

*RELIGIOUS EDUCATION  
PROGRAM*



*2024-2025  
PARENT HANDBOOK*

## **PHILOSOPHY**

### **I. PARISH MISSION STATEMENT**

The Mission of St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Springfield, PA is to be disciples. Centered in the Eucharist, we are called to encounter, follow and imitate Jesus' way of life through the humble example of our patron, St. Francis of Assisi.

### **II. PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY**

Canon Law states that "Parents above others are obliged to form their children in the faith and practice of the Christian life by word and example; godparents and those who take the place of parents are bound by an equivalent obligation." (Can. 774§2). The General Directory for Catechesis and the National Directory for Catechesis resound the same sentiment. St. Francis of Assisi Religious Education Program recognizes and embraces parents in their role as the primary catechists of their children as they strive to fulfill this special role.

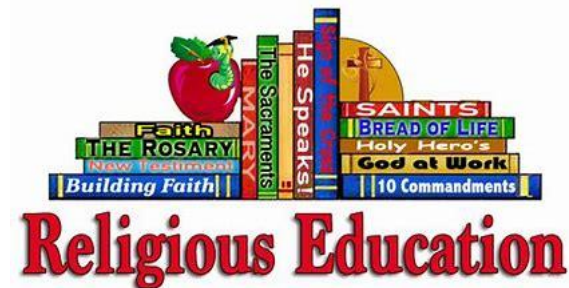
Our mission is to assist parents in providing sound catechesis on the catechism and teachings of the Catholic Church so their children will be formed in the faith of the Catholic tradition. We strive to partner with parents in leading their children to a relationship with Jesus and to experience and 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, service, community and worship.

As stated in the *General Directory for Catechesis*, "The definitive aim of *catechesis* is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ." All evangelizing activity is understood as promoting communion with Jesus Christ. Starting with the "initial" conversion of a person to the Lord, moved by the Holy Spirit through the primary proclamation of the Gospel, catechesis seeks to solidify and mature this first adherence..."



As stated in the National Directory for Catechesis published in 2005, "...Catechesis comprises six fundamental tasks, each of which is related to an aspect of faith in Christ...Catechesis promotes *knowledge of the faith*...Catechesis promotes a knowledge of the meaning of the *Liturgy* and the *Sacraments*...Catechesis promotes *moral formation* in Jesus Christ...Catechesis teaches the Christian *how to pray* with Christ...Catechesis prepares the Christian to *live in community* and to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church...Catechesis promotes a *missionary spirit* that prepares the faithful to be present as Christians in society."

By following the guidelines provided to us by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and through the use of the **We Believe** textbook, our Parish Religious Education Program strives to incorporate these tasks in all of its catechetical efforts.



Family Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

I have received and read the St. Francis of Assisi Religious Education Parent Handbook.

Parent/Guardian Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **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."

Please cut off this sheet at the dotted line with scissors and return it to the catechist of your oldest child in the program.



### III. GENERAL INFORMATION

#### Attendance

Consistent attendance is necessary for sequential learning. Four or more absences may prevent advancement to the next level. A conference with the Coordinator of the Religious Education Program will be needed to discuss excessive absences.

In case of absence, parents must e-mail (or call the rectory if e-mail is not available). Parents are asked to state their child's full name, grade level, room or catechist's name and the reason for absence.

**When your child returns the following week, the catechist will provide a make-up assignment. Parents must assist their child in completing this assignment, sign it, and return it the following week.**

If there is to be prolonged absence, parents must contact the Director of Religious Education and the catechist to advise them of the reason for absence and to be informed of missed lessons to complete at home.

Perfect attendance certificates will be awarded to students who are never late or absent.

**Any participant who voluntarily leaves the program for a period of one year will be required to make up the missed year upon re-registration.**

#### Arrival and Dismissal Procedures

Parents/guardians are asked to have their child/ren arrive 10 minutes before the starting time of class. Attendance will be taken and paperwork and home assignments will be collected during this time to allow the children to have a full hour and fifteen minutes of religious instruction. Late comers are a distraction for the rest of the class.

Parents are asked to make a special effort to have their children arrive on time.

**For the safety of the children, it is mandatory for all parents/guardians to escort their child/ren to and from the door of their classroom.**

#### Drop Off and Pick Procedures for Vehicles

Enter and park in the rectory parking lot behind the barriers.

OR

Enter Orchard Road from Saxer Avenue. Travel down Lownes Lane. Stop at Leonard Hall (gym) and exit to Saxer Avenue from Johnston. DO NOT turn onto Johnston from Saxer Avenue. Two way traffic may cause injuries to children and accidents with vehicles.

