

Family Catechesis Handbook



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St. Patrick Parish

Religious Education Program

FORMING INTENTIONAL DISCIPLES IN JESUS CHRIST



“The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ.” (Catechesis Tridentate #5)

This handbook contains certain policies and procedures for St. Patrick Family Catechesis P.R.E.P. Program. The program may change any of its policies and procedures as needed and apply them as circumstances dictate.

In the event of such a change, parents will be given prompt notification and provided with an addendum as necessary.

If you have questions about a particular policy or procedure, please contact the program director.

Students and parents must accept and abide by the policies and procedures contained in this handbook in order for the student to attend the program.

MISSION STATEMENT

“St. Patrick Church, in the process of strengthening its Catholic Community, seeks to make the Gospel of Jesus Christ better known and loved through prayer, stewardship and good works

PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

Canon Law, the law of the Church, states that “parents above others are obliged to form their children in the faith and practice of Christian life by word and example (Can. 774 §2). The General Directory for Catechesis, the National Directory for Catechesis, and many other Church documents resound this sentiment. At your child's baptism, you accepted "the responsibility of training your child in the practice of the faith" and acknowledged "your duty to bring your child up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor" (Rite of Baptism). St. Patrick Parish recognizes and affirms parents in their role as the primary catechists of their children. Its parish religious education programs exist to assist parents in fulfilling their obligation by providing them with a formal, structured, and planned program of catechesis and formation.

Our mission is to assist parents in providing sound catechesis on the catechism and teachings of the Catholic Church so their children will be formed in the faith of the Catholic tradition. We strive to partner with parents in leading their children to a relationship with Jesus and to experience and appreciate their Catholic identity. This is accomplished by providing the parents and their children with ample opportunities to live and experience their faith through catechesis, community and worship.

By following the guidelines provided to us by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and through the use of the *Christ Our Life* textbook, our Family Catechesis Program strives to incorporate these tasks in all of its catechetical efforts.

PARENT'S/GUARDIANS ROLE

Parents are the primary religious educators of their children. Our work with your children is to support and strengthen your efforts at home in passing on the Catholic faith and teaching Catholic moral values. Children should be able to see their parents as living models of our Catholic faith. Parents who have a personal relationship with Christ, placing Him first in their lives, teach their children the most valuable lesson they will learn. Our partnership as Church at home and school will be successful only when there is consistency between what happens in the home and what is taught in our religious education program.

As stated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #22, “Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God. The Parish is the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents.”

Family Catechesis by Loyola Press

Helping Build Faithful Families

For a variety of reasons, parishes across the country are inviting parents to become the primary catechists of their children. The *Christ Our Life* Family Catechesis program makes this possible by working in conjunction with the core *Christ Our Life* program. Our Family Catechesis program is unique in that it helps parents grow in their own faith while they guide their children in core faith formation, nurtures faith and helps build community.

How It Works

Christ Our Life Family Catechesis combines parish-based group meetings and grade-specific instruction by our catechists with at-home sessions guided by parents.

Families will meet once a month and be introduced to the unit. At the beginning of our gather, we will share Scripture. The children will be dismissed with their catechist to work on the first chapter of the unit. At the conclusion the children will join their parent with a wrap-up closing prayer.

In addition, the Religious Education Programs assist parents in their God given role as educators in the faith life of their children by:

- Providing religious education classes for children.
- Providing opportunities for prayer, adoration, service, liturgy, and stewardship within the program for students, parents, and families.
- Providing opportunities for families to participate in liturgies, seasonal activities, and works of mercy.
- Providing regular opportunities for families to become involved in forming their children in the Catholic faith.

CALENDARS:

Parents are provided with a yearly calendar at the beginning of the program. This calendar will be posted in the Religious Education Center bulletin board and can also be found on the parish website under the **YOUTH Tab-PREP** page and is subject to change during the course of the year. **Level 2** First Penance & Eucharist and **Level 7** Confirmation timelines are posted on the website as well.

CUSTODY POLICY:

The Program will not become involved in adjudicating the rights of parents in relation to the custody of their children. Therefore, if a parent is separated, divorced, or unmarried, it is the **responsibility of both** biological parents to provide the program director with the latest, most up-to-date Custodial Order or Custody Agreement. The Program will request these documents at the time of registration. If either Custodial Order or Custody Agreement changes during the course of the year, it remains the **responsibility of both** biological parents to provide the revised document to the program director immediately. This is also true in the event that such an agreement is issued after the time of enrollment. **In the absence of such documentation the program will and must assume that parents share legal custody.**

Our program abides by the provisions of the Buckley Amendment with respect to the rights of non-custodial parents. In the absence of a court order to the contrary, our program will provide the non-custodial parent with access to the records and other program related information regarding the child.

