



St. Francis of Assisi
CATHOLIC CHURCH

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
PARENT HANDBOOK

2022-2023

St. Francis of Assisi

CATHOLIC CHURCH

September 2022

Dear Parent/Guardian,

The role of parents in Religious Education is of utmost importance.

Vatican II presented the call that parents accept their role as primary educators of their children. It has come to be seen as a shared responsibility of Christ's faithful and a duty and right given first and foremost to parents because of their unique and close relationship with their children: The role is clearly emphasized by the Church: *"Since they have given life to their children, parents have a most grave obligation and possess the right to educate them. Therefore, it is for Christian parents particularly to take care of the Christian education of their children according to the doctrine handed on by the church."* (Code of Canon Law 226, §2)

This same emphasis is seen in the words of the Baptismal Rite: *"You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training him (her) in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him (her) up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?"*

The role of the Ministers of Religious Education

As ministers of Religious Education, we believe that assisting you as the primary educator of your children, is one of our most honored privileges. We know that the family is the primary community, the **"Domestic Church"**, where faith is shared and nurtured. It is in the home where the children are first introduced to prayer and faith traditions. It is in the home that habits of church attendance are started and will be nurtured. The Church assists by providing formal catechesis. Thus, the bond between home and church enables, empowers and nurtures families to be living examples of Christ and builds up the Kingdom of God.

Parents need to give visible signs of their faith through prayers, worship and sacramental celebrations. It is important that parents make religious education a priority so as to enrich our children's lives with our Catholic values and traditions. Religious Education must begin with regular attendance at the Sunday Liturgy, thus providing a sound basis for RE classes. Regular attendance in Religious Education is essential so choose your session carefully to keep conflicts to a minimum. Successful formation takes place **primarily in the home** and it is most important that your child sees your commitment to your faith. Genuine religious education informs, forms, and *transforms*.

The Religious Education Catechist is merely an assistant to the parent's role in this process. The Religious Education Team builds upon the foundation that you have laid in fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of faith, imparting accurate knowledge of tradition and doctrine. Feel free to contact us with questions or concerns, and please take every opportunity to discuss, share and build a faith relationship with your child.

In Christ,

Marianne Hayes

Marianne Hayes, DRE
Saint Francis of Assisi
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Introduction

Welcome to the Saint Francis of Assisi Religious Education Program. It is our hope that this parent handbook will serve as a guide and reference regarding various aspects of our program.

Religious Education Mission Statement

We at the parish of Saint Francis of Assisi look upon religious education as a total parish experience involving not just the child, but also the parents, families, catechists, clergy and all those who form the community of faith. We believe that religious education is getting to know Jesus and learning what is expected of one who chooses to follow Him in the Catholic Tradition. Our program reflects an integrated learning experience composed of catechesis, prayer, sacramental preparation, sacred scripture, Catholic doctrine, liturgy, community building and other aspects of a deeply spiritual life. Through the light of faith we hope to develop in those entrusted to our care a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ our Lord. We strive to build up the church, fulfill the message and mission of Jesus Christ, and to love God and all of God's creation by the inspiration and vision of Saints Francis and Clare.

The Goal of Catechesis

A sower went out to sow ... some seed fell along the path . . . other seed fell on rocky ground... other seed fell among thorns ... and other seeds fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing, and yielding thirty-fold, sixty fold, and a hundred fold. (Mark 4:3-8).

The seed is the Word of God and the sower is Jesus Christ. The seed falls on good soil when we make time in our lives for God, when we open our ears to the Good News, and when we live in solidarity with our neighbor. Saint Francis RE exists to help children and families to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ. As Pope John Paul II wrote, "The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only he can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit."

The Role of Parents

At their child's Baptism, parents undertake the responsibility of providing for their child's Christian formation. By word and example, parents teach their children from birth and throughout life. Saint Francis RE exists to assist parents in that task. Although each of our catechists works diligently to help children to grow deeper in faith, the parents' role in the faith formation of their child is absolutely essential and cannot be replaced. Therefore, it is essential that the foundation **is first in the home of the child.**

Parents are encouraged to:

- Help your child grow in understanding by talking about what he/she learned in Religious Education.
- Scripture reading and reflection.
- Teach your children to pray by spending some time in prayer with them each day.
- Bring your children to Mass every Sunday and do your best to help them understand and appreciate its importance.
- Prepare for Sunday Mass by reading the Sunday readings with your family one evening during the week. The readings are available online at <https://bible.usccb.org/readings/calendar>
- Provide a good Christian example for your children by continually striving to live your life according to the Gospel.