Cars, vans, etc. may *never* pass the barriers set up near the church or gym. These barriers provide a safe walking area for all students and their parents/guardians who are walking to and from class.

#### Cell Phones

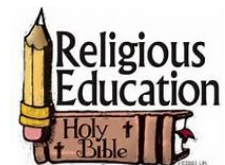
Students may not use cell phones in the classrooms. If cell phones are needed for after class contact with parents/guardians, they must be turned off and kept in the student's book bag. The school is not responsible for lost or damaged cell phones. Cell phones in evidence during a class session will be confiscated and only returned directly to the parent.

#### Changes in Student Information

Any changes in student information (i.e. changes of address, phone number, emergency contact, etc.) that occur during the school year should be communicated to the Religious Education Office as soon as possible so that records may be updated.

#### Communication

Parents are asked to provide an e-mail address at the time of registration. This address will be used by the coordinator of the program for ALL program communication.



## **Conduct**

Since religious education is a program of Christian formation, it is expected that all children will be properly attired and well-mannered at all times. Parents will be notified of consistent disruptive or un-Christian like behavior which may lead to dismissal from the program.

The Parish Religious Education 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. The program has NO TOLERANCE for behaviors that are contrary to Catholic faith and morals, including but not limited to ongoing acts of obstinacy, improper language, fighting, physical, emotional or psychological intimidation, vandalism, demeaning behavior such as name-calling, obscene language or gestures, and harassment. Such behaviors violate the central teaching of our faith and will not be tolerated in any form.

These categories do not cover every possible situation. The parish determines what is appropriate or inappropriate behavior.

Conduct by children or parents/guardians, or anyone acting on their behalf, incompatible with the educational and religious mission of the Parish is grounds for disciplinary action, including but not limited to, immediate dismissal of the student, as well as reporting the incident to the appropriate legal authorities where appropriate.

In addition, in the case of threats of violence or harassment, in any form, including oral, written, or electronic, by a child against any member of the school community, the child, if suspended but not dismissed, may be required to have psychological or psychiatric clearance before returning to school.

In the event a participant engages in any of the above listed behaviors or any inappropriate conduct, and has failed to respond to a catechist's attempt to stop or correct the behavior, the following action may be taken and at the discretion of the pastor or director of the program:

- The student may be removed from the session and the parent or guardian will be immediately notified by phone by the program director. The program director will schedule a conference with the parents, student, and catechist to discuss the matter.

- The student may be removed from the session and the parent or guardian will be immediately notified by the program director and required to pick up their child. Prior to returning to the program the program director will schedule a conference with the parents/guardians, student, and catechist to further discuss the matter.
- The student may be removed from the session and dismissed from the program. The parents/guardians will be immediately notified by the program director and required to pick up their child. Following a conference with the program director, parents/guardians, student, and catechist, the parents will be provided with the option of having their child repeat his or her current grade level the following school year or opting to complete the current year's material by home-schooling their child. In either case, no refund of registration or materials fee will be made.



## **Contraband**

Bringing contraband to the program sessions is strictly prohibited and will be confiscated and returned to parents only. Items considered contraband include, but are not limited to gum, food, beverages, toys, electronic games, beepers, hand-held music devices, weapons, drugs & alcohol and tobacco products. It is unlawful for minors to be in possession of alcohol or tobacco products. Students found to be in possession of such products may be immediately suspended from the program. Depending on the contraband confiscated, the proper legal authorities could be notified.

It is the policy of the parish religious education program to respect the privacy of its students. However, in the event that a student is suspected of having weapons or drugs in his/her possession or is believed to be a threat to himself/herself or others, the director will be notified immediately. The director will conduct a search with an adult staff

member as a witness. Refusal on the part of the student to cooperate will result in the parents/ guardians being contacted and asked to assist with the search. Parental refusal to cooperate will result in the student's immediate dismissal from the program.

## **Curriculum**

In all grades catechists follow the religion guidelines prepared and published by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Because the catechists follow these guidelines, they may not follow the textbook chapters in sequential order and some chapters may not be addressed at all.

Our textbook series, approved by the Archdiocese is entitled ***We Believe*** published by Sadlier. In ***We Believe***, faith is developed through a spiral curriculum based on the **four pillars of the Catechism of the Catholic Church - Creed, Sacraments, Morality, and Prayer**. What Catholics believe, how Catholics worship, how Catholics live and how Catholics pray are taught in every unit, at every level, every year. This ensures that the beliefs of our faith are introduced to and reinforced for our children as they grow, develop, and mature in their faith.

