

General Policies

ADMISSION POLICY - Only families who are registered members of Saint Thomas More Parish may enroll children in the Religious Education Program. Those who register children from other parish programs must have a letter verifying their past participation in that program.

ATTENDANCE RECORDS – Because Religious Education Classes meet only once a week, good attendance is essential for a child to maintain interest, achievement, and a sense of belonging. We count on parents to expect their children to have excellent records. Attendance records are especially significant for children entering a sacramental program, since these records are useful in helping to determine whether a child is ready to begin preparation. If a student should have three or more UNEXCUSED absences, it will be understood that a problem exists. The child's entrance into or continued preparation in the Grade Two, Grade Seven or Grade Eight, sacramental preparation classes, will have to be evaluated by the parents with the Coordinator of Religious Education.

ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL – Classes are dismissed at 5:30pm and 8:30pm. In the interest of your children's safety, parents are asked to come into the building or Courtyard to drop off your child(ren) for class and pick up your child after class. Students in all grades must remain in the Courtyard until picked up by parent or other designated adult. Students in grades five thru eight **may NOT** be picked up in the side parking lot.

BUILDING USAGE RULES – It is the responsibility for each catechist to faithfully enforce the following building usage rules. Catechists should review these rules with their students at the beginning of the year, and secure their cooperation.

1. Children arriving at class before their catechist may not enter the classroom but must wait in the hall until their catechist arrives.
2. Catechists may not leave their classrooms while occupied by students.
3. Students are not allowed to run in the halls.
4. Catechists are responsible for leaving their classroom in the order they find it.
5. Catechists are responsible for insuring that all windows are closed, that the heater/air-conditioner has been shut off, and the floor is free of debris.
6. Whenever chalkboards are used, they should be erased. Students should not write on them unless so directed by their catechist.
7. Upon arriving in a classroom, catechists should observe and note any materials, furniture, etc. which appears to be broken or disturbed before class begins. Catechists should also note any instance of damage in classrooms that occurs during student arrival, class time, and dismissal. Instances of damage should be reported to the Coordinator.
8. It is important that children take care of their religion books, use them respectfully, and bring them to class every week. Books that are defaced or abused may have to be replaced at the parents' expense.

CHILD ABUSE POLICY – Child abuse includes, but is not limited to, the following:

1. Engaging in sexual activity with a child.
2. Denial of proper or necessary subsistence, education, medical care, or other care necessary for the child's health.
3. Use of restraint procedures on a child that cause injury or pain.

4. Administration of prescription drugs or medication without the ongoing supervision of a licensed physician.
5. Providing alcoholic beverages or controlled substances.
6. Commission of any act, other than by accidental means, that threatens or results in any injury or death to the child.

The Coordinator of the Religious Education Program is required by law to report suspected or actual child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities.

CLASS AND HOME ASSIGNMENTS – Teachers in the Religious Education Program will assign class and homework assignments as needed. Students are expected to complete all class and home assignments

DISCIPLINE – Every person is worthy of being treated with care and respect fitting as one made in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, classroom behavior should be characterized by genuine Christian care, mutual respect and honesty.

Under no circumstances will a student or an adult be permitted to strike another or use abusive language for any reason. Lack of self-discipline during religious class will be addressed promptly.

The normal steps for disciplinary action will be:

1. Verbal correction by the catechist.
2. Removal from class and sent to the office.
3. Referral conference and completion of form by student and Coordinator.
4. Conference with student, Coordinator and parent.
5. Removal from program.

The Coordinator retains the right to omit one or more of the above steps whenever they deem it necessary

Major disciplinary violations meriting an immediate response by catechists and program administrators are as follows:

- Irreverence towards the sacred or holy places or things.
- Drugs/Alcohol/Substance Abuse (See Substance Abuse Policy below)
- Harassment – Verbal or Physical (includes sexual)
- Stealing or Damaging Parish Property
- Jeopardizing a Person's Safety
- Fighting
- Crude or Offensive Language

Substance abuse is defined as the possession of, use of, selling or distributing of any unauthorized, illegal drug, chemical, alcohol, or tobacco-like substance, which can be introduced into the body through ingestion, inhalation, or injection. Any student found in possession of an illegal or unauthorized substance on parish property will be immediately suspended from the program. A conference with the parent(s)/guardian, student and Coordinator is mandatory for re-admittance to the program. Any student selling or distributing illegal substances will be formally withdrawn from the program and the matter will be turned over to local authorities.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES FOR FIRE – Catechists should be familiar with the exit procedure for a fire emergency. The escape routes are posted by the door of each classroom. The following should also be adhered to:

1. Close doors and windows so fire doesn't spread.
2. Leave by the exit door and follow the directions posted there.
3. Lead class away from the parish building.
4. Take attendance sheet with you as you exit.
5. Count students to make sure all are present.
6. Maintain calm and order and keep silence throughout.

