

St. Joseph's Church



Parish School of Religion Handbook 2023-2024

**St. Joseph's Church
Parish School of Religion
Introduction Letter**

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Dear Parents:

Welcome to a new year of the Parish School of Religion (PSR).

At the time of the baptism of your child, the priest asked you if you were willing to accept the responsibility of bringing your child up in the practice of the faith. The blessing that you received at the end of the baptismal ceremony asked God to help you be the best of teachers of your child in the ways of faith.

You as the parents of this child are the first teachers...we the parish family of St. Joseph are here to assist you in the faith development of your child. We are here to impart on your child the knowledge of the faith along with how that faith should be lived out each and every day – full faith formation.

We ask you to assist your child in living out this faith by fully participating in the life of the parish family of St. Joseph. Regular attendance at mass on Sunday and Holy Days. Eucharist is a beginning; yet, being active in the work of the parish by volunteering in the ministries and the mission of the parish will fully immerse you and your children into the life of the Church – the life of Jesus.

We ask you to take to heart the importance of faith formation in the life of your child and work to more fully integrate the life of the Church into the life of your personal family. We, the members of the PSR staff, are here to assist you.

May God bless you and your family as we begin a new year of faith formation.

Yours in Christ's service,

St. Joseph Faith Formation Ministry

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PURPOSE

The primary purpose of St. Joseph Parish School of Religion (PSR) program is to provide assistance and support to the parents of those students who attend public schools. During the Rite of Baptism for Children, the celebrant addresses the parents:

"You have asked to have your children baptized. In doing so, you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring them up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor." In recognition of this fact, that "since parents have conferred life on their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring" (Declaration on Christian Education #3, a.k.a. DCE).

The parish of St. Joseph also recognizes its responsibility as "church community" which involves a sharing of beliefs, experiences, ideals, and values. The church community of St. Joseph Parish aids parents in creating a "family atmosphere so animated with love and reverence for God that a well-rounded personal and social development will be fostered among children." (DCE #3).

As a further aid, the Parish has dedicated catechists who volunteer to work with parents for the catechesis of their children. Catechesis is derived from the Greek word meaning to "resound" or "to sound from above." The word echoed or resounded through catechesis is the "Word" of God, Jesus Christ and the "word" of Scripture. Catechists assist individuals, and communities acquire and deepen faith and identity through initiation rites, instruction and formation of conscience. (National Catechetical Directory #7) The catechist does this by resounding the "word" of God in his/her very life. Through Baptism, the whole Church is called to participate in the mission of catechesis. "Go therefore and make disciples of every nation...Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20)

GOALS

The main objective of the PSR program is to instruct students in the fundamental values and doctrines of our Catholic Faith. Through this process we strive to:

- Encourage each individual to nourish his/her own personal relationship with God through prayer, study, scripture and frequent participation in the Mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Encourage students to recognize Eucharistic liturgy as the source, expression, and celebration of who we are as Catholic Christians.
- Encourage students to grow through prayer, study, and participation in the liturgical and active life of the Church, as a response to their baptismal call to make the Kingdom of God present here and now in the world.

POLICIES

REGISTRATION

Registration for first through eighth grade of the Parish School of Religion (PSR) Program is held annually prior to the beginning of the PSR school year. Information regarding the dates of registration and fees will be published in the weekly bulletin and on the parish website. Parents are encouraged to register early to assist the catechist in ordering the proper number of textbooks and materials. Students are required to register annually. Families must be a registered parish member in order to register for the PSR. *NOTE: A Kindergarten class may form if sufficient students are registered (5 or more) and a catechist/teacher can be found.*

TUITION

The tuition fee schedule for the current Parish School of Religion is as follows:

- \$45.00 per child or \$100.00 for three or more children.
- \$25.00 per child, for new families joining the program after January 1st.
- Tuition is waived for the children of instructors and directors.
- Financial assistance, if needed, should be discussed with the PSR Coordinator on an individual basis. All discussion will be confidential.

ATTENDANCE

Each child is expected to attend all of the scheduled classes. Classes are held from 9:15 am - 10:30 am on Sunday mornings as listed on the calendar. Students are expected to attend and participate the entire class period. Supervision is not provided before or after PSR classes. Students should not arrive prior to 9:00am and should be picked up no later than 10:45am.

It is the responsibility of the parents to notify the instructor if the child is to be absent. If the student is absent, he/she is expected to make-up any missed assignments or homework within 2 weeks of the absence and submit to the teacher upon completion. Promotion of students with excessive absenteeism (more than four classes) will be under the advisement of the PSR Coordinator and the Parish Priest.

