



Forming Intentional Disciples in Jesus Christ

"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 and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity." (St. John Paul II).

SS. PHILIP AND JAMES PREP FAMILY HANDBOOK

Revised July, 2025

This handbook contains certain policies and procedures of SS. Philip and James PREP (herein known as "The Program"). The Program may change any of its policies and procedures as needed and apply them as circumstances dictate.

In the event of such a change, parents will be given prompt notification and provided with an addendum if necessary. If you have questions about a particular policy or procedure, please contact the Program Director.

Students and parents must accept and abide by the policies and procedures contained in this handbook in order for the student to attend the program.

[Revised June 2025]

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MISSION STATEMENT & PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

MISSION STATEMENT

"Catechesis describes the essential ministry of the (Catholic) Church through which the teachings of Christ have been passed on to believers throughout the ages...Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people and adults which includes the teaching of Christian doctrine" of the Roman Catholic Church (National Directory for Catechesis, no. 1, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops). Keeping in mind that all the baptized have a right to catechesis, every person, however limited, is capable of growth in holiness (General Directory for Catechesis, no. 189). Catechetical and sacramental programs are inclusive of parishioners with disabilities and may need to be adapted for some parishioners with disabilities.

PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

We believe that our children can grow in their relationship with God:

- through well-planned lessons and activities prepared by catechists, based on the Archdiocesan grade level Religion Guidelines and Scope and Sequence for Religious Instruction,
- by preparation for and reception of the Sacraments of Penance, Eucharist, and Confirmation,
- and with frequent visits to church for lesson-related visuals, prayer experiences, liturgy and sacraments.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Parish Religious Education Program seeks to serve all registered members of SS. Philip and James Parish who attend Public or non-Catholic Private or Charter Schools, ages four through grade seven.

DAYS AND TIMES OF CLASSES

Sundays

- The Family Catechesis Program meets every five to six weeks, on designated Sundays, following the 12:00 Mass. After a brief gathering and prayer, students go with their catechists for class, while parents stay in the church for adult catechesis. Parents are then responsible for teaching the related lessons at home, before the next scheduled gathering. Lesson Plans are provided by the publisher. Students complete Interactive Chapter Reviews and submit them to the catechist via email. **Students who miss two or more of the seven sessions will not be eligible to enroll in Family Catechesis the following academic year. CYO Track and Field Athletes: keep in mind that your meets are on Sundays; therefore Tuesday or Wednesday classes would be a better choice for you.**

Tuesdays

- Levels 1-6 meet weekly, on Tuesday evenings, from 6:30-7:45.

Wednesdays

- Levels 1-6, and Level 7 (Confirmation) meet weekly, on Wednesday evenings, from 6:30-7:45.

Families of children in Levels 1, 3-6 choose either Family Catechesis, or weekly class, either on Tuesday or Wednesday.

Students in Sacrament Classes meet on a weekly schedule.

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

- Students typically prepare for and receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist while in Level 2; students who are older may be placed in a mixed-age group to meet their age- and level-appropriate needs in preparing for the sacraments.
- Students typically prepare for and receive the Sacrament of Confirmation in the second semester of Grade 7. Accommodations may be made for older students to be confirmed, with appropriate preparation.
- Students of non-parishioner families are accepted with the agreement of both pastors, and typically return to the parishes of which they are members for the celebration of the sacraments.

UNBAPTIZED CHILDREN

- Unbaptized children who are of Pre-Catechetical Age (under the age of seven years) follow the traditional pattern for reception of sacraments:
 - Rite of Baptism of Children—Immediately (Parent Preparation)
 - Penance/First Communion—age of reason; 2nd or 3rd grade
 - Confirmation—according to Archdiocesan guidelines

- Unbaptized children who are of Catechetical Age (seven years of age or older) follow the *Christian Initiation of Adults*, with adaptations for children.

CHILDREN FOR FULL COMMUNION

- Children who are validly baptized in a non-Catholic ecclesial community and who are under the age of seven follow the traditional pattern for sacramental preparation and reception of sacraments.
- Children who are validly baptized in a non-Catholic ecclesial community and who are of Catechetical Age (seven years of age or older):
 - are prepared for Reception Into Full Communion with the Catholic Church (RCIA),
 - receive First Penance prior to Rite of Reception Into Full Communion,
 - Rite of Reception Into Full Communion: Profession of Faith, Confirmation and First Communion in the same liturgy

CHILDREN BAPTIZED IN ANY OF THE EASTERN (CATHOLIC) RITES

The Eastern Rites of the Catholic Church are in Full Communion with Rome. Therefore, children who have been baptized in an Eastern Rite (of the Catholic Church) have no need to make a Profession of Faith or participate in *Christian Initiation of Adults* in order to receive sacraments.

