

# **St. Paul the Apostle Church**

## **Religious Education Program**

### **Real Families**



### **Pray Together**

## **Family Handbook**

### **2023-2024**

*“You can do nothing with children unless you win their confidence and love by bringing them into touch with yourself, by breaking through all the hindrances that keep them at a distance. We must accommodate ourselves to their tastes, we must make ourselves like them.”*

*St. John Bosco*

St. Paul the Apostle Religious Education Program accepts its responsibility as co-educators with the family and the Church to provide a solid catechetical experience for children.

### **Parental Involvement**

During the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960's the Church reaffirmed that parents are the first teachers of their children in the ways of the faith. Parents are called to serve as role models of inspiration for their children through their own prayer life, education in faith and in support of the Church.

The Religious Education Program of any parish is designed to support, not act as a substitute for parental responsibility. The parish, through volunteer catechists, parish staff, and pastor, desires to work as a team with parents. Together we provide our children with a sound program to help them become disciples of Jesus Christ.

The children in grades 1 through 8 will be given a textbook to use both in class and at home. Children in Kindergarten will be given their lesson pages on a weekly basis. With a limited number of classes, there may be some chapters that will not be covered in class. We ask parents to check the textbooks/lesson pages of their child each week. In most of the books there are family pages; you are requested to do at least one or two of the activities. If some pages are skipped, please do them with your child. **We need you to help your child remember to bring his/her book to class!** Besides the textbook, teachers are encouraged to use other interactive activities in class.

Parents who may have concerns or questions about their child's religious education classes should speak first to the catechist, then, if necessary, to the Director of Religious Education, and then to the Pastor.

### **Program Goals**

- Present the Catholic faith accurately, authentically, and completely, consistent with the age and readiness of the students.
- Provide an atmosphere where children can develop their faith.
- Provide opportunities for family faith formation
- Foster a clear sense of Catholic identity and pride, an appreciation of Catholic beliefs, values, prayers, practices, and sacramental celebrations.
- Develop a sense of responsibility towards outreach and justice for the greater good in our homes and throughout the community and world by an active appreciation and involvement in the stewardship way of life.
- Develop attitudes and behaviors that identify them as followers of Jesus.
- Nurture a respect and appreciation for all that is good in the human experience
- Create an atmosphere of interdependence between administration, catechists, parents and students that promotes mutual respect and concern and preserves the integrity of the Catholic faith.

## **Religious Education Office**

The Religious Education Office is located in the Ministry Center Building between the school and the church. Our address is:

18 Woodlawn Ave.  
Joliet, IL 60435  
Parish Phone: 815-725-1527  
Religious Ed Office Phone: 815-725-6927

Religious Education Office Hours:   Mondays      4:30-7:30 PM

## **Religious Education Staff**

Our catechists are **volunteers** who give generously of themselves and devote time to spread the message of our faith and to build up our faith community. Most are not teachers by profession, however, all possess a love of the Church and a desire to help our children grow in the love of Jesus.

All catechists are required to:

- be in good standing with the Catholic Church, living their faith in their daily lives.
- attend regular catechetical meetings and do ongoing formation.
- conform to all diocesan requirements which includes a background screening and Protecting god's Children Training.

## **Class Day & Times**

All students Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade attend classes on Mondays from 5:45 until 7:00 p.m. from September 11, 2023 through April 29, 2023. (See the 2023-2024 REP calendar for details.)

## **Registration**

Registration of new students takes place during the spring and summer months. Requirements include

- Filling out a registration form
- Being an active member of a parish
- Filling out a parish registration form if not already registered
- **Baptism and (if applicable) First Communion certificates for ALL students entering their sacramental year. Your registration process will NOT be completed until we have a copy of your child's sacramental certificates.**

## **Financial Obligation**

A financial obligation is charged to each family to help defray the cost of operating the Religious Education Program. These rates are less than the total cost to run the program and are designed to make the program affordable to most families. The rates are:

\$195.00 - One Child in the household

\$285.00 - Two or more children in the same household

\$40.00 - First Holy Communion Sacramental Fee

\$40.00 - Confirmation Sacramental Fee

Please note that the student text is included in the tuition. If the book is lost or misplaced, a book replacement fee of \$25.00 will be added after three classes without a book.

### **Financial Obligation Plan:**

At registration, families may pay in full or monthly installments.

Families may make a single payment, made in full, with cash or a check. Families may also use a credit card or bank account, but there is a 4% processing fee.

If you are interested in financial aid, please call Mrs. Kelch at 815-725-6927. All inquiries are confidential.

