpose and Overview of Parish Religious Education Program

The purpose of the Parish Religious Education Program is to assist parents in the sacred responsibility entrusted to them at their child's Baptism: to form and educate their children to become disciples of Jesus in the Catholic faith. An integral part of a true Catholic home life is the child's attendance at Mass every Sunday and on the Holy Days of Obligation³. The Religious Education Program helps the child to understand, ever more deeply, the meaning of the Mass which the family regularly attends.

The six fundamental tasks of catechesis⁴ which are entrusted to the Religious Education Program by the Catholic Church are:

- to promote the knowledge of the faith,
- to give moral formation,
- to provide liturgical education,
- to teach to pray,
- to educate for community life,
- to initiate into the missionary dimension.

The role of the Director⁵ of Religious Education and the Catechists is to provide intellectual enlightenment about the Catholic life which the child is already living at home and in the parish community, and to foster the child's faith development by accomplishing the fundamental tasks of catechesis in an age-appropriate way.

For every person, religious education nourishes our minds and spirits throughout our lives as we mature from childhood to adulthood into that image of Christ which God created us to become. First grade is not too soon to instill in our children the understanding that Confirmation is not the end of Religious Education. Rather it is the sacrament which brings about our spiritual maturation and opens us to life-long learning about the way of Life of Jesus' disciples in the Catholic Church.

Classes meet weekly for thirty (30) weeks each year (mid-September until mid-May) and are 90 minutes in length. In addition, the Archdiocese has a requirement for 5 hours of Family Catechesis to be offered in a variety of formats.

³ There are 6 Holy Days of Obligation (days when, in addition to Sunday, Catholics are required to attend Mass):

Dec. 8 – the Immaculate Conception

40 days after Easter – the Ascension

Dec. 25 – Christmas

Aug. 15 – the Assumption

Jan. 1 – Mary the Mother of God

Nov. 1 – All Saints Day

⁴ Catechesis is a Greek word used by Christians from the earliest centuries of the Church. It means Religious Instruction and Formation in the faith.

⁵ For the sake of brevity, the title "Director" will be used to indicate both the Director and the Coordinator of Religious Education.

It is the policy of the Archdiocese of New York that the parish hires a certified Director of Religious Education, who, under the authority of the Pastor and along with the parish catechetical staff and/or the parish education committee, establish policies and make decisions concerning the administration of the Religious Education Program.

Mrs. Katherine Hamilton, St. Mary's Religious Education Director, holds a Masters Degree in Religious Education and Youth Ministry and has been certified and re-certified every five years, by the Archdiocese of New York as a Director of Religious Education.

Sr. Jean Tavin, the Program Coordinator, holds a Masters Degree in Elementary Education, is certified by the State of New York and has an extensive background in Catholic Education, Religious Education and Parish Ministry.

Ms. Connie Puswald, the program secretary, holds a Bachelors Degree in Communication and Archdiocesan Level I & II Catechist Certification.

The men and women who volunteer to teach in our parish Religious Education Program are known as catechists. Catechists are expected to participate in a variety of teaching and learning programs which are provided both by the parish and by the archdiocese.

All the program catechists volunteer their time, talents and energies to this ministry. Any parish members interested in entering this catechetical ministry are invited to do so by calling the Religious Education Office or the Rectory. Catechists must agree to submit to a background check, attend a Safer Spaces seminar, provide references, and follow the topics listed in the Archdiocesan Curriculum Guidelines when presenting their classes. Catechists are encouraged and expected to attend the educational, spiritual, and methodological courses of the Catechist Formation Program which leads to certification by the Archdiocese. Resources and educational opportunities are also provided on the parish level.

The Religious Education Program: an Eight-Year Sequential Program

The essential Religious Education Program is an eight-year sequence of formation beginning with grade level 1 and continuing through grade level 8. All Catholic children of the parish who are not attending Catholic schools are expected to follow this 8-year program.

The Religious Education Program consists in a minimum of 30 sessions, 90 minutes long, held between September and June plus 5 hours of family catechesis.

The Archdiocesan Curriculum Guidelines

The *Archdiocesan Guidelines for Catechesis for Grades 1 through 6 and Grades 7 and 8* ensure a uniform presentation of the faith for each grade level and outline the content of the catechesis each child is taught at every grade level. These Guidelines are to be found on the Catechetical Office website: NYFaithformation.org. (Click on *Resources* and then select *Catechetical Office Resources*.) (a summary is at the end of the handbook)

Pre-School and Kindergarten Religious Education or Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Enrollment in Kindergarten, and above all in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, is not required but is strongly encouraged.

Family Catechesis

Each family in the Religious Education Program participates in a minimum of five hours of family catechesis offered between September and August. The Cardinal has directed all Religious Education Programs of the Archdiocese to offer this opportunity to its families in order to better assist and work with parents in forming their children in the Catholic faith.

Passport to Family Faith: In order to accommodate the busy schedules of our families, we offer Family Catechesis in our Passport to Family Faith Program. Families will receive the brochure with annual offerings in September of the school year and are asked to participate in a minimum of 5 of the activities in the brochure to meet the Archdiocesan mandate. All families are encouraged to participate in as many activities as they are able in order to grow in faith as a family unit.