This educationally sound method means that each catechist will build upon and reinforce what students learned previously in other grades. The result is age-appropriate learning on all topics of the faith.

To help parents or guardians become involved as full partners in their children's religious education, ***We Believe*** provides a **Dear Family** page in the child's text. It includes content overview, additional activities, faith formation for you, the parents, and application for family life. In each chapter a **TAKE HOME** activity in the child's text provides another opportunity to share faith at home. For each chapter a **Sharing Faith with My Family** master may be sent home by your child's catechists which includes student-initiated activities and discussions inviting your child to be an evangelizer in your home. Parents are encouraged to make use of the website:

[www.webelieveweb.com](http://www.webelieveweb.com)

## **Dress Code**

Students should come dressed to class and church in proper attire. Tank tops, midriff tops, T-shirts advertising beer/alcohol and bearing offensive words or pictures are not permitted to be worn to class, or in church. Shoes or sneakers are to be worn at all times. For reasons of safety, flip-flops, open-backed/slip-on shoes, and spiked heels are not

permitted. Hats, bandanas and similar head coverings are not permitted. Parents will be notified to bring an appropriate change of clothing for their child if a student dresses inappropriately.

## **Early Dismissal**

Early dismissal is an exception, not a routine practice. Notice to a catechist that a student will require early dismissal that afternoon or evening, may be oral or written, but should be given before the start of class. **Parents must also inform the director of the program by phone before class begins.** Requests for more than three occasions of early dismissal will be referred to the director of the program.

## **Family Catechesis**

In response to the demands of family life and assisting parents in making religious education a priority in their homes, we have an alternate program of faith formation entitled "Family Catechesis."

- Students and their parents come together for an hour and a half session, once per month for 7 months (September, October, November, January, February, March, April).
- In these sessions students are introduced to a new unit of study by catechists in age appropriate classrooms and are taught the first chapter of each unit. (7 themes for 7 months)
- At the same time, parents participate in exploring the same themes through adult presentations and discussions.
- Parents, with resources provided, then work with their children throughout the month completing four other chapters.

## **Other expectations:**

- Families are required to "Explore Four" (or more) life of the parish events of their choice during the 7 months which support faith formation and hand in an "Explore Four Reflection Form following attendance.
- Families complete all the Chapter Reviews and hand them in/email them each month to their child's catechist.
- Parents sign Family Catechesis Contract.
- Families attend weekly Mass.

## Homework

Assignments will be given to the students to be completed at home. These assignments serve to reinforce a lesson taught by the catechist or to prepare the students for the next week's lesson...pages to read, a prayer to memorize, a worksheet to complete. Parents are encouraged to set aside time to review these assignments along with their child's regular academic homework.

## Journaling

Journaling is a part of every class session. Parents are asked to provide their child with a copybook which will serve as his/her journal. Catechists will encourage the students to consider their journals as special books for conversations with God. Parents are asked to assist their child in designing a "spiritual" cover for their journal and covering it with clear contact paper.

## Lateness

Sessions begin promptly at their designated times. Therefore, any student arriving after the designated time will be considered late. It is strongly recommended that children arrive at least 10 (ten) minutes prior to the scheduled class time. Lateness will be noted on the Progress Reports. Chronic lateness will require a conference with a parent and might interfere with a student's promotion and reception of sacraments.

## Non-Custodial Parents

It is the responsibility of both biological parents to provide the parish with the latest, most up to date Custodial Order or Custody Agreement. St. Francis of Assisi Parish will request these documents in the beginning of the year. If either the Custody Order or the Custody Agreement changes during the course of the year, it remains the responsibility of both biological parents to provide that document to the parish immediately.

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 be no information given, it is the responsibility of the custodial parent to provide the program director with an official and 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.

## Outreach/Stewardship

During the year the children are challenged to extend themselves to others through donations to our parish religious education outreach programs among which are:

- ***Peanut Butter and Jelly Collection*** – Jars of peanut butter OR jelly are collected and given to the Nutritional Development Services Office of the Archdiocese
- ***Baby Shower for Jesus*** – Small, new baby items are collected and give to Catholic Social Services and/or the Mother's Home in Darby.
- ***Rice Bowl*** – During the Church season of Lent, families are asked to choose a day during the week to eat a light meal for dinner and place the money they would have spent on that meal in the Rice Bowl Box. Families are asked to return this box the Tuesday after Easter.



## Progress Reports

All students' knowledge of religion, effort and conduct will be evaluated and recorded on progress reports which all students receive in January and May. Parents are asked to sign and return the progress report sent home in January.