Children who have been baptized in the Eastern Rites will have also been *Chrismated*, or Confirmed, and received First Holy Communion at Baptism, and therefore do not prepare to receive First Holy Communion or Confirmation. If they are members of SS. Philip and James Parish and are enrolled in PREP they will, however, receive the catechesis surrounding those sacraments at the time when their Roman Rite peers are preparing to receive these sacraments. These children will prepare for and receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Penance with their peers.

CHILDREN BAPTIZED IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

If a child is baptized as an Orthodox Christian, then most likely *Chrismation*, or Confirmation, and First Holy Communion took place at Baptism. Although these Sacraments are considered valid by the Roman Catholic Church, it is an offense to the Orthodox to immediately presume intercommunion. Before an invitation is given for intercommunion, the proper Orthodox pastor of the child is to be consulted, if possible, by the parents/guardians. This applies to the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation as well. If there is a desire for the Orthodox family to become Roman Catholic, the Chancery Office of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia must be contacted.

HOME-BASED CATECHESIS

The Family Catechesis Program is intended to replace the fully Home-Based Catechesis in order to offer a cohesive course of instruction, with age-appropriate class groupings, individual home instruction by parents, and support for parents through adult catechesis.

SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS

- Class time is arranged between the catechist and the parents of the student.
- Instruction takes place in the school building, with the exact location determined by the Program Director and the student's mobility needs.

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

- VBS is offered for one week, usually near the end of June.
- It is open to children aged four (must be four years old by January 1 of the current calendar year) through 4th grade.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

APPOINTMENTS (dental, educational, and health)

While the Program recognizes the difficulty in scheduling various appointments, the scheduling of doctor and other appointments should not be made during program hours except for cases of emergency, in which case the parent agrees to complete any missed work and lessons at home. See Student Absences for details on parental expectations with regard to missed class work and assignments. Late arrivals or early dismissal due to medical appointments are strongly discouraged, and early dismissals due to extracurricular or sports-related activities are not permitted.

ARRIVAL PROCEDURES

Please note, for the safety of our students and staff, and to comply with the Safe Environment Policy of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, parents are not permitted to enter the school building during arrival time unless on official business with the program, in which case a Visitor's Pass must be obtained. Students will enter the building via the main school entrance, and proceed to their classrooms. The door is unlocked, with an Aide admitting the students.

ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY

Tuesday/Wednesday classes begin at 6:30. Please make every effort to be **ON TIME**. For safety reasons the school door will be locked at 6:45 pm. If an emergency requires arrival after that time, the parent should call the **Religious Education Office (610-363-1307, ext. 158)** to obtain admittance. **Do not disturb the classes on the first floor by asking to be admitted through their classes.**

CUSTODY POLICY

The Program will not become involved in adjudicating the rights of parents in relation to the custody of their children. Therefore, if a parent is separated, divorced, or unmarried, it is the responsibility of both biological parents to provide the Program Director with the latest, most up-to-date Custodial Order or Custody Agreement. The Program will request these documents at the time of registration. If either the Custodial Order or Custody Agreement changes during the course of the year, it remains the responsibility of both biological parents to provide the revised document to the program director immediately. This is also true in the event that such an agreement is issued after the time of enrollment. In the absence of such documentation the program will and must assume that parents share legal custody.

Our program abides by the provisions of the Buckley Amendment with respect to the rights of non-custodial parents. In the absence of a court order to the contrary, our program will provide the non-custodial parent with access to the records and other program-related information regarding the child.

If there is a court order specifying that there is to be no information given, it is the responsibility of the custodial parent to provide the program director with an official copy of the latest court order.

If a court order prohibits our releasing a child into the custody of a non-custodial parent, it is the responsibility of the custodial parent to provide the program director with an official copy of the court order or custody section of the divorce decree.

In situations with shared legal custody, the parish program expects the cooperation of both parents, especially in regards to sacramental preparation and celebrations.

CYO SPORTS

Students who register for CYO athletic programs are required to attend SS. Philip and James School, SS. Philip and James PREP, or another Catholic school. Students who attend SS. Philip and James PREP **may not participate in sports practices or games during PREP class time**, except in the case of a playoff or championship game.

DISMISSAL/CARPOOLING

Adherence to the dismissal procedures outlined below will help to allow all students to exit the building in a safe, orderly, and timely manner.

