

**St. Marianne Cope
Roman Catholic Churches of
St Thomas of Canterbury~St. Joseph
Faith Formation**

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**Parish Youth
Faith Formation Program
Parent Handbook**

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Letter to Parents

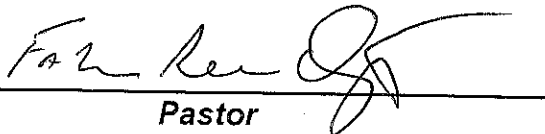
Dear Parents,

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 Faith Formation 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 *Faith Formation 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



Coordinator 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.

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

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 Faith Formation session but with a personal assistant. In consultation with the parent, the Director and Catechist will design an approach to Faith Formation 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 Faith Formation 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 Faith Formation and be currently enrolled in the second year.

Confirmation is received in 9th grade after the completion of the eighth year curriculum when the child has fulfilled all grade level requirements and complete Immediate Preparation.

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 Faith Formation Program.

The immediate preparation program for each Sacrament consists in:

- at least 2 parent sessions particular to the Sacrament being received,
- a Day of Prayer for child and parent centered on the Sacrament being received,

The required parent meetings are listed in the Faith Formation program calendar. In addition, rehearsals for the reception of the Sacrament are also scheduled.

Preparation for Sacraments for Children Who Have Disabilities

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

Responsibilities of Parents in regard to the Religious Education Program

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 Faith Formation 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 Faith Formation;
- participating in their child's faith formation by making use of the parent/family materials
- praying at home with the child, including the prayers to be memorized;
- Assisting their child with assigned at-home activities as needed.

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 Faith Formation Sessions;
- arriving on time each week for the Faith Formation Session;
- being well-prepared for each Faith Formation 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 Faith Formation Program including appropriate dress.

Registration and Placement

The Parish Faith Formation 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 Faith Formation Program every year. The registration procedure is as follows:

- Register the child for Faith Formation Program within time period specified by the parish.
- Complete *Registration Form* and medical forms as needed and submit them to Director of Faith Formation
- 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 Faith Formation the payment of fees when registration opens in March.

No child will be refused participation in the Faith Formation program because of inability to pay the fee. Parents for whom the fee would cause a severe financial burden should contact the Director for a *Financial Assistance Form* to submit to the Pastor. 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.

The Registration for Confirmation Preparation Students grades 7 and 8 include a textbook. If lost or misplaced, a fee of \$ 25 will be charged for a new book.

Child's Placement in Religious Education Sessions

The final decision for each child's placement in the Faith Formation Program sessions is made by the Director of Faith Formation and the Pastor.

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 Faith Formation 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 2 absences the parent will receive an official notification of the child's absences and a request for a parent conference will be made. If the absences continue beyond 2, 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 2 occurrences of late arrival, the parent will receive an official notification and a request for a parent conference. If the late arrivals continue beyond 4 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. The Director will send a copy of the child's permanent record to the Faith Formation 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 Faith Formation sessions take place.

Arrival

The Faith Formation Sessions take place at the following times:

Sunday Family Faith Formation Classes grades 1-6 (10 am-11 am) see scheduled classes

Wednesday Confirmation Preparation Classes grades 7 and 8 (6:30 pm- 8:00 pm) see scheduled classes.

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

Lateness

Punctuality is essential. Children and Parents who arrive late not only miss important information but also disrupt the entire Faith Formation session.

Sunday session- parent/s and child/ren should arrive 10 minutes before the session begins

Confirmation Preparation students- should arrive 5 minutes before their session begins.

If the child arrives late, he/she reports to the Faith Formation desk, located in the lobby, and from there will be brought to the session.

If the child arrives late for the Faith Formation session more than 2 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 4 times in the year, this can result in repeating the year. These make-up sessions will be determined by the Director and Pastor.

Absences

The child's regular attendance at the Faith Formation sessions is very important to his/her whole life.

Due to the limited number of classes, attendance is a requirement.

Family Faith Formation – See Attendance and Packet Policy

Confirmation Preparation – When absent, make up materials must be submitted. An email will be sent to the parent the day after a scheduled class with instructions.

Two absences will necessitate a conference between the Director, parent and the child.

Three absences is grounds for retention

If absences exceed the required limit due to severe illness or other special circumstance arrangements to complete session work will be made by the Director.

Notification Procedure for Absence

When a child is to be absent from a program session, the parent must give the Director notification before the Faith Formation Program begins. A written note must be submitted prior to or within one week of absence or call 845-534-2547 or email reled@stt-stj.com.

If the child is absent and the Director has not received previous notification, the Director will alert the parent by a flocknote the day after class.

Family Faith Formation- see Attendance and Packet Policy

Confirmation Preparation- parents will receive an email the day after class with instructions

Dismissal

At the end of the Faith Formation 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. 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.
- Staff members of the Faith Formation 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:

Family Faith Formation- Older students will be brought to the gym with the parents. Younger students will remain in the classrooms. Parents must go into the classroom to pick up their child/ren.

Confirmation Preparation- Students in the old school building will leave from the side door of the building. The front door of the old school building is for emergency exit and entrance only. Students in the main school building will be dismissed to the lobby. No child may remain on the parish premises after the Religious Education Program ends because supervision is not provided. The parent must instruct the child to report to the Director in the unforeseen event of not being picked up on time.

Dismissal of an Individual before the End of a Session

If your child needs to be dismissed early, the request for this early dismissal should be given to the Director 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 Director or appropriate adult will go to the classroom and walk the child out to meet the parent. For security reasons, the parent may not go directly to the classroom area.

