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Religious Education Program Parent Handbook

**St. John Vianney Parish
Colonia, NJ**

2023 - 2024

Dear Parents/Guardians,

On behalf of the catechists, aides and office volunteers of the Religious Education Program at St. John Vianney Parish, thank you for allowing us the opportunity to share the Catholic faith with your children. We are humbled by the trust you have placed in us and pray that we will be effective instruments in spreading the Gospel.

If you have any questions or suggestions, please contact me.

Ellen DeRosa

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Director of Religious Education

Mission Statements –

Parish

United in our belief in Jesus Christ and his call to serve, we are dedicated to living out His word through education of family, evangelization and celebration of the Sacraments.

Religious Education Program

Having been anointed as priest, prophet and king when we were baptized, and united in our belief in a God who is love, we respond to his command to love one another. Always and everywhere, we endeavor to transmit by teaching and by the witness of our lives, the teaching and life of Jesus Christ.

Welcome!

Welcome to the Roman Catholic Religious Education Program offered by St. John Vianney Parish. Our catechists are faithful to and teach the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. Our textbooks rely extensively on teachings as set forth in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. We use Diocesan programs for the training of our catechists.

The St. John Vianney Parish Religious Education Program is an eight-year program, beginning in grade one and continuing through grade eight. We encourage each child to begin catechetical instruction in first grade and continue each successive year through eighth grade. We will work with parents and children to facilitate the appropriate religious education of each child.

Parental Involvement

You, the parents, are the primary educators of your children. Our Religious Education Program is intended to supplement and complement the formation *you* provide. The lessons you teach your children by the example of your lives have a profound effect on your children.

“The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; it is also the source form which all its power flows.” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 10) Each week we gather for Mass. We offer thanks and praise. We hear God’s word and are nourished by Christ’s body and blood in Eucharist. We cannot emphasize enough how essential it is for us to come together for Mass each week.

For students in grades 3 – 8, two of the Monday classes during the 2023 – 2024 year will be replaced by attendance at Mass during the prior weekend. Details are included in the calendar and will be discussed during the parent meeting.

Curriculum

For Grades 1 – 6 we use the **Faith and Life Series** from Ignatius Press.

Grade 1 Our Heavenly Father

Students are introduced to Bible stories and teachings of the Faith. Topics include:

- The Blessed Trinity – God the Father, the life of Jesus and the Holy Spirit
- God’s plan of salvation and our part in that plan, especially in the Church
- Mary, angels and Saints
- Basic prayers

Grade 2 – Jesus Our Life

Students are introduced to salvation history and teachings of the Faith. Students are prepared for the first reception of the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. Topics include:

- God’s mercy and love
- Creation
- Covenant with Moses and the Ten Commandments
- Redemption
- Forgiveness of Sins
- The Mass

Grade 3 – Our Life with Jesus

Students continue to be introduced to Bible stories and teachings of the Faith. Topics include:

- God's plan of salvation from creation to the Incarnation and Redemption to the Birth of the Church at Pentecost and our life in the Church
- Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist
- The Mass.

Grade 4- Jesus Our Guide

Students continue to be introduced to Bible stories and teachings of the Faith. Topics include:

- Salvation history
- How we participate in God's plan of salvation
- Ways God helps us in our pilgrimage on earth to heaven through his Word, his law and his Church

Grade 5 – Credo – I Believe

Students are introduced to the Creed and teachings of the Faith. Topics include:

- Thorough study of the articles of the Creed
- Gospels
- Prophets
- Prayers of the Church

Students receive Bibles in 5th grade that will be used in 5th grade and later years.

Grade 6 - Following Christ

The students will be guided to follow Christ with their whole mind and will. Topics include:

- Formation of conscience
- Liturgical life of the Church
- Ten Commandments
- Beatitudes
- Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist received during Holy Mass
- Gift of Grace
- Particular and General Judgments

Students receive Bibles in 6th grade that will be used in 6th grade and later years. Note that the distribution of Bibles is transitioning to 5th grade.