- When the bell rings at 7:45, catechists will accompany their class to the area behind the cones, outside the building.
- Transportation Card(s) must be shown to the catechist by the driver. If drivers are transporting children other than their own, they must bring that family's Transportation Card as well.
- In the event of inclement weather at dismissal, drivers are asked to come to the narthex of the church, and present their Transportation Card(s) to the catechist to pick up the children.
- **Details regarding dismissal will be presented at the "Back-to-PREP" Meeting for parents and guardians.**
- **If an adult comes without the required Transportation Card, he or she must present photo ID to the Program Director.**

DRESS CODE

Students are expected to wear clothing that

- is modest (excludes tank tops, bare midriffs, ***short*** shorts)
- does not bear symbols or language that is inappropriate

Students are expected to wear shoes that

- fit the foot securely so as not to be a safety issue (excludes flip flops, slip-on sport sandals)

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Students who bring cell phones or other electronic devices to class are to keep the items in their backpacks; they are not to be used during class.

ENROLLMENT

Children of all abilities who are registered members of SS. Philip and James Parish may be admitted to the Parish Religious Education Program. No student will be denied access to catechesis because of race, national origin, or physical or mental challenges. Applicants who have not been baptized at SS. Philip and James Parish must provide a Baptismal Certificate at the time of registration.

- Students who drop from enrollment and re-enroll in subsequent years may be required to enroll in the level which follows the last level they successfully completed.
- Older students who have not received prior religious instruction may be placed in a mixed-age grouping with other students who are atypical in their enrollment and curriculum progress.

- Since reception of sacraments is dependent upon readiness, understanding, and preparation, students who are atypical in their enrollment may have reception of sacraments deferred until they are properly disposed.

FAMILY VACATIONS

In the event that a family takes a vacation that affects program attendance, it is expected that parents work to accomplish the lesson(s) that the child has missed. Please consult Class Curriculum Calendars for assignments.

PROGRAM CANCELLATIONS (due to Inclement Weather or other Emergency)

When classes need to be cancelled due to inclement weather or other emergency, parents are contacted through SCHOOL MESSENGER. Classes will not be rescheduled; parents are expected to work with the child or children to complete the lesson and assignment found on the Class Curriculum Calendar.

PROGRAM FEES

Program fees are a necessary part of the Program and help ensure that the Program can provide students and their families with the most current and best catechetical resources for their formation needs.

- **The PREP Program fee is due in full at the time of registration.** However, being sensitive to the needs of our families, a deferred payment plan is available upon request. Anyone who cannot pay the fee in full at the time of registration or who has difficulty making payment due to hardship, should contact the Program Director to discuss other possible arrangements.
- In the event that a student voluntarily leaves the Program during the program year, or is dismissed from the Program for any reason including, but not limited to poor attendance, a disciplinary incident, or the possession of drugs, drug paraphernalia, or a weapon on parish property, no refund of tuition or material fees will be made to the family.
- In addition, there may be certain material fees associated with sacramental preparation that are in addition to the PREP Program Fee. These material fees cover incidentals associated with sacramental preparation, including, but not limited to, sacramental enrichment packets, retreat experiences, guest speakers, certificates, music licenses, etc. These fees have separate due dates which will be provided to families of sacramental candidates under separate cover.
- A yearly fee is used to cover the cost of books and other consumable materials used by the students, as well as program and building costs.
The fee schedule per family is as follows:
 - \$170.00 for one child

- \$260.00 for two children
- \$290.00 for three or more children

REGISTRATION

Registration for the upcoming year usually begins in late spring so as to facilitate appropriate planning related to the number of catechists needed, textbooks needed, and logistics.

SNACKS/TREATS

In response to the many PREP students with food allergies, the Program is making every reasonable accommodation to lessen the possibility of exposure to food allergens by designating all classrooms as Snack Free Zones. This policy is to be followed before, during and after PREP time. On occasion, a treat may be provided to be eaten at home.

If there is an occasion for a special celebration, which includes special foods or snacks, the event shall be held in a communal PREP setting, such as the school cafeteria. A parent or guardian of a student with a food allergy must be present at such gatherings or provide a snack for his/her child or children.

STUDENT ABSENCE

Regular and consistent attendance in the PREP program is essential for students to master knowledge of their faith. Attendance is one of several key factors considered when determining student eligibility for promotion.

Poor attendance, including frequent lateness, can negatively impact a student's ability to attain proficient mastery of knowledge of their faith. The following policies have been adopted to ensure that students succeed in mastering knowledge of their faith and the core content for their grade level.

- Catechists will provide students with a PREP Curriculum Calendar detailing class dates and the chapter(s), material, and assignment(s) to be covered for each date.
- When absence is necessary, parents are requested to notify the Religious Education Office, by email or phone, before the scheduled class, with the reason for the absence.
- Students absent from 4 or more classes during the program year, and whose participation indicates that they have partial proficiency or need assistance to attain mastery will be required to complete additional study and/or take special assessments in order to ensure that they have successfully mastered the required material to be considered for promotion at the end of the program year.
- Students who accrue 6 absences may be dismissed from the program and be required to
 - a) finish the school year via home-based catechesis with parents

- b) **or** enroll in the following year's program and repeat their current grade. Students that elect option "a" must successfully complete the home-based catechesis program established by the Program in order to be eligible for promotion at the end of the program year.