Early Dismissal of the Program

The Faith Formation 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

1. All parents received a calendar when registering and the handbook is posted on the website. The handbook contains all important information as it relates to the Faith Formation Program.
2. The Faith Formation Program will notify you through FLOCKNOTES with notices of calendar changes, upcoming events, reminders for parent meetings, etc.
3. All calendar events are subject to change, so please read your FLOCKNOTES.
4. If you haven't registered for Flocknotes please do so:
Visit flocknote.com/STCanterbury

FLOCKNOTES: are sent weekly on Mondays before noon and when needed.

WEBSITE: All Schedules and necessary documents are posted on the St. Thomas of Canterbury – St. Joseph website. The schedule for the upcoming Faith Formation Year will be posted in June. <https://ststthomasjoseph.com/religious-education-news>

BULLETIN: Up to date Faith Formation information is also posted in the weekly church bulletin.

Emergency Cancellations of Program

1. THERE WILL BE NO FAITH FORMATION CLASSES WHEN THE CORNWALL/NEWBURGH SCHOOLS ARE CLOSED
2. WHEN CORNWALL/NEWBURGH SCHOOL DISTRICT CANCELS "ALL AFTER SCHOOL ACTIVITIES" ALL FAITH FORMATION CLASSES ARE ALSO CANCELLED FOR THAT DAY.
3. You will receive a Flocknote in the event of a closing or cancellation and (WHUD) 100.7, K104.7, MIX97.7, (WPDH) 101.5, and (The Wolf) 94.3/97.3 will also be notified.
4. It is important that you check your calendar often. Calendar dates are subject to change. We service two different school districts so any additional closings, not on our original calendar, cannot be honored.

In an emergency situation, the children will be taken to the following supervised "safe place" where parents can pick them up: St. Thomas of Canterbury Church

Postponements and Rescheduled Events

A flocknote will be sent in the event of postponements or changes in the schedule.

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 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. Parents should not phone the Catechist.

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.

Use of Social Networking Sites by Faith Formation Program

Regarding the use of Social Networking Sites and all other electronic communication, the parish Faith Formation 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.
- 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.

The written permission for all the above must be given directly to the Faith Formation Director.

Cell Phones

The use of cell phones and other electronic devices by the child is not permitted during the Faith Formation session unless this is directed by the Catechist as part of the educational process. Cell phones brought into the place of the Faith Formation session should be turned off. Children in need of contacting a parent must ask the Catechist's permission to go to the Faith Formation Office to place the call.

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..

Dress Code

Children are required to wear modest clothing which reflects the dignity of the Faith Formation 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.

Food

No food is allowed during the Faith Formation Program for the following reasons:

- some children have medical restrictions or allergies to certain foods or ingredients;
- The limited time needed for class instruction is important work of imparting 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 Faith Formation sessions.

Behavior Management

Catechists use behavior management appropriate to an educational environment as a necessary means for the Faith Formation 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.

1. It is expected that in the Faith Formation Program the Gospel values of charity, kindness, honesty, respect, sharing, obedience to authority, etc. that are being learned in class should be lived. Therefore, acts of violence, prejudice or abuse by words or actions will not be tolerated by anyone.
2. In the event of an incident, a *Behavioral Report* will be submitted by the Catechist or Director. The parent/guardian will be notified about the report. The report must be signed by a parent/guardian to enable the student back into the classroom.
3. Once a student receives his/her 3rd *Behavioral Report*, The Program Coordinator and Pastor reserve the right to dismiss from the program any student, who after initial correction/s, continues to be rude, disruptive, or in any way show disrespect to classmates or continued lack of cooperation with the Catechist.
4. 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:

Bullying and Cyber-bullying

Bullying includes but is not limited to: threatening physical harm, verbal abuse, and 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.

Accidental damage should be immediately reported to the Director.

Unacceptable Behavior

The following types of behavior are not allowed during the Religious Faith Formation 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,
- 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.

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 Faith Formation 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 Faith Formation 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 Director and should be administered in the office.

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 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 on the registration form.

Medical Emergency Information

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

Safe Environment

Archdiocesan Children Protection Policy

The Archdiocese of New York and St. Thomas of Canterbury-St. Joseph are committed to ensuring the personal safety of all children in the Faith Formation Program. Therefore the parish and its Faith Formation 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 dates for this training can be found on the *Religious Education Program Calendar*. Parents have the option to exempt their child from any session of the Safe Environment Training. If the Parent chooses to do so, they must complete and sign the *Parent Opt-Out Form* which they secure from the Faith Formation Office.

Families in the Family Faith Formation Program will receive their opt-out form and instruction in their September packet. If opting out it must be submitted in your return packet in October.

Visits to Religious Education Program by Unauthorized Persons

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



FAMILY FAITH FORMATION ATTENDANCE AND PACKET POLICY

1. Families are required to attend every scheduled Sunday class.
2. In the event that an absence is unavoidable you must attend the make up class.
3. If attending the make up class you must contact the office prior to the day of the make up class to let us know that you are attending.
4. If both a Sunday and the make up class are missed it is the responsibility of the parent to contact the office to set up an appointment for both the parent and the student for packet instruction.
5. A review of continued enrollment for the Family Faith Formation student will be determined by the pastor if **more than two absences are reported.**
6. Return packets must contain review sheets. Review sheets will be corrected and students will receive credit for completing this requirement.

It is very important to keep communication open. We understand that special circumstances may arise. If this occurs please take the time to contact the office so that we can work together.