HOMEWORK/TEXTBOOKS

The catechist may assign homework weekly to students in all grades. Students are expected to bring completed assignments along with their textbook and folder to class each week. Students who misplace their PSR textbook(s) or other materials will be expected to purchase a new textbook(s) or materials as limited additional resources are available for back-up.

EVALUATION/ PROMOTIONAL TESTING

Student attendance and acceptable performance of the lessons is tracked by each instructor. The purpose of this is to provide the diocese and parents a means to see student progress in learning their Catholic Faith and where they, or we as a parish, might be falling behind. Religious education comes from both the program; yet, more importantly, the parents as we instill the importance of our faith with our children.

Parents are encouraged to discuss the progress of their child with the catechist as the need arises.

- Students will take a tests/quizzes on the material they have learned in class to assess their mastery of a subject area and to determine areas of study that may require additional catechesis.

Students in all grades are expected to take and pass tests throughout the PSR year in order to be eligible to be promoted to the next grade.

Failing performance or participation may require the parents to attend a conference with the parish priest, the PSR coordinator and the teacher.

CHILD PROTECTION TRAINING

All PSR catechists and substitute catechists must attend the initial Child Protection Training through the Belleville Diocese. Each PSR catechist or substitute catechist must complete a refresher course annually in order to continue teaching PSR students.

A Child Protection Training course will be offered annually to the PSR students. Age appropriate material will be presented to the children during these sessions.

PRIVACY

Information obtained from families during PSR registration will be maintained for the sole use of the PSR program. While this information may be shared with other groups within the St. Joseph Parish Community, this information will not be provided to third parties without the express consent of the family.

DISCIPLINE

It is important to maintain a healthy and productive learning environment. As such, PSR students are expected to behave and treat the catechist and other students with respect. In the event that a student becomes disruptive, the catechist will take the appropriate action to bring control and order to the class. The severity of the disruption will determine the teacher's course of action. Appropriate actions may include but are not limited to:

- Asking the student to behave (pointing out the behavior issue).
- Separating the student from the others or assigning seats to students.
- Removing the child from class to sit with the PSR Coordinator until class end. Parent notification will occur.
- Asking the parent to attend class with the child.
- Scheduling a parent and student meeting with the parish priest, the PSR coordinator and the catechist.
- Calling the parent to retrieve the child from class.

The school building and its resources are provided and maintained by the parish to be shared by all members primarily as a formal place of instruction. Since the school is used during the week to instruct other students, there are also items of personal property belonging to those students and instructors. PSR students are expected to be respectful of the resources of the parish and possessions of others present in the school. No student or students should occupy any classroom without the supervision of a PSR catechist.

COMMUNICATION

Communication will occur primarily via email but also through letters sent home with students, parish bulletins, and the website. Changes in policies or schedules will be communicated to each student's family.

CLASS CANCELLATION

In case of severe weather or other emergency, families will be notified via text and/or email using the information given to the parish during registration. Please do not call the parish priest on Sunday morning to determine whether classes are canceled.

FIRE/TORNADO

In the event of a fire or threat of fire, PSR students and catechists will immediately evacuate the school building. Parents will be contacted after all students and faculty are in a safe location away from the threat.

In the event of a tornado, PSR students and catechists will move to the first floor hall of the school or parish hall.

MEDICATION

In accordance with State and Federal laws, Parish School of Religion personnel, salaried or volunteer, are not permitted to administer first aid or dispense medication to any student. In an attempt to serve you, it is requested that you inform the PSR coordinator in writing of any physical or medical needs.

EMERGENCY

In case of emergency, the parents of students will be notified immediately. When parents cannot be reached, the alternate (emergency) number on the registration form will be called.

CELL PHONES/ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Students are prohibited from using cell phones during PSR without consent of the catechist. Other electronic devices, including but not limited to, iPods, MP3 players, cameras (video, digital, etc.) are not permitted in the PSR classrooms unless specifically requested by the catechist. Cell phones or electronic devices will be confiscated until the end of class when students do not abide by this policy.

SACRAMENTS

Before a student can receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Holy Eucharist, and Confirmation, he/she should regularly attend a Catholic Religion program. At a minimum, one year prior to the sacrament year.

In order to assist parents in the preparation of their children for the reception of these sacraments, St. Joseph PSR provides parent meetings for each sacrament. These parent meetings are a required part of the Sacramental Programs. The parent meetings are designed to familiarize parents with current Church teachings; develop methods to promote and increase family participation in the reception of the sacraments, and to extend the process of catechesis into the home.

Sacramental preparation is designed to help students, parents, and families prepare for the reception of the sacraments, as well as continued participation in the sacraments.

RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF CHILDREN

For those students who have not received the Sacrament of Baptism, or who have been baptized and have not received the Sacraments of Holy Communion, Reconciliation and Confirmation, special classes are offered to prepare these children for the sacraments. It is important to remember that these classes are not a substitute for PSR classes. After the student has received the sacraments of initiation, the student's religious education is to be an ongoing process. For more information on the Rite of Christian Initiation of Children (RCIC), contact the PSR coordinator or the parish priest.

BAPTISMAL CERTIFICATES

Each new student must have on file with St. Joseph Parish, a copy of his/her Baptismal Certificate. If an original is sent to the parish rectory, a copy will be made and the original returned. If your child was baptized at St. Joseph parish, a note on the registration form is all that is needed with the child's birth date.

SERVERS

Each of us is called to serve the Lord in different ways. One of the ministries PSR students can perform is to volunteer as a Mass server. PSR students who have entered fourth grade will be required to train as a server. Families are strongly encouraged to embrace this ministry; however, once trained, it is a family decision on whether or not to be scheduled for serving. Families may request their Mass preference (Saturday at 5:00 p.m. or Sunday at 8:00 a.m. at St. Joseph or Sunday at 10:00 a.m. at St. Agatha). It is important for the server to fulfill their commitment if scheduled or by finding a replacement server as the entire parish community suffers when servers do not fulfill their assignments. NOTE: St. Agatha is the parish partner of St. Joseph and servers can participate at both parishes for this ministry.

CONFIRMATION REQUIREMENTS

Confirmation for our parish can be a one-year (8th grade) or two-year cycle (first year 6th & 7th grade; second year 7th & 8th grade). St. Joseph and St. Agatha PSR students attend the program together and work in concert with the St. Joseph school children with the program.

A candidate for the Sacrament of Confirmation who has attained the age of reason must profess the faith, be in a state of grace, have the intention of receiving the sacrament and be prepared to assume the role of disciple and witness to Christ (CC 1319). In order to ensure a candidate is prepared, students who have not regularly attended PSR classes (or another approved catechetical teaching) for the past two years will not be able to receive the sacrament of confirmation without expressed consent of the PSR coordinator and the parish priest. Please discuss any concerns with the PSR Coordinator for clarification.

SPONSOR SELECTION

Each confirmation student will be required to select an *adult* sponsor. The sponsor must be a baptized, confirmed Catholic in good standing with the Catholic Church. Non-parish sponsors will be required to provide a letter of recommendation from their parish providing the baptismal date, confirmation date and statement of good standing. The catechist will provide additional instruction regarding requirements.

To emphasize the unity of the Sacrament of Baptism and the Sacrament of Confirmation, it is appropriate that the sponsor be one of the baptismal godparents (CC 1311). While this is not a mandatory requirement, the candidate should select a sponsor that provides the student with a good example of living the Faith (living a holy life through prayer, attending Mass, etc.). The sponsor must reside in the local area in order that they are able to support the candidate through the process and provide the candidate a good example of living their Catholic Faith. This type of support and example can be very challenging to provide when the sponsor does not live in the area. Parents or siblings close in age are not appropriate choices for sponsors. Additionally, high school students are not appropriate choices for sponsors.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

It is the responsibility of the faithful to serve their community as Christ taught us. As such, confirmation students are expected to perform 15/30 hours of community service during their confirmation years. The service hours should be in each of the following areas: family, parish, spiritual and community.

The confirmation student is giving his/her time and talent to others through performing Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. As such, the student should keep the following thoughts in mind when selecting service projects:

- The student is not to be paid.
- Normal household chores are not to be used as service hours. Students are expected to perform these activities as a contributing family member.
- The student should try to include a variety of experiences.
- The student should perform the project selflessly and lovingly for those in need.
- The student should reflect on how his/her actions are helping him/her take on the mind and heart of Christ while fulfilling the needs of others and building up the Christian Community.
- The student should remember that giving time and talent continues throughout life.

The Confirmation catechist(s) has a list of acceptable ideas for community service. The students should consult this list and ask the teachers, the PSR coordinator or the parish priest if they have any questions or concerns regarding the type of project they would like to complete. The catechist will provide additional instruction regarding this requirement.

LETTER TO THE BISHOP

Confirmation students will be required to submit a letter to the Bishop reflecting why they would like to move forward with the Sacrament of Confirmation and receive the fruits of the Holy Spirit. All letters must be typed on white paper and should be grammatically correct. The Bishop has requested that all letters be reviewed and that all issues be resolved at the local level prior to submission to the parish priest. The Bishop reads every letter and may invite candidates to write, telephone or visit him. The catechist will provide additional instruction for this task.