## **Transfer Students**

Students in grades 2 through 8 who are transferring into the program from another parish should obtain records from the school/REP or a letter indicating that the child had been attending religious education, which grade/grades he/she attended and the attendance record in each grade.

**Parents should request these records as soon as possible** from the previous parish as they are necessary for the appropriate placement of the child in the program. It is important to have these records prior to the start of the school year because any child in grades 2-8 who has had no previous religious education or who has missed a year might be required to complete a separate program before entering his/her class. See ***TRANSITION CLASSES*** for more details.

## **Transition Classes**

Any child enrolled in grades 2-8 who has had no previous religious education or has missed a year or more of religious education will be assessed to determine the need for a catch-up program before entering the class.

The purpose is obviously to catch the child up in content missed to relieve the student of undue embarrassment as they enter the classroom for the first time and to allow the teacher at each grade level to spend class time on the curriculum for that grade.

Upon completion of the catch-up program, the Director of Religious Education will place the student in his/her grade level. This program will be designed to fit the needs of the individual student.

## **Curriculum**

The series is "Blest Are We," Faith and Action Edition, published by RCL, 2018 edition. Grade 2 uses two additional books published by RCL, one covering Reconciliation and one covering Eucharist. The Confirmation Class uses RCL's Confirmation book. These programs have been endorsed by the Diocese. The "Blest Are We" series is foundational in that it is based on the structure of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. This structure assures that students learn the content of our Catholic faith, celebrate it in worship, connect it to their everyday lives, and learn to pray. There is a "Family Time" page for each chapter to be used to connect the lessons to the child/ren's REAL life experiences. At [www.blestarewe.com](http://www.blestarewe.com) there are special articles and activities for parents.

## **Homework Assignments**

There is never enough time to cover all the reading and activities which are assigned to the lessons. Sometimes the teachers ask students to finish pages for homework. Adults are encouraged to supervise this work, especially because the religion material is new to the student. Many of the teachers have a homework folder and some ask for a parent signature after the homework has been checked. Please ask your child about homework and check backpacks if necessary. When a child is absent, he/she is expected to complete the lesson that was covered in the missed class. When the student returns to class the following week, they will be expected to make up any missed assignments while they were out. A long term illness or a family emergency are exceptions. It will be at the discretion of the teacher, and the DRE if necessary, for any additional make-up work.

Parents will be notified of incomplete assignments and asked to see that all assignments are completed.

## **Sacraments**

Preparation for the sacraments is an integral and important part of the Religious Education Program. Sacraments are celebrations that mark important phases in a child's faith journey. Celebrations of the sacraments provide the immediate family and the faith community an opportunity for reflection and renewal.

Parental involvement in the sacrament preparation of children is of the greatest importance. Parents are **expected** to take an active role in the faith journey of their child. It is the parents' responsibility to:

- Nurture the spiritual life of the child
- Encourage an active family prayer life
- **Regularly attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation**
- Participate in **ALL** parent meetings (**Parent meetings are mandatory; there will be NO makeup meetings.**)
- Encourage open dialog and discussion about faith issues and what the child is learning in class

- Read parent letters and review take home materials
- Ensure that the child is completing any homework assignments

## **Reconciliation & Eucharist**

Preparation for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist begin in first grade. Immediate and formal preparation occurs in second grade. Both the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Eucharist take place during the second grade school year. Diocesan policy requires two years of instruction before any sacrament.

Children who come to the program from other areas must bring a written record of the previously completed and current grade levels. Children who for any reason enter the program at an older age will be grouped and instructed with age appropriate materials.

There will be required meetings for parents to assist them as they prepare their child for Reconciliation and Eucharist. These meetings are mandatory even if you have attended in previous years for your other children.

## **Confirmation**

Confirmation is one of the three Sacraments of Initiation along with Baptism and Eucharist. Confirmation completes the grace of Baptism through an outpouring of the special gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is a time where the child personally accepts and makes the commitment to Catholicism that was made for him/her by parents at Baptism. It is an initiation into a fuller and richer faith life.

The process of preparation for Confirmation takes place over a two-year period beginning in seventh grade. A key element in the lessons is helping the student to determine the importance and relevance of the specific teachings of the Church to his/her life.

The preparation process includes stewardship/service activities. It is a time for the student to explore and discover what areas of community involvement are significant to his/her spiritual life. He/she will gain an awareness of the gifts and talents they possess and his/her ability to share them with others.

The preparation process at St. Paul the Apostle Parish includes academics, stewardship (service), prayer, a retreat, individual assignments and regular attendance at Mass.