Religious Education for Children with Disabilities

Because of a disability, a child may require an individualized program of instruction. This may be done in a small group, in a one-on-one setting or as part of the regular Religious Education session but with a personal assistant. In consultation with the parent, the Director and Catechist will design an approach to Religious Education that addresses the child's needs.

Preparation for the Reception of the Sacraments

Preparation for the reception of the Sacraments (i.e. first reception of the Eucharist and of Penance (Reconciliation) and Confirmation) is an integral part of the 8-year parish Religious Education Program. Each year, the child is taught in age-appropriate ways more about the meaning and importance of the Sacraments for his/her life.

In order to receive the Sacrament of Penance and First Communion, the child must have completed the first year of Religious Education and be currently enrolled in the second year.

While the Archdiocesan policy is that Confirmation is received after the completion of the eight-year curriculum when the child has fulfilled all grade level requirements, here at St Mary, Mother of the Church Confirmation is celebrated in 7th grade with the expectation that our youth continue to complete their formal Religious Education through 8th grade.

For each Sacrament, the parish program provides an immediate preparation which has a strong family/parent dimension, and which helps the child prepare spiritually to receive the Sacrament. This immediate preparation is required to receive the Sacrament and it is done in sessions separate from, and in addition to, the regular Religious Education Program.

The immediate preparation program for each Sacrament consists in:

- Parent sessions particular to the Sacrament being received,
- A Day of Prayer/ Retreat for child and parent (First Holy Communion) and the student (Confirmation) centered on the Sacrament being received,
- Additional requirements for the reception of these important Sacraments are fully explained at the Parent Meetings in the Fall for 1st Reconciliation / 1st Eucharist and in May of the student's 6th grade for Confirmation.
- There is an additional fee for the students receiving 1st Holy Communion and Confirmation due during the final preparation stages. The 2018-19 fees are: \$65 for 1st Holy Communion and \$100 for Confirmation. These fees cover materials used in the preparation process, retreat fees, gown and supplies.

Preparation for Sacraments for Children Who Have Disabilities

The parish also offers sacramental preparation for children with disabilities. The parent should call the Religious Education office for more information and to register.

Responsibilities of Parents regarding the Religious Education Program

Priest: "You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training him/her in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him/her up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?"

Parents: "We do."

Rite of Baptism

Parents have the primary and sacred responsibility to form their children in the Catholic faith and they do so in the following ways:

- teaching their child to live a moral life according to the values and teachings of Jesus Christ and the teachings, laws and norms of the Catholic Church, realizing that the primary way parents teach this is by living it themselves;
- **attending Mass each Sunday with their child, thus instilling in them the conviction that weekly Mass attendance is essential to being a Catholic;**
- participating fully with their child in the parent preparation for the first reception of Penance, for First Communion, and for Confirmation.
- ensuring that their child receives the Sacrament of Penance at least once a year;
- preparing their child for participation in Religious Education by fostering an openness and positive attitude toward the religious education which the child will be receiving;
- fulfilling the requirements outlined in the Parent Handbook;
- ensuring that their child arrives on time for the Religious Education session each week;
- participating in their child's faith formation by making use of the parent/family materials and the *Archdiocesan Guidelines for Catechesis*;
- praying at home with the child, including the prayers to be memorized;
- assisting their child with assigned at-home activities as needed.
- Attending to the minimum of 5 activities a year of family catechesis given by the Religious Education Program.

Responsibilities of the Child enrolled in the Parish Religious Education Program

The obligations of children enrolled in the Program are:

- living a moral life that reflects the values and teachings of Jesus Christ;
- participating in the Parish Mass each Sunday;
- receiving the Sacrament of Penance at least once a year;
- following the teachings, laws, and norms of the Catholic Church;
- attending the weekly Religious Education Sessions;
- arriving on time each week for the Religious Education Session;
- being well-prepared for each Religious Education session by having all assigned home projects completed satisfactorily;
- memorizing all required prayers;
- participating in class discussions and activities;
- being attentive and respectful during sessions;
- performing satisfactorily on assessments of the material taught in the sessions;
- fulfilling all requirements of the Religious Education Program including appropriate dress.

Registration and Placement

The Parish Religious Education program offers religious education to all Catholic children who do not receive it in their school and whose families are enrolled in the parish as parishioners. When space allows, the Director may also try to accommodate in the program children whose families are registered in another parish, with the permission of both Pastors.

There is no discrimination on the basis of race, gender, national origin, disability conditions or family background.

Registration Procedure

Every parent must register their child for the Religious Education program every year. The registration procedure is as follows:

- Register the child for Religious Education Program within time period specified by the parish.
- Complete *Child Re-Registration Information Record* and Emergency medical forms as needed and submit them to Director of Religious Education
- If the child is new to the parish, present the Baptismal Certificate; the Director will make a copy to be kept with the child's *Information Record* and return original to the parent.
- Speak with the Director about any special needs the child has which could affect the child's learning and well-being in the Religious Education sessions.
- Arrange with the Director of Religious Education the payment of the registration fee according to the parish registration fee chart and schedule.