St. Francis of Assisi Religious Education

Classes begin the week of September 18, 2022

Registration for the Religious Education Program:

Parents must be registered parishioners of Saint Francis Parish in order to register their children in the Religious Education Program.

- Upon registration, full payment must be made unless arrangements are made for a payment plan with Francis House 703-221-6344. All information will be kept confidential.
- When registering for first grade or new to the RE program, a copy of the baptismal certificate must be submitted for each student.

Sessions: Sunday 9:30AM-10:45AM
 Thursday 5:00PM - 6:15 PM

**RE Fees: One child: \$110, 2 children: \$160, 3+ children: \$210,
First Eucharist Fee: \$30, Confirmation Fee: \$75**

Home Schooling for Religious Education:

Parents are the primary educators of their children, especially in the area of faith development so home schooling is an option. As the primary teachers of the faith, parents are responsible to teach their children in the faith. The Religious Education program is a supplement to that process.

During the years of sacramental preparation however we prefer that children attend the RE classes for the strengthening of the idea of a faith community. Our sacraments and community celebrations and the child prepare for the sacraments within the faith community. Our children bring a wealth of faith experiences to be shared with others in the community. If home schooling is your choice, please fill out the registration packet or online form and pay the required fees. During the year, you will be required to attend all homeschool meetings and retreats as well as keep an accurate log of all RE homeschool hours. You must also turn in all tests attached to the log at the end of the year prior to the designated date.

Special Needs Religious Education

Special Needs Religious Education is available. Parents should inform us of any learning difference, health challenge, language problem, or home situation which may affect their child's ability to learn or participate fully in class. Most children with special needs can be included in regular RE classes with assistance from an aide. We do have a class specifically for Special Needs children if that is what is needed for your child. RE desires to partner with parents to provide religious education and sacramental preparation for all children.

New to the Parish or Transferring

Students transferring from another parish's Religious Education program or from a Catholic school must supply the following when registering:

- A copy of your child's baptismal certificate
- Documentation of prior religious education or Catholic school completion (letter of

verification, including attendance record) Students who enter the RE program without having celebrated the sacraments of initiation, and who are beyond the usual age for reception of these sacraments, may need additional formation.

Custody Issues

Please notify the DRE if only one parent/guardian has the custodial care of a child during classtime. We must be aware of who may or may not pick up children during or after class.

Rights of Non-Custodial Parents

Both parents have access to a child's religious education progress reports and achievement information **unless** one parent produces a legal (court certified) document to the contrary

Once we receive that document, it will be attached to the child's record and all catechists to whom the child is assigned will be informed of these special directions. Progress reports to the non-custodial parent will be provided upon request, which must be made in writing. Changes in the child's normal routine must be approved by the custodial parent in collaboration with the RE Office; catechists will be notified of these changes. No child will be dismissed from the program to the non-custodial parent without the written consent of the custodial parent.

Attendance:

Regular attendance at Religious Education (R.E.) sessions is important to the ongoing faith formation of students. The sessions are built on each other and carry a central focus throughout the year. RE attendance should **take precedence over all extracurricular activities.**

- Excused absences are defined as those involving personal illness of the student, death in family,
- During the year, parents are asked to notify the office if their child will be absent. This will allow us the opportunity to put together home assignments for the child.

Special Note:

Students in sacramental preparation (1₂,7₁8₁ SPI,SPII,Teen Sacramental Preparation) may not miss more than 3 scheduled classes to be considered ready for reception of the sacraments. Non-Sacramental grades (3,4,5,6) may not miss more than 4 classes for the year to be counted. Please contact us immediately if there is a family situation that will impact your child's attendance.

Inclement Weather:

Cancellations will be posted on stfrncis.org. Current RE families that have provided updated email addresses will receive an email and text message via Flocknote.

Email and text notification is sent to all RE families as soon as possible. When Prince William County Schools are closed or dismissed early and all after school activities are cancelled on a Thursday **due to the weather** (not Transportation), RE classes on Thursday will be cancelled. In case of inclement weather on Sunday, please check your email.

Please make sure your email address and cell phone number is updated in the RE Office.
Make sure you have signed up for Flocknote.

The student must complete all class work and homework. If a student is ill, the parent should notify the RE office prior to class to report their absence. When a child will be absent, parents should speak with the catechist and cover the chapter at home.

The **RE Calendar** is available online at stfrncis.org under [learn/religious education/welcomeintroduction](#) or in the Religious Education Office.