If there is a court order specifying that there is to be no information given, it is the **responsibility of the custodial parent** to provide the program director with **an official and the latest copy of the court order.**

If a court order prohibits our releasing a child into the custody of a non-custodial parent, it is the **responsibility of the custodial parent to provide** the program director with **an official copy** of the court order or custody section of the divorce decree.

In situations with shared legal custody, the parish program expects the cooperation of both parents, especially in regards to sacramental preparation and celebrations.

FAMILY CATECHESIS COMPONENTS CLARIFICATIONS PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

1. To be eligible for this program option, a family must attend Sunday Mass regularly, and Holy Days of Obligation to the best of their ability.
2. Attend Class Mass for each level- dates will be posted on the calendar and in Flocknotes.
3. To be eligible for this program, participants must be members of St. Patrick Parish or been part of the P.R.E.P program for at least one year with permission from your parish's pastor. Applicants whose **child has not been baptized** at St. Patrick are asked to provide a copy of their child's baptismal certificate.
4. Students that have been enrolled in the program with no more than four absences during the 2024-2025 PREP year.
5. Must have a reliable internet connection for email and submissions of e-assessment via Loyola Press *Christ Our Life* in order to return assignments by due dates.
6. Families will participate in the **Living Rosary in October** and at least once during the PREP year the **Sunday Rosary** either by leading a decade or via zoom.

7. Families will attend Family PREP Days and the Joyful Scenes of Christmas.
8. Families will attend Stations of the Cross at least once during Lent.
9. Complete all registration forms and submit all requires paperwork and fees at the time of registration including the Family Catechesis Contract Form.

DEFINING FAMILY CATECHSIS This program option is grounded in family catechesis and therefore depends on the family's participation for a student to succeed. The Program defines the family as the student, and any parents and siblings living in the same household. If the family, as defined, cannot participate in a Family Session, Spiritual, or Act of Mercy activity, then at least one parent must accompany the student and participate in the activity with the student. If both parents are unavailable due to work, then a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or godparent may stand in the parent's place. Parents of other students enrolled in the Program **DO NOT meet** this definition and may not serve as a substitute for another student's parent unless they are directly related to said student.

SPIRITUAL COMPONENT

The Spiritual Component of the program consists of two parts:

1. We ask parents to strengthen their spiritual life by attending one of the Adult Faith Formation opportunities such as: Small Group, Bible Study, Ladies Evening of Reflection, Men's Night, 40 Hours, Lecture series with Fr. Connolly, etc... All events will be advertised in the bulletin, Flocknotes and on our website.
2. Participation in the **Sacrament of Penance** at least once during the Program year.
3. Families attend weekly Masses and Holy Days of Obligation to the best of their ability.



FAMILY CATECHESIS POLICIES & PROCEDURES ARRIVAL PROCEDURES

Families report to the St. Joseph Room following the 9AM Mass. Those families that do not attend the 9AM Mass are expected to report to the hall no later than 10:10AM. The actual start time of the session may vary depending on when Mass concludes. Family Sessions will conclude 90 minutes after the start time.

ATTENDANCE

The entire family is welcomed and encouraged to attend the Family Sessions and program activities. However, at the minimum, children must be accompanied by an adult family member at every Family Session and program activity. Families will be expected to attend all Sunday Family Classes, (including Living Rosary, Family PREP Days, Joyful Scenes of Christmas, Kid Talk and final), barring extenuating circumstances, such as illness or family emergency, and no more than **two sessions** can be missed under such circumstances. Families that miss more than two sessions may be required to complete the remainder of the program year in the traditional weekly program. Parents will be responsible to make up any work already covered in the weekly traditional PREP.

Participation in sports and extracurricular activities are not considered extenuating circumstances. In addition, family events (e.g., parties, celebrations, etc.) and vacations are also not considered extenuating circumstances and should be planned around the Sunday Family Sessions so that they do not conflict with a family's participation in said sessions. For those families that miss a Family Catechesis Session due to extenuating circumstances, the material presented during the session will be made up and parents will be responsible for teaching the entire Unit that month. Families that do not meet all of the program requirements by the end of the program year may not be invited to participate in the Family Catechesis Option the following year.

AT-HOME ASSIGNMENTS

Every month, families will be expected to complete the chapters for a given Unit at home using the student textbook and materials provided on the *Christ Our Life* website. These assignments are a necessary and required component of the Family Catechesis Option. Families that fail to complete the required assignments may be prohibited from enrolling in the Family Catechesis the following year or attending Camp Caritas for Confirmation aged students.