2018 Religious Education Fees:

Kindergarten	\$60 (of only child in program)
1st – 7th Grade	\$175 one child / \$250 - 2 or more children
8th Grade	\$65 Registration Fee

\$50 Parishioner Rebate is available if active parishioner

- Active Parishioners: 40 or more envelopes used during previous 12 months.

The \$35.00 Registration Fee is non-refundable.

The entire fee is not refundable after 9/1/2018.

While all fees are due at the time of registration, no child will be refused participation in the Religious Education program because of inability to pay the tuition and registration fee. Parents for whom the fee would cause a severe financial burden should contact the Director to discuss a payment plan, or how they can work together to assist in the program for a waiver of fees. If a family cannot pay the fee in full at registration, a payment plan may be drawn up by the Director and the parent to be submitted to the Pastor.

A child's textbook is included in the registration fee. If lost or misplaced, a fee of \$ 25 will be charged for a new book.

A Fireside Catholic Youth Bible is required for all students for use in 6, 7 & 8th grades. It may be purchased privately or at cost from the Religious Ed Program.

Child's Placement in Religious Education Sessions

The final decision for each child's placement in the Religious Education Program sessions is made by the Director of Religious Education.

For any child who has physical, mental or emotional disabilities, the Director in consultation with the parent will determine a program of religious education to effectively address these needs.

Any child who leaves the Religious Education Program (e.g. after receiving First Communion) and subsequently returns, will upon re-entering the program, be required to complete the curriculum of the grade levels missed using an assessment based on the *Archdiocese Curriculum Guidelines*.

For a child who is in third grade or older and has not had formal religious education, the Director will determine the most appropriate and effective way for the child to be taught the content of the faith, using the *Archdiocesan Curriculum Guidelines* as the norm.

Repetition of Grade Level

Repetition of Grade Level means that the child must repeat the grade level or the year's curriculum. Great care should be taken in the home as well as in the program to help the child realize that repetition of the year's curriculum is not a punishment but rather a means to help the child be as successful as possible.

The reasons for repetition of grade level are as follows:

1. **Excessive absence:** after 3 absences the parent will receive an official notification of the child's absences and a request for a parent conference. If the absences continue beyond 5, this is grounds for retention. (See also section on "Absences.")
2. **Poor performance:** if the child does poorly when assessed on the content of the textbook and the *Archdiocesan Guidelines for Catechesis*, remedial work will be required and organized by the Director. If the remedial work is not sufficient to enable the child to grasp the content, repetition of the grade level may be the best solution.
3. **Excessive lateness:** after 3 occurrences of late arrival, the parent will receive an official notification and a request for a parent conference. If the late arrivals continue beyond 6 occurrences, this is grounds for repetition of grade level.

Transfer to Another Program

When a parent must withdraw a child from the program, the parent should immediately inform the Director/Coordinator. The Director will send a copy of the child's permanent record to the Religious Education Program to which the child is transferring.

Arrival, Lateness and Absences

Parents assume full responsibility for the transportation of their children to and from the parish site where Religious Education sessions take place.

Arrival

The Religious Education Sessions take place at the following times: Session 1: 4:15 pm and Session 2: 6 pm

Supervision of the children will be provided beginning at 10 minutes prior to each session.

No child should be on the parish premises before this time unless accompanied by an authorized adult.

On arriving for Religious Education, the parent brings / sends the child directly to the gym.

Lateness

Punctuality is essential. Children who arrive late not only miss important information but also disrupt the entire Religious Education session.

If the child arrives late, he/she reports to the Religious Education front table and from there will be directed to the gym or to their classroom.

If the child arrives late for the Religious Education session more than 3 times during the year, this will result in required attendance at additional sessions to make-up material missed. If the child arrives late more than 6 times in the year, this can result in repeating the year. These make-up sessions will be determined by the Director.

Absences

The child's regular attendance at the Religious Education sessions is very important to his/her whole life. These 30 sessions should take priority over all other after-school or weekend programs and activities.

- Three absences will necessitate a conference between the Director/ Coordinator and the parent.
- Four absences will result in the child having to make up the sessions. The number of make-up sessions will be determined by the Director and will be based on the number necessary for the child to be adequately taught the content of the textbook and the *Archdiocesan Guidelines* for his/her grade level.
- Six absences may result in the repetition of the grade level.
- In the case of a long-term illness confirmed by a doctor's report, the Director and parent should make arrangements for religious education to be guided by the Catechist and Director in an alternate setting.

Notification Procedure for Absence

When a child is to be absent from a program session, the parent is asked to give the Director notification before the Religious Education Program begins. This should be done preferably in writing but a phone call is acceptable.

If the parent has been unable to send a written communication before the absence, it must be given to the Religious Education Office no later than the following week. It must specify the date and reason for the absence and be signed by the parent.

If the child is absent and the Director has not received previous notification, the Director will alert the parent by a telephone call as soon as attendance is taken. If the parent cannot be reached by phone, an email and/or text message will be sent. If the parent does not respond immediately, the Director will call the person designated as parent substitute on the *Child Information Record* submitted at Registration.

Dismissal of an Individual before the End of the Day's Session

If your child needs to be dismissed early, the request for this early dismissal should be given to the catechist in writing by the parent prior to the scheduled session. This request should include:

- the name of the person picking up the child,
- the designated date and time,
- the reason,
- the signature of the parent.