For Grades 7 and 8 we use **Chosen – Your Journey to Confirmation** from Ascension Press.

Chosen includes student textbooks, videos, online materials as well as parent and sponsor handbooks. During the two-year journey to Confirmation, students will be encouraged to open their eyes and hearts to how God sees them and to develop a deeper relationship with Jesus and the Church. The students will be invited to follow Jesus Christ and embrace a faith that brings meaning and purpose to their lives.

Additional Programs

RCIA is an acronym for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. It is a faith journey. It is a journey for persons who have never been baptized, or who were baptized as Catholic or in another Christian tradition, but for whatever reason were not Confirmed and have not received First Communion. At the completion of the journey, the catechumens or candidates receive the Sacraments of Initiation – Baptism, for those not previously baptized, and Confirmation and First Communion. If you or someone you know is interested in the RCIA, please let us know.

Our Special Needs Program is offered to address one of the basic tasks of catechesis - to initiate into the life of the Church community. How important it is that we do not isolate or somehow exclude a child who may have special needs. When we speak of special needs, we are speaking of a child who may have a learning or developmental disability or a physical disability. In the document *Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities* we read that “Persons with disabilities, especially children, are particularly beloved of the Lord and are integral members of the Christian community.” If your child may benefit from this program, please let us know.

Sacramental Preparation

We will provide specific information pertaining to preparation for First Penance, First Eucharist and Confirmation to the parents of children preparing for these Sacraments. The Calendar for 2023 - 2024 includes the dates and times for parent meetings during which the policies for the Sacraments will be discussed and information distributed. Just as parents are expected to attend a class before a child is baptized, parents are also expected to attend a Parent Meeting before a child receives the Sacraments of Penance, First Communion and Confirmation. Why? Because it is important for you to be a living example of what we do with your children on Mondays. Penance is not just about *First* Penance. Communion is not just about *First* Communion. These are *repeatable* sacraments. They are essential for growing in holiness. Confirmation is not just about the day the Bishop comes. It is about living our profession of faith.

Homework

Assignments are given to reinforce classroom lessons. Just as you take time to review your child’s assignments in his or her academic program, we encourage you to be involved with the assignments given in religious education classes. The Activity book used in Grades 1 – 6 and the online access for Grades 7 and 8 will facilitate any make-up lessons that may be necessary following an absence.

Protecting the Children

A Police Officer is on the premises during the times classes are in session. In addition, there is a receptionist at the desk who will stop everyone seeking to enter the building while children are in the building. If you need to come to the Office to pick up a child before the usual time for dismissal you will be required to first stop at the reception desk to sign in. Similarly, if you are dropping off a child after classes have begun, you will be asked to stop at the reception desk before proceeding to the Religious Education Office. We will escort children to and from the classroom, as appropriate. After first stopping at the reception desk, you may then proceed to the Religious Education Office which is the first office on the left. Parents may *not* proceed into the hallways to go to a classroom.

Attendance

When your child will be absent, please send an email to ederosa@sjvs.net no later than 5:00 p.m. on the Monday your child will be absent. Please include the name of the child in the subject and in the body of the email state the grade level and briefly state the reason for the absence. If you have not sent an email alerting us to the absence prior to class, we will contact you if your child is not present for class.

Illness, injury, and emergency situations such as a death in the family, are considered excused absences. In the event of serious illness or injury that prevents a child from attending classes for a period, of time we will work with you and the child, if the child is able, to help the child keep up with grade level work.

We have scheduled twenty-five (25) classes from September through the end of April. For us to consider a child as having completed a certain level, among other things, we consider whether the child has attended a significant number of classes.

Please make every effort to bring your child to class on time. All classes meet on Monday evenings for one hour from 6:15 p.m. – 7:15 p.m.