The essential role of the parents and sponsors is to encourage, support, and affirm the candidate's involvement in the Confirmation process. Sponsors must be at least 16 years old, a confirmed, practicing Catholic (registered in a parish, receiving the sacraments, and regularly attending Mass). Sponsors may not be the parents of the Confirmation candidate.

Parents who have not received the Sacrament of Confirmation may inquire about classes to prepare them for this sacrament.

## **Security**

For the safety and security of all of our students, all outside doors will remain locked at all times during class. A volunteer will be present to open the Door C (the North door) door for the students beginning at 5:30 p.m. For further security, anytime the children are in Church for Mass (the Opening Mass, the Christmas Mass and our Closing Mass) the doors to the Church will be locked as well. The only door available to parents to enter is the main center door of the Church facing Woodlawn. If you are running late for Mass, please be patient and a staff member will open the door for you. Also, we are requesting that the balcony not be used during Mass. These procedures are put into place to strengthen our security. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to phone the Director.

## **Arrival Procedures**

All students should arrive at least five minutes before the **start** of class. This is a good time to have the children stop to use the restroom before going to class. Time for instruction is limited so it is **important that students be on time for classes.**

**ALL** students will enter the building using Door C (the gym entrance). Families should enter the north parking lot using WOODLAWN AVENUE and exit via CAMPBELL STREET. Those parents who wish to bring their children into the building should park on the north side (near the Campbell Street entrance) and follow the sidewalk to Door C. There will be no entrance via the courtyard parking lot.

Once you enter the building, the students will be escorted to the gymnasium to line up with their class. At 5:45 p.m., the teachers will walk the students to their classroom for class.

## **Dismissal Procedures**

Dismissal should follow the same procedure: Enter off of Woodlawn and exit via Campbell. For the safety of all concerned, please follow this plan. As the year progresses, the darkness will set in and here at St. Paul's the safety of the children is of utmost importance.

The lot formerly known as the teachers' lot will NOT be used for drop off or pick up. Classes are over at 7 pm. We cannot leave the building until all children are picked up. **Catechists are volunteers and are already giving a great deal of their own personal time. Please show them the respect they deserve by arriving and picking up your child on time.**

For safety reasons, students will only be released to parents or other legal guardians unless written authorization is provided to the catechist and/or REP office. If you want your child dismissed to an older sibling or a carpooling parent, please provide us with written permission stating your request. We will not release students to the north parking lot regardless of grade level.

**PLEASE NOTE: Please be extremely careful in the parking lot area as children are often distracted and not watching car movement.** If your child(ren) will be walking to and from REP on occasion, please notify us.

**There are a few marked handicapped spaces near the main activity center entrance. Please leave those spaces available for those who have a handicapped sticker or tag.**

### **ATTENDANCE/ABSENCE**

The Religious Education Program has a very limited teaching period in which to provide a consistency of instruction that enables our students to grasp the tenets of their faith. It is required that children attend regularly. We recognize that an absence is sometimes unavoidable and we want to work with you if there is a problem.

Please make religious education a priority in your child's life. If your child is ill and cannot attend, please contact the Religious Education Office 815-725-6927 and notify the Director as soon as possible. We ask that you notify the office no later than 5:00 p.m. on Mondays. In the case of extreme emergencies, please call the office as soon as possible.

When your child returns to class, please make arrangements with the teacher for your child to make up any missed work.

Once class has begun, no student is permitted to leave the building unless accompanied by a parent. The parent should first come to the Religious Education desk to sign out that student before removing him/her from class. No student will be allowed to wait outside the school building.

**Parents should notify the REP desk in writing** if someone other than the parent will transport the child. Your child's safety is important to us.

Classes begin promptly at 5:45 pm. Any child who arrives after that time will be marked tardy.

**We ask parents to come into the building with any student who is late for class and sign in for the child at the REP desk.** This will facilitate the child getting to class as soon as possible.

Regular class attendance is expected for all those enrolled in St. Paul's Religious Education Program. Adults are required to phone in **each time** a child will be absent from class. Classes **begin** at 5:45, so late arrivals are a disruption. In case of unusual circumstances, alternative arrangements may be made with the Director and Teacher. Since each lesson builds upon the previous material, it is crucial for students to attend class regularly. **Missing more than five classes (THREE in a sacrament year) could result in having to repeat the grade level.** If a child skips a year of religious instruction, the child will be placed in the grade level that was missed. All program placements are made at the discretion of the Director.