The parent must come to the Religious Education table in the front foyer to pick up and sign out the child. The Director/Coordinator or appropriate adult will go to the session and walk the child out to meet the parent. For security reasons, the parent may not go directly to the session area.

Dismissal

At the end of the Religious Education session every child is released to the care of their parent or parent substitute. The parent substitute must be the person designated in writing at registration on the *Child Information Record*. If someone other than the parent or parent substitute is to pick up the child on a given day, this change should be given in writing to the Director prior to the session in question.

- A child will not be released to anyone under age 18.
- A child will not be released to someone who appears to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- The staff of the Religious Education Program are not allowed to drive or walk children home.
- The Director should be informed in writing by the custodial parent of the rights of the non-custodial parent as these pertain to the child's participation in the program as well as to the child's release from the program. A copy of the appropriate section of the custody papers should be attached to the written statement.

The method of dismissal is as follows: **Following end of session announcements, a bell will ring signaling the end of the session. Parents will go to each of their children's classrooms to sign them out. Children should remain seated at their desks until they are signed out. Children may not leave the classroom without being signed out. For the safety of all children parents should keep children close by as they exit the building.**

****ONLY the front door should be used as an exit.**

No child may remain on the parish premises after the Religious Education Program ends because supervision is not provided. If the catechist has to leave, the child will wait with the Director/Coordinator and contact with the parent will be initiated.

Early Dismissal of the Program

The Religious Education Program will not have an early dismissal unless it is necessitated by an emergency. Parents will be notified of the emergency closure of the program. (See section on *Communication with Parents: Emergency Cancellations of Program*)

Communication with Parents

Emergency Cancellations of Program

Weather Related:

St Mary, Mother of the Church Religious Education Program follows the Wappingers Central School District lead on weather related closures. If WCSD is closed due to inclement weather there are no Religious Ed Classes. If WCSD has a weather-related early dismissal OR if WCSD has cancelled after-school activities due to the weather, then St Mary, Mother of the Church Religious Ed Classes are cancelled.

We will make every effort to email this information out to families who are on our email rosters.

We will also post closings on www.cancellations.com

Parents should have in place an emergency plan for those times when Religious Education must be cancelled due to weather.

** This is ONLY for weather related instances. This does not pertain to Superintendent's Days, Jewish Holidays and School Conference cancellations of classes.

Postponements and Rescheduled Events

All event rescheduling and other communication will come via email.

Written Communication to Parents

All individual written communications to parents will come from the Director/Coordinator in the following manner: **Email or distribution during class of written notices/flyers. The Catechist may email their class directly with the Director/Coordinator cc'd on all emails.**

Rights of Non-custodial Parent

The Director should be informed in writing by the custodial parent of the rights of the non-custodial parent to receive duplicate sets of progress reports, invitations to religious education events, notices, calendars, etc. as these pertain to the child's participation in the program. A copy of the appropriate section of the custody papers should be attached to the written statement.

Individual Meetings with Catechists

All communication between parent and Catechist regarding the faith formation or behavior of a child should be approved and arranged by the Director/ Coordinator. Parents should not phone the Catechist directly.

A Catechist may keep a child after the program session for reasons such as additional instruction, misbehavior, excessive absence or lateness but this can only take place with the permission of the parent and it must be organized by the Director/Coordinator.

Use of Social Networking Sites by Religious Education Program

Regarding the use of Social Networking Sites and all other electronic communication, the parish Religious Education Program follows the directives published by the Archdiocesan Safe-Environment Office (Nyfaithformation.org – Safe Environment Resources – Facebook and Child Protection). These include the following:

- There may be no private direct communication with a minor. All communications must be through parents.
- There may be no photographs or videos of minors posted without the written permission of the parent.
- There may be no photographs or videos of religious education personnel posted without the individual's written permission.
- With regard to a group photo or video, written permission must be given for every person in the photo/video. (via the Media Release form)
- There may be no contact information, or other personal information, of a minor or of religious education personnel posted without the written permission of the parent or Catechist/Director.

Cell Phones

The use of cell phones and other electronic devices by the child is not permitted during the Religious Education session unless this is directed by the Catechist as part of the educational process. Cell phones brought into the place of the Religious Education session should always be turned off and out of sight.

The catechists in the upper grades (4-5-6-7-8) are asked to collect all phones to a communal area and to return them to students at the end of class.

Children in need of contacting a parent must ask the Catechist's permission to go to the Religious Education Office to place the call.

Students in violation of the cell phone policy will have their phone confiscated and returned to parents after they are signed out of the program.

**Electronic games have no place in the classroom and should be left at home along with any items that would be distracting in a learning environment.

Home Actions Essential to the Religious Education Program

At-Home Activities

At-home activities reinforce learning and provide opportunities for independent study and creative thinking. They are an effective way for the child to internalize the religious education he/she has received so that it becomes "faith formation." The parents can help their children by arranging a quiet, comfortable place for them to complete these assignments and by encouraging and helping the child as needed.

The parent is strongly urged to participate in the online parent dimension of the child's religious formation which is provided by the textbook company and follows the child's lessons.