Tardiness

Please bring your child to class on time. Children who arrive late not only miss out on important information and class time, but they also disrupt the class. The child's tardiness will be recorded and once the minutes have accumulated to the amount of one class, an absence will be recorded.

Communication

Announcements regarding parent meetings, special events, deadlines, etc. will be communicated to parents through the following ways: Sunday bulletin, Flocknote, and website.

It is the responsibility of the parent to make sure that the RE Office has an up to date email address and phone number on file. **It is the responsibility of the parent** to check the website and bulletin for program and sacramental updates.

Student Progress Reports: Reports will contain record of attendance, mastery of curriculum and behavior. They will be emailed in January.

Students will be monitored by our Catechists and RE staff throughout the year. This will include: attendance, participation and cooperation. Should any concerns arise, parents will be informed.

Parents may contact the Religious Education Office at 703- 221-3127 any time to discuss any issue or ask a question.

Drop Off

Parents should park and accompany all children into the school building and to their classroom. On Sunday, the lanes in front of the school are to be for access to the handicap spots and not for drop off, please go around and park and walk your child to class. Do not park in front of the school.

Dismissal

Parents must collect their children in the school building and, for younger children (1-5), in the RE classroom. Students will be released only to their parents or an adult or older sibling explicitly authorized by the parents. Please inform the DRE and the catechist of any special custody situations. A Dismissal form **must be** filled out and turned into the RE Office with authorized persons listed on the form along with a working telephone number.

Please make sure that caution is exercised when walking in the parking lot. Under no circumstances are cars to block the lane in front of the school. The exit at the elementary wing is **never** to be used during RE. Under no circumstances is a child to walk home without an adult.

If your child must leave early please first obtain a form from the RE Office, no child will be dismissed without a signed form.

Early Dismissal

Parents **must come** to the RE Office prior to taking their child out of class for early dismissal. A form

must be obtained from us to present to the Catechist. Repeated early dismissal requests by the parent will result in additional absences.

Lost and Found

If your child loses an item, please contact our office at 703-221-3127. We will do our best to assist you.

Supplies

Textbooks, pencils, crayons, etc. are provided. If the class is working on a special project, the parents may be requested to contribute extra supplies. The parent/guardian can purchase a secondbook online at loyolapress.com for grades 1-7 Christ Our Life Series Parish Edition from Loyola Press if the child should lose their book. If your child is in grade 7, 8, SPI or SPII classes please contact our office for lost books. The textbooks need to be brought to class each week unless otherwise notified by the catechists.

Textbooks

We use the textbooks Christ our Life series by Loyola Press for grades 1-7. Grade 6 will receive the "Prove it Bible" which needs to come to every class until Confirmation The website for addition information is www.loyolapress.com if your child loses their book, you must go online and order a new one. Make sure you order the parish edition.

8th grade Chosen for Confirmation series

The special sacrament classes; SPI, SPII, Teen Sacrament Class, SPRED, please call our office to order new books

Learning Environment

A welcoming and respectful environment is necessary to provide an atmosphere that is conducive to sharing and learning. Therefore, the following guidelines will apply:

- A.** All students must report to their classrooms **promptly at class time**. Student tardiness will Count towards an absence.
- B.** Students will **not** be allowed to use cell phones or any electronic devices during class time or special sessions. **All cell phones and electronics must be put away at the beginning of class.**
- C.** Students will be expected to follow the guidelines set forth by the catechists for appropriate behavior within the classroom.
- D.** Courtesy and cooperation is expected of each and every person involved in religious education formation.
- E.** **Respect for the catechist**, assistant and fellow students is required.
- F.** **Care must be taken of classroom property**: tables, desks, chairs, walls, posters, books, projects, etc....
- G.** Students **may not** leave early without a written note from parents.
- H.** **Disruptive Behavior** - The catechist is to send disruptive students to the Religious Education Office. If a student is sent to the Office a SECOND time, the parents will be notified. If the student's behavior is hindering the learning process, the parents and the child will be requested to meet with the catechist, and the Director of Religious Education to explore a solution to the problem or an alternative setting for the child's learning experience.