### **Accidents & Emergencies**

Emergency contacts for your child and any information vital to the safety and welfare of the child must be on file in the Religious Education Office. In case of minor accidents, first aid will be given by the school and parents will be notified of it.



## **Communication**

Students are often given fliers or letters containing information pertinent to the program such as scheduling changes, attendance at Church, informational needs, volunteer requests, and special events. Please check with your child weekly for this material. Newsletters will be posted on St. Paul the Apostle Parish's website. It is very important that you become familiar with using the parish website (under the Child & Youth Ministries tab, REP) for all vital and important communications or changes to the calendar. As much we try, there are times when calendar dates are subject to change. There will also be hard copies of the monthly newsletters kept at the REP office desk for you to pick up if you so choose. Please keep in mind, the information in the newsletters are very important dates coming up, calendar changes if necessary, and parent information regarding sacraments. Also, please follow St. Paul the Apostle's Facebook page too!

## **Visitors**

Any children or adults who are not enrolled or working in the program are considered visitors. These people must sign in at the desk and state their reasons for being present. Classroom observation must be cleared with the Director and the teacher(s). Outside doors will be locked at all times with a volunteer opening the door for late families.

## **Family Expectations**

We ask you to go over the student expectations with your child(ren) and to reflect upon what is expected of you after reading this Handbook. You have been asked to sign the signature page indicating you will make yourself familiar with the contents of the Handbook.

Students have the responsibility to:

- respect and obey teachers and helpers.
- wear respectable attire. (no short shorts, pants with holes, no hats worn inside)
- do assigned work.
- bring the book and supplies to class.
- enter and exit in an orderly fashion.
- take assigned seats upon entering the classroom.
- respect the property of the school and the other students and be responsible for any damage to property.
- leave ipods and games at home; leave cell phones at the desk if necessary to bring it.

Parents are to:

- work with their children, not only modeling faith but also talking faith.
- see that they and their children participate at weekly Mass.
- help them to develop a sense of stewardship.
- see that their children attend class weekly.
- follow procedures for notification of absence, tardiness, and early dismissal.
- see that homework is completed and prayers mastered.
- review weekly lessons with children.

- read newsletters and other communications and respond when necessary.
- attend sacramental preparation meetings and other meetings that are required.

## **Discipline**

Discipline in behavior and habits are an important aspect of moral formation. The purpose of discipline is to foster personal development and to promote self-respect for others and for duly constituted authority. At St. Paul the Apostle, we support a positive and constructive discipline philosophy.

Our goal is to foster a sense of right, justice, love and respect for everyone. When our students misbehave they will be dealt with immediately. The action taken will be in accordance with the seriousness of the offense. Since we have only 75 minutes for class, it is important all students pay attentions so the teacher does not use class time on resolving discipline issues. The following procedure will be used should the need arise:

**First offense:** The teacher will take initial action to correct the problem. The student will be reminded of his/her responsibility to himself/herself and to the class.

**Second offense:** The teacher will send the student to the Director of Religious Education. The Director will speak to the student and determine if it is necessary to call the parents so they may be aware of the infraction and become involved in resolving the problem.

**Third offense:** The teacher will send the student to the Director of Religious Education who in turn will call the parents.

## **Suspension**

Serious breaches of discipline may result in the suspension of a student from religious education classes or activities. These serious breaches include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Fighting
- Bullying
- Conduct endangering fellow students, teachers or school personnel
- Damaging or destroying school property
- Insubordination
- Violence
- Leaving the school building or grounds without permission
- Weapons (anything that could cause serious injury or damage)

When an incident that leads to suspension occurs, the Director of Religious Education and the Pastor shall investigate the alleged offense. Investigation will include a discussion with the involved student and giving the student an opportunity to be heard in regard to the alleged offense.

## **Bullying/Harassment**

Every individual is entitled to respect due to his/her uniqueness as a child of God. At St. Paul the Apostle, we are committed to providing an educational environment which is free from physical, psychological, sexual or verbal bullying/harassment. Disrespect or bullying/harassment will not be tolerated and it will be treated as a serious offense.

## **Medication**

The guidelines of the Diocese of Joliet will be followed regarding the distribution of medication during religious education classes. Parents are asked to administer any medication before or after religious education class or activity and to make the teacher and Director aware of any possible side effects. Parents are permitted to come to the school to administer medication to their children. If it is essential that a student receive prescription medication during class, the parents must meet first with the Director of Religious Education to go over the guidelines to be followed. This will be done on an individual case basis.