The parent is expected to ensure that the child completes each at-home assignment and brings it to the Religious Education session.

Prayer at Home with the Child

The parent is the primary educator in the faith for of the child and one of the most important ways to fulfill this responsibility is by praying with the child every day. Some important prayer practices to be done in the Catholic home are:

- grace before meals,
- prayers at the child's bedtime,
- blessing the child in the morning before he/she leaves for school by tracing the cross on the forehead and saying with the child the prayer to his/her guardian angel,
- the family rosary prayed together regularly,
- pictures and statues of Jesus and Mary in the home,
- a family bible kept in a place of honor, with a passage or story read from it regularly,
- recitation with the child of traditional Catholic prayers,

Mass Attendance and the Sacramental Life

Children learn to live as Catholics above all by experiencing their parents living as Catholics. Regular weekly attendance at Sunday Mass is essential to being a practicing Catholic. Therefore, doing this together as a family is one of the most powerful ways in which the parent can form the child in the faith. Catholic living also includes regular reception of the Sacrament of Penance and the parent should insure that the child does so from an early age..

The Religious Education Program explains to the children the meaning of the Catholic life of faith that they are living at home and experiencing in the parish community.

Components of the Religious Education Program

Assessment

Assessment of the faith formation taking place in the child is done in order to facilitate further growth. However, it is important to be aware that the child's faith, love for the Lord, moral living and commitment to the Church is not being assessed. What is being assessed is the child's grasp of the knowledge that has been taught in the Religious Education Program.

Each child is expected to master the contents of the curriculum and the *Archdiocesan Guidelines for Catechesis* at the grade level in which he/she is enrolled. The child will be given regular assessments based on the lessons and on the *Archdiocesan Curriculum Guidelines*. The results of the assessments will be given to the parent.

If the individual child needs additional help in learning and better understanding the concepts assessed, the Director will consult with the parents and the Catechist before deciding how this should be provided.

Progress Reports

Progress reports reflect the child performance in the religious education setting, that is:

- attendance at sessions,
- participation in the sessions,
- behavior and attitude during the sessions,
- quality of at-home assignments,
- memorization,
- grasp of the content taught.

Catechists prepare a progress report for each child twice yearly: in January and in May. These reports are given directly to the parent in January. Parents are encouraged to discuss the child's growing knowledge and understanding of the faith with the Catechist. The May progress report is included in the end-of-year mailing home and includes a copy of the end-of-year assessment.

Permanent Record

A *Permanent Record* is kept in the Religious Education file for each child. It records the child's successful completion of each grade level. If a child must transfer to another Religious Education program, a copy of this *Permanent Record* is sent to the Director of the new Program.

Dress Code

Children are required to wear modest clothing which reflects the dignity of the Religious Education Program in which they are participating. The exercise of good taste and proper, reasonable judgment on the part of the parent in overseeing the child's choice of clothing, in itself, provides effective formation for the child.

Not to be worn: tank tops, halter tops, short skirts or shorts, bare midrifts, blouses with spaghetti straps, pajama-like pants (flannels). clothing that is torn, worn below the waist, clothing that bears obscene or inappropriate messages, high heeled shoes, shoes with cleats, flip-flops and baseball caps.

With the approval of the Pastor, the Director has the final authority to determine the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the clothing worn. If a child violates the policy, the child is removed from the session and the parent is immediately called. The parent must bring alternative clothes for the child to change into so that he/she may return to the Religious Education session.

**** Our children frequently leave the school building to visit the Church and or outdoor Stations of the Cross and need to wear appropriate clothing as a show of respect on entering the Church. In addition, please consider weather and have appropriate jackets or sweaters for outdoor travel.**

Food

No food is allowed during the Religious Education Program for the following reasons:

- some children have medical restrictions or allergies to certain foods or ingredients;
- the 30 sessions a year is already a very limited time allotment for the important work of helping parents impart the faith to the children.

If a child has snacks after school and before the session begins, these must be eaten before the child arrives at the program.

Parties are not held during the Religious Education sessions.

If we are celebrating special occasions as a program, all parents will be notified and given appropriate warning and opportunity to provide alternatives for children with allergies.

ie: The last week of classes we celebrate with Ice cream after our outdoor Rosary. Please feel free to provide an alternative if your child cannot have ice cream.

Behavior Management

Catechists use behavior management (or “discipline”) appropriate to an educational environment as a necessary means for the Religious Education Program to accomplish its goals. The purpose of behavior management is to help the children develop self-control, self-respect, respect for others, and reverence for the Word of God which is being explained to them in these sessions.

Several infractions of rules of conduct will result in a call by the Director to the child's parent in which the Director will describe the situation and work out a solution with the parent. If the infractions continue, the Director will organize a conference with the parent, the Catechist, the Director and the Pastor.

The Religious Education Program reserves to the Director, under the authority of the Pastor, the right to remove a child from the group session, either temporarily or permanently:

- if the child's behavior is seriously inhibiting the learning of others in the group;
- if the child's behavior is seriously inhibiting the safety or well-being of others in the group;
- if temporary removal is used as a disciplinary measure for serious and persistent disruptive behavior.