END OF YEAR - Catechists are reminded to remove all objects from the drawers and closets in the classrooms. Attendance sheets and teacher's manuals should be returned to the office.

FINANCIAL PROCEDURES – Tuition fees are expected to be paid at time of registration. Families experiencing special need are asked to contact the Coordinator by letter to explain their situation and request partial or full waiver. Such requests will be treated in a confidential manner.

In the event that no fee waiver request is received, families are asked to have all registration fees paid when the books are picked up.

Refund Policy – Families who withdraw children from our program before their scheduled starting date will be entitled to a full refund. Families who withdraw children from our program after their scheduled starting date will be entitled to a partial refund (maximum of 50%) pro-rated according to the balance of classes remaining in that year at the time of notification to the Religious Education Office.

GENERAL ASSEMBLIES - Periodically during the year, part or all of the student body will be assembled for special programs of general interest. These assemblies will normally be scheduled at the beginning of the year. Examples include opening day prayer service, Christmas caroling, Ash Wednesday services, mission service, end-of-year liturgies, etc. Catechists are expected to attend these programs and sit with their students.

INCIDENT REPORT - Every person is worthy of being treated with care and respect fitting as one made in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, classroom behavior should be characterized by genuine Christian care and mutual respect. Under no circumstances will a student or an adult be permitted to strike another or use abusive language for any reason. Lack of self-discipline during religious class will be addressed promptly, and parents will be notified. Should an incident occur prior to, during, or after Religious Education classes while the student remains on parish property, the responsible catechist or adult witness must:

1. intervene to insure student(s) safety and well-being.
2. notify the responsible religious education supervisor as soon as possible and
3. within 24 hours, complete and turn in to the Coordinator an Incident Report describing the incident and those involved, in careful detail.

MASS ATTENDANCE – Mass attendance is an integral part of your child's faith formation. Mass attendance goes hand in hand with the Religious Education Program. One cannot do the work of the other. If your family is not already worshipping regularly with your parish family, you are invited most sincerely to join us each week in the celebration of the Mass. Because we are Catholics, we can never really understand nor live our faith apart from the Mass and the faith community of the

parish. Religious lessons are prepared with the presumption that the students are familiar with liturgy through regular participation in the Mass. To be eligible to enter a parish sacramental preparation program, a child must attend Mass regularly.

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES – In the event that a student is unable to continue participating in the regular program activities of the religious education class, the child will be sent to the office with another student to accompany them. As soon as possible, the office staff should be notified so that parents may be called to pick up the child.

NO CHILD SHOULD BE LEFT ALONE OR UNSUPERVISED BY AN ADULT, ESPECIALLY WHEN SHE/HE APPEARS SICK.

NOTICE OF NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY – Saint Thomas More Religious Education Program admits students of any sex, race, color, national and ethnic origin to all rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to program participants. It does not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, color, or national origin in the administration of its programs or the recruitment of its teachers.

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT – Due to Diocesan Policy requiring written consent by parent or guardian to allow children to participate in parish programs, a child's custodial parent(s) or guardian must give written consent to register a child in the Parish Religious Education Program. This is part of the registration form. The custodial parent/guardian's signature will also signify that the signee has read, understands, and supports the policies contained in the Student Handbook. Parents are asked to review the Handbook contents with their children before they begin their religion classes.

PROGRESS REPORTS - Each student will receive a progress report halfway through the school year so that each parent can be informed regarding the academic religious progress of his/her child. This report will also include any behavioral or spiritual concerns that should be attended to by each family.

REMEDIAL PREPARATION – Formal preparation for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist begin in first grade. Confirmation preparation begins in grade seven and is completed at the end of grade eight. A minimum of 15 hours of Christian Service and attendance at the Confirmation Retreat is required of candidates as part of their Confirmation preparation. Parent information meetings are held in the fall to enable parents to assist in their child's preparation. At least one parent of every student in sacramental preparation must attend the parent meeting before the student will be considered as a candidate to receive a sacrament. Students should be registered and participating in their programs every year.

A. Situations requiring remedial preparation:

- Children who have not been baptized in the Catholic tradition.
- Children beyond first grade who have not been in a Religious Education Program.
- Children baptized into another Christian Community, but have not been formally received into the Catholic Church.
- Children who have not had sacramental preparation and are beyond the age in which this sacrament is offered (within reason).