Due to the severe allergies of some children, absolutely no food is allowed in the classrooms, halls or foyer.

## **Dress Code**

Children's attitudes and behaviors are affected by what they wear. We ask that children dress appropriately for religious education classes as well as Mass. Short shorts, tank tops, halter tops of any sort and blouses with spaghetti straps are not permitted. No midriff should be showing. High healed shoes, heelies, and flip-flops are inappropriate and dangerous in a school atmosphere. Clothing that is torn, bears obscene or inappropriate messages may not be worn. Good taste and proper judgment should be utilized. If your child is dressed inappropriately, you will be called to pick him/her up or bring a change of clothing.

## **Electronic Equipment**

Use of electronic equipment such as Ipods, cell phones and video games are not permitted before or during class. If a child is caught using one of these devices, it will be confiscated and will only be returned to a parent. **If it is necessary to have your child bring a cell phone, he or she must leave the phone on top of their desk during class.**

## **Mass Attendance**

"The celebration of the Mass, as an action of Christ and the people of God hierarchically ordered, is the center of the whole Christian life for the universal Church, the local Church, and for each and every one of the faithful. 'For therein is the culminating action whereby God sanctifies the world in Christ and men worship the Father, as they adore him through Christ the Son of God.' The mysteries of man's redemption are in some way made present throughout the course of the year by the celebration of the Mass. All other sacred celebrations and the activities of the Christian life are related to the Mass; they spring forth from it and culminate in it." *Document of the Second Vatican Council*

Simply put, attendance at the sacred liturgy, Sunday Mass, is a privilege and obligation. Attendance at religious education class is in addition to, not in lieu of, Mass. We urge parents to attend Mass with their children and to position themselves so the children can see and hear what is going on.

### **Stewardship**

We encourage you to help your child find ways to use his/her time and talent to help others in the community. Within the Religious Education Program, we conduct a food collection at Thanksgiving, a toy and baby clothes collection at Christmas, and during Lent we encourage our children to save money for various organizations that help the needy.

Help your children to appreciate that stewardship is as important to our Christian development as is the knowledge of and the celebration of our Catholic beliefs and rituals.

### **Altar Servers**

All students in grades 4-12 are given the opportunity to volunteer as altar servers, with parental permission. Training is usually done twice each year. Please contact the REP office if your child is interested in becoming an altar server.

### **Prayers**

Each grade level has a certain set of prayers that are presented and practiced during a given year. Prayers introduced in previous years are also reviewed. Most students find it difficult to memorize a given prayer when they hear it or read it a few times a year. Therefore, please pray the traditional prayers each day with your child. A copy of these prayers can also be found in the child's textbook.

### **Liturgies**

At special times during the year, the children attend Mass or prayer services (e.g., opening of the school year, Advent Mass, and the closing of the school year). Children are also given the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation during class time once or twice a school year. Families are always welcome!

### **Active Parishioner Status**

In the day-to-day operation of the parish, the term "active parishioner" is used in a number of instances. It is defined as a registered parishioner who attends Mass on a regular weekly basis, Sundays and holy days, contributes time (volunteering), talent (teaching, choir, parish ministry, etc.) and treasure in the parish offertory and that the contribution of treasure is done in an accountable way, i.e., parish envelopes. If you choose not to use the parish envelope, your check is considered "loose" and counted as an unknown contribution. If you want to be an "active parishioner" you should

- Register at the parish office
- Use your envelope
- Find a meaningful way to use time and talent for the good of the Church

We encourage all families to be active members of the parish. Remember, you are your child's number one role model.

### **Safe Environment**

We at St. Paul the Apostle are committed to creating an environment where all children and vulnerable adults are safe. We abide by rules and policies of the Diocese of Joliet and comply with using the Virtus *Protecting God's Children* program. Parents are highly encouraged to take the *Protecting God's Children* workshop. It is mandatory for anyone volunteering or who is in the building on a regular basis when children are present.

### **Reporting Child Abuse**

St. Paul Religious Education personnel are required to conform to the "Abuse and Neglected Child Reporting Act" (PA 81-1007). Guidelines have been published by the Diocese regarding these procedures. Each year *new* families will receive a copy of "Standards of Behavior for Those Working with Minors," The Diocese of Joliet "Pastoral Policy Regarding Sexual Abuse of Minors," and "Parent Guide: Understanding and Preventing Child Sexual Abuse." These documents are on our parish website under Religious Education Registration. If you suspect child abuse, call DCFS or the local police. Parents should carefully read the "Parent Guide: Understanding and Preventing Child Sexual Abuse.

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