Bullying and Cyber-bullying

Bullying includes but is not limited to: threatening physical harm, verbal abuse, intimidation, cyber-bullying. The Archdiocesan policy against bullying is followed. This policy states:

A safe and civil environment is necessary for children to learn and achieve Christian value. Harassment, intimidation, bullying, cyber-bullying (using technology to bully such as but not limited to: posting an inappropriate picture of a child on the Internet) and other violent behaviors will not be tolerated in a Religious Education Program environment. Any child who engages in this behavior may be asked to leave the religious education environment if this is seen to be in the best interest of the rest of the religious education community.

Vandalism

Vandalism, i.e. willfully damaging or destroying property, will not be tolerated. Vandalism must be paid for by the parent of the child who did it.

***We are in a shared space with the Regional School. Students are not to touch or take anything from the desks of the students who attend the school. Leaving notes or defacing the desks or belongings of the day students is considered vandalism. Students who do so will be responsible for replacing the missing or damaged belongings of another student.

Accidental damage should be immediately reported to the Director.

Unacceptable Behavior

The following types of behavior are not allowed during the Religious Education Program.

Infractions which call for discipline by the Catechist are:

- acting in a disrespectful manner toward the Catechist, other adults or children in the program,
- speaking and interacting with other children inappropriately during the session,
- leaving a session without permission,
- using a cell phone during the session when not authorized by the Catechist, (ie: in the bathroom)
- doing something other than the work of the session,
- violating the dress code,
- eating in the Religious Education session.

Persistence in any of these behaviors after several corrective measures have been taken will place this behavior in the category below.

Infractions which call for immediate action by the Director and Pastor are:

- possession of and /or trafficking in alcohol or other drugs,
- leaving the Religious Education premises when child is supposed to be attending the session,
- willful defiance of authority,
- possession of weapons, such as knives, guns, or look-alikes,
- physical assault/fighting, threatening bodily harm
- harassment and intimidation of other children,
- vandalism, arson,
- theft, extortion
- cheating,
- abusive or vulgar language,
- defacing or damaging of parish property, vandalism, arson
- bullying/cyber-bullying.

Persistence in any of these behaviors after corrective measures have been taken can result in the removal of the child from the Religious Education group sessions, either temporarily or permanently, depending on the recommendation of the Director and the decision of the Pastor.

Medication and Medical Emergency

Medication

No medication of any kind (whether prescription or over-the-counter) will be administered to, or taken by, any child during the Religious Education Program.

In the event that a child has a condition for which emergency medication may be necessary, the parent must provide a written request and directives to the Religious Education Director.

Any emergency medication/medical device to be administered during the program according to the above directives must be brought by the parent to the Religious Education Office and should be administered there.

Medical Condition of Child

The parent should inform the Director about any child who has special medication needs, a medical condition which could flare up in the session, or a medical condition which could affect the teaching/learning environment (e.g. allergies, asthma, auditory or visual impairment, possibility of seizures, learning disability, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, need for the epi-pen). This information is strictly confidential and will be used with the utmost discretion. The Director/Coordinator will ensure that the Catechist is informed.

A course of action in case of a flare-up is determined by the parent at the time of registration and put in writing.

The *Child Information Record*, completed by the parent at registration, contains the names and contact information for the people who must be contacted in case of emergency.

Medical Emergency Information

In the case of any medical emergency, 911 will immediately be called without exception.

A *Child Information Record* along with appropriate Medical Forms is filled out by the parent and kept on file in the Parish Religious Education Office. The parent must be careful to keep the information in these forms current. Any changes to the forms are made in writing and signed by the parent.

Safe Environment

Archdiocesan Children Protection Policy

The Archdiocese of New York and St. Mary, Mother of the Church are committed to ensuring the personal safety of all children in the Religious Education Program. Therefore, the parish and its Religious Education Program follow all the policies, directives and requirements of the Archdiocesan Safe Environment Office. These policies and programs are to be found on the Safe Environment web page which can be accessed through the Archdiocesan web site (*Archny.org*) and the Catechetical Office web site (*nyfaithformation.org*)

Safe Environment Training and Possibility for Parent Opt-Out

Each year, the Religious Education Program provides to each child the curriculum entitled *Right, Safe and Good Relationships* following the lesson plans provided by the Archdiocesan Safe Environment Office. (See Safe Environment Web site: Children's Curriculum.) The material is infused in the child's lessons when appropriate. Please see the guide at the end of this packet for information that is presented at each grade level.

Visits to Religious Education Program by Unauthorized Persons

For security reasons, no unauthorized persons are allowed in the area where the Religious Education sessions are taking place. Even parents and other family members may only go to the Religious Education office or designated reception area until the program sessions are completed, and the children are dismissed to the care of their parents.

CURRICULUM

The Archdiocese of New York has published Guidelines for Catechesis which ensures a clear and uniform presentation of the faith for each grade level (1-8). These Guidelines are implemented in all parish Religious Education Programs and parochial schools throughout the Archdiocese.

Through the use of the Guidelines, all children of St. Mary's Parish and their families are invited and encouraged to grow in faith, in their ability to pray, in their appreciation for the sacraments and in their awareness of themselves as vital members of the community of faith.

The following are the themes and objectives as stated in the Guidelines.