B. If your child has not received any sacraments, the following steps are required:

- The student needs to enroll in the proper level of Religious Education determined by the Coordinator.
- If necessary, the student may need to attend special sacramental preparation classes.

C. The actual reception of the sacrament will be determined by the Pastor and the

Coordinator of Religious Education.

REQUESTS FOR EARLY DISMISSAL/TARDINESS – It is ordinarily expected that students be punctual in arriving. When a child is late for class or must leave early, a note should be sent to the teacher during the actual session the child attends. If a child is habitually late or leaves early, the child and parent should speak to the Coordinator.

REQUIRED PARENT MEETING – In accordance with the policy of the Diocese of Camden, meetings are held which are required for parents of students in grades two, seven and eight. Because the children in these grades are in a sacramental preparation class, parents are required to attend meetings especially designed to help them update their own understandings of the sacraments while being made thoroughly familiar with the preparation their children are receiving.

RIGHTS OF NON-CUSTODIAL PARENTS – Both parents have the right of access to a child's religious education progress report and achievement information unless one parent produces a legal (court certified) document to the contrary. Upon reception of such a document, it will be attached to the child's record and all teachers to whom the child is assigned will be informed of its special directions. No child will be dismissed from our programs to the non-custodial parent without the written consent of the custodial parent/guardian.

SACRAMENT PROGRAM - RECONCILIATION AND FIRST EUCHARIST

- A. The child must successfully complete his or her first year of religious education either in a Religious Education Program or in a parochial school to be eligible to enter sacramental preparation.
- B. The child must participate in a year and a half program of preparation before the reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- C. The child must take part in a two-year program before the reception of the Sacrament of First Eucharist.
- D. The child must memorize the following prayers and be able to say them without prompting: "Our Father", "Hail Mary", and "Glory Be to the Father".
- E. The child must attend Mass every weekend and have some familiarity with the liturgy.
- F. The parents must be willing to attend the Required Parents' Meeting.

SACRAMENT PROGRAM - CONFIRMATION

Confirmation preparation is a two-year process which begins in Grade 7 and culminates with reception of the sacrament in the Spring of Grade 8.

- A. The child must have successfully completed the sixth-grade year of religious education either in a Religious Education Program or in a parochial school.
- B. The child must be attending Mass every weekend.
- C. The child must be willing to undertake all aspects of the Confirmation Program and promise to do his or her best to cooperate in Confirmation preparation. This would include all written assignments, yearly retreat in Grade 8, and performance of approved acts of service.
- D. The parents must be willing to attend the Required Parents' Meeting.

SPECIAL NEEDS PROGRAM – Children with special learning needs (i.e., mentally or physically handicapped) are welcome and included in our program. Parents of children with special needs, who feel their child would benefit from our program, are asked to make known the special needs of their child at the time of registration. Mainstreaming the child within the regular class will be done if this is

educationally appropriate for the child. Parents of children with special needs may be asked to be aides in the classroom if this seems to be an educationally and psychologically sound decision.

SPORTS & EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES – Parents are asked to demonstrate a commitment to their children’s formal religious education even when it is difficult or involves potential conflicts with a child’s interest in sports or other extracurricular activities. Should a parent/guardian anticipate an unavoidable conflict in child’s attendance at religion classes, they should contact the Coordinator to discuss their difficulties and try to work out alternative plans.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE POLICY - Substance abuse is defined as the possession of, use of, selling or distributing of any unauthorized, illegal drug, chemical, alcohol, or tobacco-like substance, which can be introduced into the body through ingestion, inhalation, or injection. Any student found in possession of an illegal or unauthorized substance on parish property will be immediately suspended from the program. A conference with the parent(s)/guardian, student and Coordinator is mandatory for re-admittance to the program. Any student selling or distributing illegal substances will be formally withdrawn from the program and the matter will be turned over to local authorities.

Upon discovery, Catechists are to immediately confiscate the above named items and see that they and the student involved are taken to the Coordinator. The student must be accompanied by another adult.

TELEPHONE CONTACT – The Religious Education Office will be open Monday through Friday from 9:00am to 5:00pm. Parents may call 424-3212 to reach the secretary about any questions or concerns during that time. Only emergency calls will be relayed to students during program hours.

YOUTH MINISTRY PROGRAM –STM Youth Group encourages 5th -12th graders to get involved in parish life and empowers them build their relationship with Jesus by taking part in service, social and spiritual activities at St. Thomas More, the diocese and the community. STM Youth reinforces what is taught in Religious Education Classes to help the students live their faith as a disciple of Jesus. Email Katie at YouthGroup@stthomasmorenj.org for questions and to receive email updates on additional service, social and spiritual events for youth and families in 5th-12th grade.