

2023-2024
ST. MICHAEL'S PARISH
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES HANDBOOK

OUR PURPOSE:

St. Michael's Parish offers religious education and formation for young people in Grades One through Eight. Our purpose is to continue the mission of Jesus Christ by proclaiming the Word of God, teaching through our witness to the Word, and enabling our students to be a part of the worshipping community of the Catholic Church.

MAILING ADDRESS:

St. Michael's Religious Education Office
1211 Orange Avenue
Union, NJ 07083

OFFICE HOURS:

Monday through Thursday
9:30AM until 2:30PM
Other hours are available by appointment.

TELEPHONE:

(908) 964-0965
Messages may be left at any time.

EMAIL ADDRESS:

smccd@comcast.net

A. PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parents are the primary educators of their children in the area of faith. Our goal is to assist parents in sharing their faith with their children. We ask that parents speak with their children about each week's lesson. **Notices are sent home periodically via email and/or with the children. Please watch for them.**

In our Archdiocese, Catholic school children in grades K-12 receive two annual lessons in keeping themselves safe. Beginning in September of 2022, parish catechetical programs for children attending public schools are required to implement this program. This program, called Empowering God's Children by Virtus, is now available to parents of children in parish faith formation programs. [See Section D. EMPOWERING GOD'S CHILDREN.]

B. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CLASSES

Students are expected to attend religious education classes beginning in Grade One and continuing through Grade Eight in order to receive a well-rounded formation in the faith and to be prepared to receive the sacraments of Penance & Reconciliation (Confession), Eucharist (Communion) and Confirmation.

Grades 1 – 5

Parents may choose one of the following days:

Sunday, 10:15AM to 11:30AM -OR- Monday, 3:30PM to 4:30PM

Grades 6 – 8

Tuesday, 7:00PM to 8:15PM

PLEASE NOTE: In-person classes are preferred for religious education. We provide an option for home-based instruction for those who are unable to attend weekly classes. We are not offering virtual classes at this time. However, the digital communications policy is noted below in the event it is needed during the course of the year.

C. DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

The Archdiocese of Newark continues to use digital tools as needed to serve the young people and families of St. Michael's Parish, Union, NJ.

Parish program facilitators may choose to deliver virtual programming and content for its participants, through online platforms in addition to in-person programming. Additionally, in the event that circumstances warrant a temporary pause of in-person faith formation classes, parish program facilitators will notify families of alternate virtual programming. The program(s) will use software, tools and applications provided by third parties that participants, parents/legal guardians, volunteers and/or staff will access via the internet and use for purposes of communication, programming, and potential content creation. These platforms may include but are not limited to: Google Classroom, GoToMeeting, Webex, and Zoom.

To enroll in any of these programs, you must provide your consent and release for your child to participate in these online applications for distance-based, virtual program purposes. Please be aware that each application collects different information about its users and has its own privacy

terms and conditions to which members must adhere and which parish or diocese cannot control or assume responsibility. Please review these carefully before registering your child.

Our commitment to keeping the children and youth we serve safe is always our number one priority. To that end, we will actively monitor participant activity of children while engaged in our digital learning platforms. It is parents' responsibility to monitor their child's internet usage as a whole, including their use of any internet sites that are outside of our digital learning platforms. All online activities contemplated hereunder must also comply with the Archdiocese of Newark Safe Environment Protocols and must also follow any use requirements developed by the Archdiocese of Newark and/or the Department for the Protection of the Faithful.

D. EMPOWERING GOD'S CHILDREN

In an effort to assist in the monumental mission of protecting children from abuse, St. Michael's Religious Education is partnering with you to present safe environment lessons to your youth within their youth program. It is our cherished role as adults to fully protect children. In addition, we must also teach children about their safety rights and boundaries, so that they have tools to protect themselves.

Once again, this school year your child will be presented with a program entitled *Empowering God's Children*, in which Lesson Leaders present a safety lesson to children that includes a grade-appropriate video component along with a hands-on activity. The material is designed to better equip your child to know their rights, recognize their boundaries, and to empower them to protect themselves when safe adults are not immediately available—and ultimately be safer from people who might want to harm them. Youth will participate in the following lessons:

- Lesson 5: *Being a Safe Friend*
- Lesson 6: *Boundaries: Feelings and Facts*

Check your child's Religious Education folder for important **Selection Forms** that will be sent home within the first few weeks of class. You must choose one of the following options and return the signed form with the child to class:

1. **Parent/Guardian may present these lessons to their child(ren)** in their own homes. We would provide you with lesson plans, including a video. Additional information and resources on how to present this material to your children is available on request.
2. **Catechist led lessons will be presented by one or more catechists** -- approved by the Parish Catechetical Leader. These catechists will be provided training in how to lead these sessions with the children. Parents will be provided with information on the lessons in advance and are encouraged to discuss *and* reiterate the message at home.
3. **Parents may also choose to completely Opt-Out of this training by submitting the proper form to the parish.**

E. HOME-BASED RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM

This option is available for Grades 1 – 8, except for Grade 2 and Sacrament Prep students.