- I. **Student Progress Reports** - Student Progress Reports will be issued in January. It will reflect attendance, participation, evidence of knowledge, attitude and behavior. We ask that you sign and return it to your child's catechist. The Director of Religious Education is available for follow-up conferences for any area of concern.
- J. **Absolutely NO FOOD is allowed in the classroom** as many of the school and RE children have life threatening food allergies.
- K. **Weapons** - Any student found with a weapon (gun, pocket knife, screw driver, explosive Device etc.) toy or otherwise, will be immediately dismissed from class and the parent/guardian will be contacted. Student will not be readmitted into class until parents meet with the DRE. This is for the safety of our students

Emergency Health and Safety Information

In case of injury or other emergency that affects a child, RE staff will call the child's parents immediately or 911 if warranted. If parents cannot be reached, the staff will call the person designated as an emergency contact on the registration form. If treatment is necessary and no parent is available for consent treatment will be sought for the welfare of the child. Personnel and catechists are not permitted by law to administer any medications or give medical advice to students. It is therefore imperative that parents provide our office with the necessary information in case it is ever needed. Parents are urged to inform the DRE or office in case a child is diagnosed with a medical condition or learning difference after registration has taken place.

Crisis safety management: intruder lock down, weather hazard or other threat will be handled following procedures established by our school, should they become necessary. No student will be released without parent's written instruction, personal identification and prior parent authorization. No student will be released to parent in the middle of an emergency situation unless parent signs them out.

All volunteers are instructed in emergency procedures; evacuation maps, first aid information is located in each classroom.

If a situation arises that requires building evacuation, the children will be brought to the church. If an offsite location is necessary, the children will be relocated to Triangle Elementary School, 3615 Lions Field Rd. Triangle, VA 22172

Curriculum Goals and Objectives

The Arlington Diocese Religious Education curriculum guidelines are available online at <http://www.arlingtondiocese.org>. The Loyola Curriculum has incorporated the guidelines from the Diocese of Arlington as they are the same as the US Bishops mandate. The Loyola texts are approved by the US Bishops Committee. The Christ our Life series by Loyola is what is used in the RE program. For the scope and sequence of this program go online to loyolapress.com.

Formation in Christian Chastity

The Diocese of Arlington has issued a program for use in our schools and Religious Education programs. This program provides an on-going and progressive tool in assisting families in the formation of the virtue of chastity. The major focus is to provide the children with effective ways to deal with boundaries. To assist with this objective, the diocese has provided resources to be used both at home and in the RE classroom.

The materials are available for your review and use at www.arlingtondiocese.org. Once at the site, click on *Child Protection* then place the cursor over the words *Formation in Christian Chastity*. A drop down menu will appear where you will click on your child (ren)'s specific grade. The information to be

taught in the home is provided under the section, *For the Home*. In addition, lesson plans will be presented in the RE classroom for all grades. Our catechists will be presenting the materials under the section, *For the Classroom*. You will have the opportunity to consent for your child (ren) to participate in this learning session or you may opt your child out of the lesson on that day. You will be notified of the scheduled class times and your response will be required. The materials provided on the website can also be reviewed in the REoffice. **The opt- out form is located at the end of this handbook and needs to be turned in to the RE Office if you are opting out of this lesson.** The date of the lessons will be emailed to you. All homeschool students **must either** opt out or parents must teach this mandatory lesson.

Diocese of Arlington Child Protection Policy

The Diocese of Arlington and Saint Francis Parish are committed to ensuring the personal safety of all children in our program. Any adult who works with or have substantial contact with children or young people at Saint Francis Parish are required to

- Complete a volunteer application form
- Pass criminal background check
- Take part in a four-hour VIRTUS training session

Class aides under the age of 18 do not receive this Child Protection training; therefore they must be supervised at all times by an adult who has received this training.

All catechetical volunteers and staff are mandated reporters and are instructed in identifying and reporting suspected cases of abuse as prescribed by the Diocese of Arlington.

SACRAMENTS

Sacrament preparation for any of the sacraments, and for SP Children, requires two full years of preparation.

For First Reconciliation and First Eucharist, the preparation time culminates no earlier than the child's 7th birthday. SP Children will enroll in the two-year program, Sacramental Preparation for Older Children.

Our Confirmation candidates are required to make a commitment of two full years to their Pre-Confirmation and Post-Confirmation preparation.

Sacraments for Older Children

The sacramental preparation classes (SPI, SPII, and Teen Sacramental Prep) are for children ages 7 and above who have not been baptized and for children who have been baptized but have not received any formal religious education and are preparing for Holy Communion or Confirmation.

In the course of their journey a variety of resources are used that explore Catholic beliefs and practices from the perspective of the child.

Participation at Sunday worship is mandatory and essential in this process. Children can only learn the importance of the Mass and the Eucharist when they see their parents making it a priority in their own lives.

These classes are referred to as Sacramental Prep I and Sacramental Prep II, Teen Sacramental Prep (SPI, SPII) and are a two-year process.