SAINTS

Confirmation students will be required to select a saint for their confirmation name and write a biography about the chosen saint. The student should select a saint based on the holy life the saint led. The chosen saint should be someone the student would like to model his/her life. The students may select an archangel or someone in the process of being canonized, if approved by the coordinator. The student must be able to provide factual information about the saint that he/she has chosen. This information must be included in the written biography. The catechist will provide instructions regarding the requirements for this paper.

PRAYERS

Each confirmation student is expected to have learned his/her Catholic prayers by the time he/she begins the confirmation year. As each PSR classroom focuses on prayer every week, students attending PSR should know their prayers by the age of confirmation. Prayers are located in a separate PSR Prayer Handbook.

LUKE 18 RETREAT

Each Confirmation year, the parish Youth Ministry Program holds a Luke 18 weekend for confirmation students. This weekend is intended to help the students enrich their Catholic Faith. It is mandatory that all confirmation students attend this weekend. If the student does not attend the Parish retreat, they are responsible for locating and attending a confirmation retreat at another Parish. Information regarding the weekend date will be provided at the beginning of each PSR school year.

ATTENDANCE AT THE CHRISM AND TRIDUUM MASSES

Each year the confirmation students are requested to attend the Chrism Mass at St. Peters Cathedral during Holy Week. This Mass is typically celebrated the Tuesday of Holy Week during school hours. Permission slips are provided to the students to release them from school to attend the Mass. Information is sent home for parents several weeks prior to the Mass. Due to this being during school hours, attendance at this mass is strongly encouraged; but not mandatory.

Each year the Bishop stresses the importance of attending the Triduum Masses (Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Vigil) as these Masses are the highlight of the Liturgical year. All confirmation students are required to attend these Masses during their confirmation year as part of their preparation for confirmation.

CONFIRMATION TEXTBOOKS

As the students move into the 2-year Confirmation Cycle, the grades combine for both years: 6 & 7 grade for year one and 7 & 8 grade for year two. The textbook used varies based on what is recommended by the diocesan office.

Ascension Press: Chosen – This program is a combination of instructor and video led sessions that can take place over a one-year time frame (7th/8th grade) or used over a two-year time frame (6th/7th & 7th/8th). It allows the catechists to grow the student's faith as they learn of Jesus' call to each person to become his disciple and the ways in which his teachings, his sacraments, and his Church nourish people for discipleship.

Dynamic Catholic 'Decision Point' - This program is a combination of instructor and video led sessions that take place over a one-year time frame when students are in 7th/8th grade. Decision Point is specifically designed to engage young Catholics in a meaningful conversation about the genius of Catholicism. It teaches and inspires teens to respond to God's grace. Dynamic Catholic is an on-line free Catholic resource which allows for students to make up missed class sessions as needed.

TEXTBOOKS (Non-confirmation grades)

The PSR coordinator, with approval of the parish priest, selects textbooks designed to cover the teachings of the Catholic Church. The PSR program is currently using the *Sadlier Religion Christ In Us* textbook series for grades kindergarten through six. The *Christ In Us* program helps the students to learn, celebrate, share and live their Catholic faith. The program offers in in-person or virtual option or a hybrid of the two. The textbooks are built on the four pillars of the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

- Creed
- Sacraments
- Morality
- Prayer

The *Christ In Us* program is rooted in Tradition and Scripture and authored in wisdom of the community. It uses a learning framework that considers how young people develop an enduring understanding of the Catholic faith.

A spiral approach to catechesis goes deeper into faith concepts at each grade level in developmentally appropriate ways. Each unit and lesson pose an Essential Question, which is the same for all grade levels. The Essential Questions are meaningful, faith-focused questions that encourage inquiry and reflection and promote ongoing, lifelong faith formation because they explore the heart of what we believe as Catholics. Students revisit the questions each year with increasing complexity and deepening of understanding. They consider how each question applies to their own lives and influences their actions as disciples of Jesus Christ. Families with students at different grade levels explore the same concepts at the same time, making family faith formation more effective and faith-sharing easier.

Christ In Us uses both hard copy textbook learning and also a digital platform for the Teacher, the Parent and the Student. Digital access will be given to both the Parent and the Student to encourage family faith formation outside of the classroom. The digital platform also provides the ability to have remote learning in the event of missed classes or pandemic restrictions.

The **second grade** Sacramental Preparation for Reconciliation and Communion are from Dynamic Catholic. The program is titled 'Blessed' and is used to ready students for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. This series is used throughout the entire sacramental year and is a combination of textbook, video and hands-on activities to lead the students in their faith and ready them for the sacraments they are to receive. This program can also be used virtually to allow for make up of missed classes and/or pandemic restrictions, should they occur.