St. Michael's Parish offers this program for families who prefer to teach their children at home. This is a year-long commitment; **children must remain in this program the entire year**. The Home-Based Program follows the same curriculum as the classroom program. Parents are required to meet with the Coordinator of the Home-Based program to understand the program and its requirements. Students are required to complete all assignments, chapter tests and unit tests and hand them in when due. There will be a mid-year and year-end interview along with a written test.

F. PREPARATION FOR THE SACRAMENTS

Our First Reconciliation and Communion Program is designed to help children and their parents to understand and experience these sacraments more fully. Parents are encouraged and expected to take an active role in the preparation of their children for the sacraments. **Mandatory** Parent Meetings and Family Retreat Days are scheduled during the year.

First Eucharist and Reconciliation are typically received in the second grade after two years of formal religious education.

Students receive the sacrament of **Confirmation** in the ninth grade through the CYO Program after they have completed eight years of religious education.

Arrangements for students who have missed one or more grades, or who are in grade three or above and have not received First Eucharist, may be made through the Religious Education Office.

G. MASS

Regular attendance at weekend Mass is expected of all our students. As Catholic Christians, this is the way we worship God and support each other in faith. We strongly urge you to attend Mass as a family. Your participation in worship strengthens family life and provides an example for your child.

H. ATTENDANCE

It is important that children attend class weekly and that they arrive on time for class.

- Only **illness or family emergencies are considered excused absences**. Two consecutive absences for illness will require a doctor's note in order to return to class.
- For the student's safety, parents must call the Religious Education Office at **(908) 964-0965** to report a child's absence as early in the day as possible. When calling, give: **(1) The child's first and last name, (2) grade, and (3) reason for absence**. Messages can be left on the office answering machine.
- Any other request to be excused from class, e.g. travel or conflicting events, must be approved in advance by contacting the Coordinator of Religious Education.
- If you cannot commit to attending class in person, please select the Home-Based option (see Section E above). Note: The Home-Based option is **not** available for Grade 2 and Sacrament Prep students.
- Missed work for all absences must be completed to the satisfaction of the catechist.

I. EXCESSIVE ABSENCES

Excessive absences may delay the reception of sacraments and promotion to the next grade.

We believe that religious education is extremely important and each student needs to participate fully in order to grow in faith. Classes meet a minimum of 26 times. If a student misses more than five classes and fails to make up the work to the satisfaction of the catechist, parents will be notified. **The child may be required to take a test and meet with the Religious Education Office.**

J. DISMISSAL

Children in the Sunday program are to be picked up in the school gym. Children in the Monday program are to be picked up at the front door of the Church. Tuesday students are dismissed from the school. Please be on time when picking up your child.

K. EMERGENCY CLOSING

Religious Education sessions are canceled when Union Township public schools close due to weather conditions. If you have any questions, call our office. Every attempt will be made to contact Sunday classes by phone in the case of inclement weather. Please notify the Religious Education Office if you change your phone number or address during the year. Please refer to the calendar that will be given to you. If Union Township schools are closed for a holiday or break, so are we.

L. STUDENT PARTICIPATION

Students are expected to be prepared for class each week, including completing any assigned homework. They **must** bring their textbook and a pencil to each session. Written assignments are to be completed neatly. If your child is absent, a notice will be emailed home informing you what work your child has missed. Your child is to complete the work and return it to their teacher the following week.

M. BEHAVIOR

Appropriate behavior and common courtesy are presumed and expected at every grade level.

Student misbehavior will result in the following response:

- First incident: Warning by the catechist.
- Second incident: The Coordinator of Religious Education will speak with the child.
- Third incident: The parent will be notified, and a parent meeting may be scheduled. Parents may be asked to attend class with their child.

N. LOST BOOKS

Students who lose their textbook must buy a replacement book for \$25. Please have your child write his/her name and catechist's name inside the front cover.