## Registration

Registration for the 2024-2025 school year will take place in the spring of 2025. All *new* registrations must be accompanied by proof of baptism which parents must acquire from the church where their child was baptized. No proof of baptism is needed for students who were baptized at St. Francis of Assisi Parish. The registration fee for 2024-2025 will be announced in the spring of 2025. In the event that a student is dismissed from the program due to excessive absences, lateness, problem behavior, or for any other reason, no refund of registration or materials fees will be made. Payment plans are available.

## Restrooms

Restrooms are available to our students, but, because of limited class time, parents should encourage their child(ren) to use the bathroom at home before coming to class.

## Sacraments

Two years of study are required to prepare to celebrate a Sacrament. Children in grade two prepare to celebrate Penance and Holy Eucharist. Students in grade seven prepare to celebrate Confirmation.

Because Church law dictates that a person must be baptized before any other Sacraments are celebrated, *proof of Baptism is required for all children unless the child was baptized at St. Francis of Assisi Parish.* Parents should apply for a certificate from the church in which their child was baptized, and attach it to their child's application for the Sacrament.

Participants exhibiting chronic absences (3 or more), lateness, or who are a persistent discipline problem may have their reception of Baptism, Reconciliation, First Holy Communion and/or Confirmation deferred until the following year or later.

Preparation for the reception of a sacrament is a time of prayerful reflection and discernment. A student's desire to celebrate the sacrament is reflected in his or her positive attitude toward the preparation process. Thus proper attendance and behavior are expected.

Archdiocesan policy requires that a child receive the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation) in the parish where their family is registered.

A mandatory parents' meeting is held for all parents preparing their child(ren) for the celebration of the Sacraments. Practices and a day of reflection are planned for all children preparing for the Sacraments. All children, but especially those who are candidates for the celebration of a Sacrament, *must* attend Sunday/Saturday Mass on a weekly basis. At Baptism, a commitment is made to follow the teachings of Jesus and the Church. The Sacraments of Eucharist and Confirmation call for a deeper commitment. Participation in Mass each week is necessary to nourish and strengthen the call to live a Catholic life.

### *First Reconciliation (Penance)*

**First Reconciliation Parent Meeting:** November 11, 2024, 7PM Church

**First Reconciliation:** Thursday, March 6, 2025

**Dress Code:** Sunday best

### *First Eucharist*

**Date of First Eucharist Parent Meeting:** Monday, March 31, 2025, 7:00PM Church

**Practices Wednesday, April 23, 2025:** 9:00-11AM Practice for the 11:45 Mass; 1:00-2:30PM Practice for the 9:30AM Mass

**Thursday, May 1, 2025:** 9:00-10:30AM Practice for the 9:30AM Mass; 1:00-2:30PM for the 11:45AM Mass

**Parent/Child Practice for First Eucharist:** Monday, April 28, 2025

**6:00-6:45PM (9:30 Mass) and 6:45- 7:30 (11:45AM Mass)**

**First Eucharist:** Saturday, May 3, 2025

**Dress Code:** *Boys* – Navy jacket, white pants, white tie, white shirt, dress shoes; *Girls* – White dress, veil optional, white shoes, white knee socks, white anklets or white stockings. (No gloves)

### *Confirmation*

**Parent Confirmation Meeting:** 7:00PM Church

**Confirmation Commitment Mass:** Sun.9:30AM

**Retreat Day:** 9:00AM – 12:00PM Gym/ Church

**Practices: Students only**

**Confirmation:** Saturday, April 5, 2025





### **Safe Environment Lesson (KIDTALK)**

Education and awareness are keys to preventing sexual abuse of children. The Archdiocese of Philadelphia provides all religious education programs with Safe Environment lesson Plans called “KIDTALK.” To assist the parish in its compliance to address the Charter for the protection of Children and Young People, it is mandatory for all catechists to teach the lesson provided. Parents may preview these lessons sent by the Director of Religious Education or by viewing them online on the Archdiocesan website.

### **PREP Schedule**

**Grades 1, 2 and 3**                      Tuesday, 4:30-5:45PM

**Grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7**                Tuesday, 6:45-8:00PM

### **Shelter in Place Plan**

According to the directives from the Office of Catholic Education, we have established a Shelter in Place Plan here at St. Francis of Assisi. Shelter in Place is a **lock down protocol** that would be used in the event of a chemical release in the atmosphere. If a Lock Down occurs, a situation where NO ONE is permitted IN or OUT of the building, you would not be permitted to come to school to pick up your child(ren) until the local authorities have given the “all clear” for the building to be evacuated.