Grade 1 - God is our Father who loves us. Jesus is the Son of God who tells us about our Father. The Holy Spirit helps us to be holy.

Objective: To develop an awareness of God who gives life and grace to us, the wonders of creation and the promise of eternal life.

Grade 2 - Jesus comes to nourish and strengthen the God-life, grace, within us.

Objective: To present Jesus as the model of Christian Living.

Grade 3 - Jesus continues His Life and work through His Church.

Objective: To deepen the child's understanding of the Church and to help the child experience the Church as Christ

Grade 4 - As God's people, we are called to live as Jesus did, choosing a life of love, characterized by obedience to God and service to others.

Objective: To help the children form their consciences according to the teachings of the Catholic Church, and to learn the basis of Christian morality especially as taught in the Old and New Testaments.

Grade 5 - Through the Sacraments, the Church celebrates the life-giving signs of Christ's saving action in our lives.

Objective: To help the child become a conscious and active member of the Church through an appreciation and celebration of its sacramental life, and to experience and understand the rites of the Sacraments.

Grade 6 - God's saving actions are found throughout history. The Bible, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, records God's plan of salvation.

Objective: To understand the Old Testament as the revelation of God in the history of a people, a revelation fulfilled in the New Testament.

Grade 7 - The growth and change experienced during adolescence are the unfolding of God's plan for our development as fully Christian persons.

*Objective: To develop in the young adolescent a sense of self-worth and self-respect nurtured and strengthened by a knowledge of God's love.
To acquaint the young adolescent with an understanding of the virtues necessary for a life of goodness and faith.*

The Gospels reveal Jesus as the Savior and Risen Lord who calls us to advance the Kingdom of God through discipleship.

*Objective: To broaden the young adolescent's understanding of the Gospels through a study of their formation, themes, message, and literary aspects.
To help the young adolescent grow in a personal relationship with Jesus by encountering Him in the Gospels and learning to live His message.*

The mystery of Christ continues in the Church through the Sacraments which are visible signs of the love and saving action of Jesus.

*Objective: To help the young adolescent understand, appreciate, and celebrate the continuing presence and saving action of Jesus in the Church.
To lead the young adolescent to a full and active participation in the sacramental life of the Church.*

Sexuality is a gift from God. It embraces psychological, spiritual and physical characteristics of men and women. We human beings need to integrate our sexuality into our total personality in order to develop into the persons God has called us to be.

*Objective: To help the young adolescent appreciate the gift of sexuality.
To assist the young adolescent in developing correct and positive attitudes concerning sexuality.
To clarify for the young adolescent how the gift of sexuality can be misused.*

Grade 8 - Developing relationships with others and God is essential to becoming our true selves.

*Objective: To help the young adolescent understand the elements which are essential to developing positive relationships.
To help the young adolescent understand that true community is built on honest, loving, and respectful relationships.*

Jesus' life and mission continue through the Church, the community of believers called by God and empowered by the Spirit to be the sign of the Kingdom of God

Objective: To deepen the young adolescent's knowledge of the history of the Church. To lead the young adolescent to a fuller participation in the life and mission of the Church.

Grade 8 cont.

Through our relationship with Jesus, we grow in an ever-deepening awareness of who God is, who we are, and particularly how God calls us to live. Catholic Christian morality gives direction to our response to God's call.

Objective:

To help the young adolescent grow in an understanding of the moral responsibilities arising from one's relationship with Jesus.

To help the young adolescent understand what conscience is and how to form his or her conscience according to the Catholic faith.

To help the young adolescent learn basic concepts of morality and develop skills for moral decision making.

To enable the young adolescent to recognize the role of the Spirit and the witness and guidance of the Catholic Christian community in moral living.

Prayer is an expression of our awareness of and response to God's presence, love, goodness, and saving power.

Objective:

To assist the young adolescent to grow in a desire for and appreciation of prayer as essential to the Christian life.

To help the young adolescent, through the presentation and experience of a variety of prayer forms, to develop the ability to pray.

These Guidelines are designed so that the curriculum of each grade level builds upon that of the year before. More detailed grade level curriculum can be obtained by contacting your child's catechist or the DRE.

Particular requirements concerning homework and testing will be determined by individual catechists. Catechists are expected to notify parents of any such requirements. However, when picking up students at the end of class, parents should regularly check with the catechist to see how their child is progressing and if any assignments are due or outstanding.

CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR CATECHESIS

Our Catholic tradition has always affirmed the dignity of the human person as created in the image and likeness of God. Every person with whom we come in contact deserves to be seen by us with the eyes of God. We know that ministry with children and youth, in particular, is a sacred trust.

St. Mary, Mother of the Church Parish is committed to preserve, at all times and in all places, this sacred trust which is rooted in our faith in Jesus Christ.

In 2002, the Bishops of the United States approved The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, in an effort to protect children and youth from sexual abuse at all levels of church life and to restore trust in a Church scarred by the scandal of clergy sexual abuse. Article 12 of the charter directs all dioceses to create programs and processes to teach children and youth about sexual abuse and its prevention. In the Archdiocese of New York, this training will be integrated into the religious education curriculum each year in all schools and parish religious education programs.