Emergency Closing Information

The following rules will apply in the event of inclement weather:

- If the Woodbridge Township public schools are closed due to weather, the religious education classes scheduled for that evening will be closed.
- If the Woodbridge Township public schools have an early dismissal due to weather, the religious education classes scheduled for that evening will be closed.
- In the event of closing specific to our religious education program, an email will be sent to all parents/guardians.

Early Dismissal

If your child must leave class prior to the scheduled conclusion, you must send a note advising us of the time the child will be picked up and the name of the parent or guardian who will pick the child up. No child will be dismissed until first signed out in the Religious Education Office.

Program Fee

A \$50 Program Fee is payable for one child, and a \$75 fee is payable for a family registering more than one child. If payment of this fee would be a hardship, please contact the Director of Religious Education.

Records

It is essential that our records be up to date. In the event of any change in information please contact the Religious Education Office by email as soon as possible. It is especially important that we have correct emergency contact information.

Discipline

For our program to be effective, it is necessary for the students to behave properly. In the instance of repeated behavior problems, you will be called for a conference with the Director of Religious Education.

We will not tolerate any form of violence or vandalization of Church or school property, and students found to be perpetrators will be held accountable.

Parental Concern Form

To initially advise you of a concern concerning homework, attendance or discipline we will send a “Parental Concern Form” to your home. Please sign the form to acknowledge receipt and return it to the Religious Education Office. As appropriate, we will invite you to come for a meeting with the catechist and Director of Religious Education

Progress Reports

Unlike a report card as is used in an academic program, Progress Reports do not seek to grade a child. Rather, the goal is to assess how well each child is progressing, to the extent that the progress is observable. Progress Reports will be distributed in January and must be signed and returned to the Religious Education Office. Progress Reports are maintained in each child’s permanent record file.

Dress Code

Students may wear clothing like that worn to school provided it is modest and reflects Christian values. Any student arriving wearing clothing determined to be improper will be kept out of class until such time as a parent arrives to provide appropriate clothing.

Drills

We will conduct a fire drill and a lock down drill during the year.

Child Abuse Policy

New Jersey Law requires us to immediately notify the Division of Youth and Family Services if a catechist or the Director of Religious Education suspects a child has been abused.

Impaired Driver

We will not send a child home with a driver who is visibly impaired. We will contact the emergency number to secure an alternate driver.

Drugs

Drugs are never permitted on the premises. Any student found possessing drugs will be detained until the police have been notified.

Crisis Management

The Religious Education Program follows the Crisis Management Plan established by St. John Vianney School. This plan addresses preparedness for traditional crises and emergencies such as fires, accidents as well as biological, radiological, chemical concerns and other terrorist activities. The plan includes procedures for explosions, bomb threats, violence, intruders, weapons and hostages.

Contact Us

Ellen DeRosa, Director of Religious Education

Email: ederosa@sjvs.net

If you prefer a phone conversation, please send an email and include the best phone number and the preferred time for a call.

Office Hours

The office will be open Mondays from 5:30 p.m. until all students leave following the Monday class session. See the website for other days and hours that vary during the year to accommodate the needs of the program.

If you would like to schedule a meeting, please send an email to ederosa@sjvs.net to arrange a mutually convenient date and time.

More Information

Please be sure to pick up a bulletin when you come to Mass. The Bulletin will include important reminders and other information regarding the Religious Education Program.

You can also visit the website for information about the Religious Education Program. <http://www.sjvianney.com/catechesis/> Click on the Faith Formation tab.

Acknowledgement

Instructions: An Acknowledgement must be completed for each family. Please return it with your child no later than October 2, 2023.

Child Name (First name, Last name)

Grade

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

I acknowledge receipt of the Religious Education Program Parent Handbook. I have read the Handbook and agree to abide by the policies set forth in the Handbook.

Signature of Parent/Guardian _____

Printed Name_____

Date _____

2023 - 2024