First Communion Preparation

The best preparation that the child can receive is to accompany their parents and family each week at Mass as they grow to have a sense of community and understand the importance of the

Mass in the life of a Catholic Christian.

Each Sacrament requires a two year preparation; therefore, First Communion preparation will begin in the first grade. If a child misses first grade they will have to attend the first grade class as second graders.

Children must receive First Reconciliation before First Communion. Here at Saint Francis we provide communal First Reconciliation Services in February or March. The children still have the opportunity for one on one penance with a Friar. If you wish you may have them attend First Reconciliation on any given Saturday prior to First Communion, but please notify our office first.

All children are required to attend retreats and parent all meetings prior to First Communion.

Confirmation Preparation

Confirmation preparation at St. Francis of Assisi requires a **two-year commitment** that usually begins in the 7th grade, being "Year I" preparation and ends at the completion of the 8th grade year "Year II". **A meeting for parents and students to enroll in the Confirmation process is scheduled in the fall. Attendance at this meeting is required** for all students enrolled in RE and Catholic Schools **in order to be considered as candidates for Confirmation.**

Young people are confirmed in their faith by being incorporated into a community of believers. This is an on-going process in which the adult community plays a vital role. These young people must witness a community that learns, shares, worships and serves together. It is the responsibility of parents and other adult members of the community to help those who are newly confirmed to understand that **Confirmation marks the beginning of their renewed commitment to the Church.**

*CONFIRMATION IS NOT A GRADUATION.
CONFIRMATION MARKS THE BEGINNING OF A
COMMITMENT TO LIVE AS A DISCIPLES OF CHRIST*

Confirmation is the third of the Sacraments of Initiation, thus indicating **that one is equipped and ready to live the life of a committed Christian. Our newly confirmed are required to continue their commitment to grow in their understanding of what it means to live the Faith as a Confirmed member of the Church. The experiences of CYM support them as they go forth in their teen years.**

The Confirmation program here at St. Francis seeks to achieve a balance between a clearly academic religious education program and an informal, practical program. It is academic in that students are expected to master specific material and are held accountable for this material, just as in any other academic study. It is informal in that the text itself is conversational and engaging. The suggested lesson plans encourage student involvement, require minimal lecturing by catechists and challenges the students to live their faith.

Each year of preparation is supplemented with retreats, special presentations and learning experiences.

Outreach with Special Olympics. Bread for Life

Service projects that focus on the Social Justice Teachings of the Catholic Church are required outreach projects for our Confirmation students. The hours required for Confirmation are 15 hours of service in addition to participation in the Special Olympics basketball game and Bread for Life.

CYM (Catholic Youth Ministry) REAL

For grades 9-12. A great mix of formation and fun! Every year teens participate in a work camp experience. Schedule of events will be posted on the website for all events held during school year. CYM kick off in the fall and details will be in the bulletin.

Adult Faith Formation Opportunities

Parents and all adult Catholics are encouraged to strengthen their own faith. We cannot pass on a vibrant faith to our children if ours is not strong. Check our website frequently for adult faith opportunities. www.stfrncis.org click on learn in the top menu and then adult faith formation

Catechetical Volunteers

Catechists are women and men who are members of our parish family and have agreed to represent all of us in a specific area of ministry. In this ministry, catechists work as assistants to the parents who are the primary catechist. Our role is to help, not to replace the vital role parents have as the primary catechists. It is our role to help the parent's journey with their children as they deepen their faith and love for our Lord. We would like to thank all the young people and adults who are not mentioned here but volunteer their time in so many ways to help create a wonderful environment for learning, prayer and worship.

Volunteer Opportunities

Our program is only possible through the help of many volunteers. Here are the areas for you to consider helping out:

- **Catechists** (teachers): Introduce students to Jesus and our wonderful Catholic Tradition by allowing them to witness their love for Christ and the teachings of the Church. Training is available in the summer. We are always in need of Catechists.
- **Substitute Catechist**: lesson plans will be provided
- **Catechist Assistant**: Help the primary catechist (We welcome High School Students)
- **Hall Monitors**: Monitor activity in the hall during class time.
- **Office Help**: Weekly or when available

If you are interested in any of these volunteer positions, please contact the Religious Education Office. Please be aware that all volunteers who have contact with children must:

- Submit to a Criminal History Background Check before beginning their volunteer assignment
- Attend a VIRTUS session
- Adhere to the practices stated in the Volunteer Code of Conduct
- Review the Safe Environments Policy set by the Diocese of Arlington
- Sign and return the "Confirmation of Receipt"

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