To complete the monthly chapter assignments, parent must do the following:

Catechists will provide parents with the chapters, material and assignment(s) to be covered for the unit. Information pertaining to the particular text assignment can be found at:

Go to loyolapress.com

Click Faith Formation-Christ Our Life

Click Families and scroll to the particular grade level.

Click AT-HOME EDITION – here you will find an actual dialogue that can be useful when talking with your children about the content of the chapter.

DISCIPLINE

The Program is designed to assist parents with the faith formation of their children, as well as foster values and behavior that are in accord with Catholic Church teaching and a life of discipleship. The program has NO TOLERANCE for behaviors that are contrary to Catholic faith and morals, or the Gospel, including but not limited to ongoing acts of obstinacy, improper language, fighting, physical, emotional or psychological intimidation, bullying, vandalism, demeaning behavior such as name-calling, obscene language or gestures, and harassment (including but not limited to social media posts, texting, emails, etc.). Such behaviors violate the central teaching of our faith and will not be tolerated in any form from students or their family members. Conduct by students, family members, or parents/guardians, or anyone acting on their behalf, incompatible with the educational and religious mission of the parish is grounds for disciplinary action. Conduct that includes cases of threats of violence or harassment, in any form, including oral, written, or electronic (including but not limited to social media posts, texting, emails, etc.), against any member of the program community, is grounds for immediate dismissal from the Program, as well as reporting the incident to the appropriate legal authorities where appropriate. These categories do not cover every possible situation. The Program Director makes the final determination of what is considered appropriate or inappropriate behavior, both in and out of class, in the Program generally, and outside the Program, where such improper behavior affects the Program community. The Program Director and Pastor will make the final determination as to what behaviors warrant disciplinary action.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES:

Since our Lord's life is an example of total self-discipline, the Religious Education Program strives to teach discipline as well as doctrines of our faith. We ask that the student adhere to the following:

- Respectful attitude and speech to teachers and fellow students
- Reverent attention to and participation in prayer services
- Students may only enter the classroom when the catechist/aide are present.

- Appropriate dress

Girls – no tank tops, cutoffs, short shorts, pajama pants

Boys – no hats or pajama pants

All – no rollerblade sneakers, no cleats, flip-flops, slides, or slipper like shoes.

TEXTBOOKS used in the Program are approved by the Archdiocesan Office for Catholic Education, and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Every student will be assigned a textbook. This textbook is a necessary tool in helping the catechist achieve the required learning objectives and will be checked monthly for the completion of at home assignments. Therefore, students must bring their textbooks to every Family Class Session. Parents should exercise

caution in making sure that the textbook is secured in a set place within the home so it is not lost during the academic year. Lost textbooks will need to be replaced. Parents assume full responsibility for all costs associated with the replacement textbook including any taxes, shipping and handling. A folder to keep loose papers and a string bag to hold all material is highly encouraged as well. Please do not send your child with their school pack back. We are not responsible for lost or broken items brought from home.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

The Program realizes that devices such as cell phones and smart phones have become a necessary and convenient technological and communication tool for both parents and children. In order to prevent such devices from becoming a distraction while at the Family Session we have established the following policy:

- Students will be asked to leave all electronic devices with parents prior to reporting to class.
- Parents will be asked to turn off cell phones during the Family Session.

SNACK FREE ZONE:

In response to the many PREP students with food allergies, the Program is making every reasonable accommodation to lessen the possibility of exposure to food allergies by designating all classrooms as **Snack Free Zones**. This policy is to be followed before, during and after PREP time. The program has a **NO FOOD POLICY** only water is permitted in the classroom.

LEARNING CHALLENGES & HEALTH CONCERNS:

Please help us help your child by alerting the DRE and catechist of any special learning challenges your child may have. Your child participates in an academic situation while attending PREP. Please help us to assist your child in the best way possible. Please let the catechist and the office know in writing any accommodations that your child receives while in day school. We want to support each student in the way that is best for him or her.

The program has a **NO FOOD POLICY** only water is permitted in the classroom. The **ONLY** exceptions that will be made is for medical necessity such as to accommodate a diabetic child or child with low blood glucose. A **doctor's note will be required** and must be on file prior to the start of the program. On Donut Sundays please enjoy your treat after class.

Parents of students that have life threatening allergies in Levels K-3:

A parent of that child is required to volunteer in your child's classroom weekly to help prevent any cross-contamination and to administer any medication if needed. Please keep in mind we do not have a nurse on staff.