Our plan in place is to have the children placed in the hallways. Here emergency supplies of food (peanut free) and water would be provided for them.

If your child is on medication which must be taken in the evening or daily, parents should bring an extra dose in a zip-lock bag to the religious education office in the rectory. Instructions and your child’s name, grade, and room number should be placed in the bag.

### **Snow and Emergency Closing**

In the event that classes need to be cancelled due to inclement weather or any other emergency, please listen to KYW radio for a “Community Closing” announcement (not a school closing announcement).

Whenever St. Francis of Assisi Parish School is closed due to severe weather conditions, our Religious Education Program will also be cancelled unless the weather changes. Every effort will be made by all catechists/aides to call and inform their students of cancellations.

### **Special Needs**

Parents should make the Director of Religious Education aware of any special needs, both academic and health, of their child. All information is held in confidence. We are a “peanut free” school.

### **Stewardship**

Stewardship of time, talent and treasure can be taught at a very early age. Students are supplied with offertory envelopes at the beginning of the school year. Parents are encouraged to have their children sacrifice by providing their own offering from allowances or money gifts. Our Religious Education program also provides opportunities for stewardship for the students.

### **Supplies**

Students in all grades are issued a textbook. Copybooks will serve as prayer journals. Parents are asked to place their child’s name, grade level and room number on the inside of the front cover. If a textbook is lost, payment (\$20.00) is expected for a replacement book. To guard against misplaced folders and texts, it is strongly recommended that parents set aside a special book bag for Religious Education materials.

Students in grade four receive a Bible which they are expected to bring to every class and keep for use during their remaining years of religious education. All bibles will be replaced in grades five and six for a fee.



## Schedule

### September

- 10 **Religious Education Begins ~ Parents only attend**  
17 PREP Sessions – (Gr.1-3- 4:30-5:45PM) (Gr.3-7-6:45-8:00PM)  
24 PREP Sessions

### October

- 1 PREP ~ Mission Assembly  
8 PREP Sessions ~ ***Peanut Butter & Jelly Collection Begins!***  
15 PREP Sessions ~ ***Peanut Butter & Jelly Collection Continues!***  
22 PREP Sessions ~ ***Peanut Butter & Jelly Collection Ends!***  
29 PREP Sessions

### November

- 5 **No PREP Sessions** on Election Day  
11 **First Reconciliation Parent Meeting** 7:00PM Church  
12 PREP Sessions ~ ***Mission Boxes Due***  
19 PREP Sessions  
26 PREP Sessions ~ ***Baby Shower for Jesus Begins!***

### December

- 3 PREP Sessions~ ***Baby Shower for Jesus Continues!***  
8 **Confirmation Commitment Mass** 9:30AM Church  
10 PREP Sessions ~ ***Baby Shower for Jesus Ends!***  
17 PREP Sessions ~ ***Advent Prayer Services during regular scheduled classes***

### January

- 7 PREP Sessions  
14 PREP Sessions ***KIDTALK Lesson Will Be Taught***  
21 PREP Sessions ~ ***First Semester Assessments***  
28 PREP Sessions

### February

- 4 PREP Sessions ~***Progress Reports sent home to be signed.***  
11 PREP Sessions  
18 PREP Sessions  
25 PREP Sessions

### March

- 4 PREP Sessions ~ ***Receiving Rice Bowls***  
6 ***First Reconciliation*** 6:30PM Church  
11 PREP Sessions  
18 PREP Sessions  
25 PREP Sessions  
28 **Confirmation Practice** 8:30AM-10:30AM  
31 **First Eucharist Parent Meeting** 7:00PM Church

### April

- 1 PREP Sessions  
3 **Confirmation Practice** 3:15-5:15PM  
5 ***Sacrament of Confirmation*** 10:00AM  
8 PREP Session  
22 PREP Sessions ~ ***Please return Rice Bowls.***  
23 ***First Eucharist Practice***  
28 ***Parent/Child First Eucharist Practice***  
29 PREP Sessions

### May

- 1 **First Eucharist Practice**  
3 ***First Eucharist***  
6 PREP Session ~ ***Second Semester Assessment***  
13 **Closing of the Religious Education Program** ~ Prayer Service and Presentation to the Blessed Mother ~ All children (1-7) will meet in their assigned classrooms to receive their Progress Reports and Promotion Certificates at 6:00PM. We will begin at 6:30PM. Parents are invited! Dismissal will be from the students' assigned classrooms around 7:30PM. First Communicants should come dressed in their First Communion attire. Newly Confirmed should wear their robes. ***All other students should be properly dressed for church.***