The following sexual abuse awareness elements are being integrated into the religious education program curriculum. In order to keep our children safe, we need the continued support and interest of our parents.

Curriculum for Catechesis with Safe Environment Topics Pre-K; K; Grade 1

The Good Shepherd wants to keep us safe from harm.

The “wolf in sheep’s clothing” wants to get close to hurt us. Jesus wants us to be safe.

God made us special and sacred.

Part of our body is always covered because this part is special and sacred. This part is the part covered by our bathing suit.

Only certain very good people should see or touch this part of our body, and then, they only see and touch us to help keep us clean and healthy. These very good people are usually our parents or caregivers, and a doctor or nurse. When these people see or touch us in the part covered by a bathing suit, they do so only when it is necessary to help us. If we do not need help, we say, “No, thank you; I don’t need your help.” Other people should never see or touch this part of our body because it is a special and sacred part of us. We are special and sacred. Jesus wants us to be safe and happy.

If someone tries to get close to see or touch this special and sacred part of your body, you should:

1. **Tell a good adult**
2. **Tell another good adult**
3. **Keep telling good adults until you get help and are safe from the “wolf in sheep’s clothing”.**

**Curriculum for Catechesis with Safe Environment Topics
Grades 2 through 5**

The Sacrament of Reconciliation (grades 2;3;5) / Study of Morality (grade 4)

God loves us and created us for happiness.
God's commandments are the way to
happiness.

Primacy of the first commandment: The authority, wisdom, and goodness of a God of love who created us for happiness.

Fourth commandment: obedience to human authority

- obligation of all humans to obey God's standards
- requirement that human authority be honorable
- the moral obligation to disobey human authority that violates God's standards

Fifth, Sixth, Ninth commandments:

God made us special and sacred.

Part of our body is always covered because this part is special and sacred. This part is the part covered by our bathing suit.

Only certain very good people should see or touch this part of our body, and then, they only see and touch us to help keep us clean and healthy. These very good people are usually our parents or caregivers, and a doctor or nurse. When these people see or touch us in the part covered by a bathing suit, they do so only when it is necessary to help us.

If we do not need help, we say, "No, thank you; I don't need your help."

Other people should never see or touch this part of our body because it is a special and sacred part of us.

We are special and sacred. We honor, respect, and care for ourselves and other people should honor, respect, and care for us.

What to do when a person of authority/power wants you to violate standards of goodness and safety:

- Tell a trustworthy adult
- Tell another trustworthy adult
- Keep telling trustworthy adults until you get help and are safe from harm.

**Curriculum for Catechesis with Safe Environment Topics
Grades 6 through 8**

The Study of Scripture (grade 6)

Adam and Eve: Original Sin

Refusal to obey the God of love who created us for happiness
Trusting the stranger who pretended to be concerned, to care.

Personal Growth / Sexuality / Sacrament of Reconciliation (grade 7)

Relationships and Morality (grade 8)

We are social beings and we have been created for relationships. Our need for relationships should never be a reason to permit our own dignity to be compromised. At the same time, we should always relate to others in a way that recognizes their human dignity.

Sacrament of Reconciliation

God loves us and created us for happiness. God's commandments are the way to happiness.

Primacy of the first commandment:

The authority, wisdom, and goodness of a God of love who created us for happiness.

Fourth commandment:obedience to human authority

- obligation of all humans to obey God's standards
- requirement that human authority be honorable
- the moral obligation to disobey human authority that violates God's standards

What to do when a person of authority/power wants you to violate standards of goodness and safety:

- Tell a trustworthy adult
- Tell another trustworthy adult
- Keep telling trustworthy adults until you get help and are safe from harm.

Fifth, Sixth, Ninth commandments:

God made us special and sacred.

Part of our body is always covered because this part is special and sacred. This part is the part covered by our bathing suit.

Only certain very good people should see or touch this part of our body, and then, they only see and touch us to help keep us clean and healthy. These very good people are usually our parents or caregivers, and a doctor or nurse. When these people see or touch us in the part covered by a bathing suit, they do so only when it is necessary to help us.

If we do not need help, we say, "No, thank you; I don't need your help."

Other people should never see or touch this part of our body because it is a special and sacred part of us.

We are special and sacred. We honor, respect, and care for ourselves and other people should honor, respect, and care for us.

How we can be deceived:

1. A person appears to be good.
2. A person who offers us something we like or want.
3. A person who plays with our feelings.
4. A person who wants to be alone with us.
5. A person who wants to see or touch the bathing suit area of our body
6. A person who wants to hide the truth. (eighth commandment - grades 4 & 5)
7. A person who forces us to make promises or threatens us.



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**St Mary, Mother of the Church
100 Jackson St. , PO Box 780
Fishkill, NY 12524**

**Parent Agreement to Abide by
The Religious Education Program Parent Handbook**

Family Name _____

Children: Full name of Child **Grade Level**

I have read the Religious Education Program Parent Handbook and I and I agree to follow the Religious Education Program policies and procedures stated herein.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Parent/Guardian Name Printed: _____

Date: _____

Return this agreement by _____
(Date)

To: Katherine Hamilton, DRE
PO Box 780 , 100 Jackson St
Fishkill, NY 12524