ASSESSMENTS

Students need to exhibit proficient mastery of the required material for their level to be considered for promotion at the end of the year. Assessing student progress provides feedback to students, parents, and catechists alike, allows corrective measures to be taken when necessary to help ensure that a student's proficient mastery is attained, and ensures that families receive assistance as needed to help them succeed.

Students are required to complete a unit assessment that will be provided the child's catechist with direction on when and how to return it. All work and assessments must be turned into the catechist by the due date indicated on the calendar. The Catechist may recommend that certain pages, concepts, or material be reviewed with a student if the assessment indicates that further review is warranted to ensure mastery of the material has been attained. Catechists will communicate this information directly to parents via email. Failure to complete and submit work and assessments student may be withheld from year-end promotion or admittance to Camp Caritas for Confirmation.

Archdiocesan final assessment will be given in person on the date indicated on the calendar to ensure that a student is proficient in the key objectives established for the level.

SNOW EMERGENCIES & PROGRAM CANCELLATIONS

In the event of inclement weather on the day of a Family Session, parents will receive a Flocknote by 9:00 AM to inform them of the session's status. In the event of a program cancellation, the Family Session will not be made up but information will be set via email to guide you through the unit. Parents will be responsible for completing all the chapters for the assigned unit that month at home with their children.

PARENT COMMUNICATION:

Communication between parents, catechist, and Religious Education Office is extremely important if objectives of the program are to be met. Avenues of communication used to inform parents of major happenings may take one of the following forms:

- Parent meetings
- Weekly Flock notes (PREP and Parish)
- Notice in the church bulletin
- Notice home with student
- Email to the parent

UPDATING CONTACT INFORMATION:

The contact information that you provide at the time of registration will be used as the primary means of contacting you. Updating changes to this information, especially changes to email addresses, is your sole responsibility. In order to receive necessary and vital information pertaining to your child's participation in our program it is imperative that you notify the program director as to changes in address, phone numbers or email.

CATECHETICAL STAFF & PERSONNEL

St. Patrick religious education programs participate in and adhere to the Safe Environment Program (SEP) mandated by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. This policy has been in effect in all Archdiocesan parishes, schools, and children's programs since 2002, and has undergone several revisions as the SEP and State Law have evolved. All Program personnel are required to abide by the Safe Environment Program of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, which includes the following:

REQUIRED TRAININGS

- Safe Environment Training session. This training is mandated by and provided through the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The training session is about two and a half hours long and must be completed by new employees and volunteers within 90 days of beginning service. This training needs to be completed one time only.
- Standards of Ministerial Behavior and Boundaries (SMBB). All volunteers and employees must agree in writing to abide by and uphold the SMBB, which will be presented at the Safe Environment Training Session.
- Mandated Reporter Training: This training is required by PA State Law and is provided by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. It consists of three 20 minutes training modules, which can be completed online. This training will be updated from time to time as PA State Law requires. Volunteers will be notified when this training requires updating.

REQUIRED BACKGROUND CHECKS

- PA State Police Criminal Record Check. To be completed prior to beginning service. Must be renewed every five years.
- PA Child Abuse History Clearance. To be completed prior to beginning service. Must be renewed every five years.
- Federal Background Check (Fingerprinting): Required only of volunteers who reside outside of Pennsylvania or who have resided outside Pennsylvania any time within the last 10 years. This is

renewed every five years until 10 years of PA residency is attained. Thereafter, the volunteer must submit a Disclosure Statement Application every five years (see next bullet point).

- Disclosure Statement Application. To be completed every five years by volunteers who to be completed every five years by volunteers who have resided in PA for at least 10 years.

REGISTRATION:

Registration for the upcoming year **OPENS IN MARCH** (to the best of our ability) and will be communicated through the Parish Bulletin and Flocknotes. Parents will be able to register and pay online through Parish Giving or use a paper form found on the parish website. Checks may be made payable to St. Patrick Church.

Parish Giving will send a “Welcome Letter” to the families that have registered with them in the past and provide your user information.

REGISTRATION WILL CLOSE MID-JULY. Please routinely check the reminders communicated through the Parish Bulletin and Flocknotes. Any returning family who registers after the closing date will be charged a \$30.00 late fee. In addition, any returning family who registers after the book order has been placed will also be charged a book fee.

Level 7 Camp Caritas registration opens in January

All registration and payments are handled through **Bishop Shanahan High School.**

For more information call 610-518-1300

Communication about the follow-up classes will be sent through emails and Flocknotes.



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