○ EXTENDED ABSENCES DUE TO ILLNESS

An extended absence due to illness is defined as an absence that spans two or more consecutive weeks. Parents should be in regular contact with the Program Director during an extended absence so that the parents and the Program may work in partnership to ensure that missed assignments and classwork are completed during the extended absence and to keep the student's formation and instruction up to date. Parents are responsible for completing missed assignments and classwork with their children as outlined above.

Extended absences will not result in dismissal from the program so long as the following conditions are met:

- a) all work is completed;
b) the extended absence does not affect the student's mastery of the required material.

A student's mastery may be assessed through appropriate reviews to ensure proficient mastery has been achieved for prolonged absences due to illness.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM

Adults

All catechists and staff are required by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to obtain background checks, including the following:

- PA State Police Criminal Background Check
- PA Child Abuse Clearance
- Federal Criminal History Record
- Attendance at "Protecting God's Children – Awareness Sessions for Adults"
- Signed "Standards for Ministerial Behavior" Acknowledgement Form
- Technology Addendum Training
- Mandated Reporter Training
- PA Omnibus Act 24 Form

Students

During the course of the year, catechists in all class levels beginning with Grade One, present a Safe Environment Lesson, known as "KidTalk." These lessons have been developed by the Office for Child and Youth Protection of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, and are available in English and Spanish.

These lessons can be viewed ahead of time by going online to:

<https://childyouthprotection.org/index.php/protect-children/trainings/kidtalk-overview>.

Notice will be given prior to the scheduled KidTalk session, and parents will be required to opt-in or opt-out on behalf of their child or children.

VISITORS TO THE SCHOOL BUILDING

Persons who wish to meet the Program Director or a catechist for a conference may do so at the end of class, by prior arrangement. Persons who need to drop items off for a child's class are asked to call the Religious Education Office so that someone can meet them at the door and give the item(s) to the child's catechist.

FORMATION & ACADEMIC LIFE

CALENDARS/CURRICULUM CALENDARS

At the beginning of the academic year, each student receives a Class Curriculum Calendar, which contains the expected class dates, as well as the work expected to be covered in class and for homework for each week.

N.B.: All calendars are tentative and subject to change. Any changes will be conveyed to parents by the Program Director.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Students should come to class ready to participate in the planned activities. No lesson or activity will prove worthwhile if students do not participate in it. Participation also means that students come to class prepared for class. Students must insure that they have the proper materials for class including, but not limited to, their textbook, and a copybook, if their catechist uses one with the class.

CURRICULUM

SS. Philip and James PREP follows the Religion Curriculum of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, and uses texts approved by the Archdiocese. To view the Religion Guidelines, go to: <http://phillyocf.org/religion-guidelines/>. To view the Scope and Sequence Charts, go to: <http://phillyocf.org/scope-sequence-charts/>.

The scope and sequence will direct learning objectives and the sequence that core concepts are presented to students. Therefore, it is important to note that in order to meet the objectives outlined

in the scope and sequence for a particular grade level, a catechist may not be teaching book chapters sequentially.

DISCIPLINE

- The Program will have NO TOLERANCE for behaviors that are contrary to Catholic faith and morals, or the Gospel, including, but not limited to, ongoing acts of obstinacy, improper language, fighting, physical, emotional or psychological intimidation, bullying, vandalism, demeaning behavior such as name-calling, obscene language or gestures, harassment of any kind, and possession of contraband. Such behaviors violate the central teaching of our faith and will not be tolerated in any form from students or their family members.
- The Program Director makes the final determination of what is considered appropriate or inappropriate behavior, both in and out of class, in the program generally, and outside the program, where such improper behavior affects the program community. Disciplinary actions may include a parent conference, suspension, or dismissal from the Program, depending upon the severity of the infraction. The Program Director will make the final determination as to what behaviors warrant disciplinary action.
- It is expected that parents/guardians, or anyone acting on their behalf lead by good example in their interactions with staff members, other adults and students. If the adults' behavior is incompatible with the educational and religious mission of the Parish, it may be grounds for disciplinary action, including but not limited to, immediate dismissal of the participant, as well as reporting the incident to the appropriate legal authorities where appropriate (e.g., a parent threatens a staff member).
- The Program reserves the right to supersede the forgoing course of action depending on the particular circumstances of any given situation.

HOMEWORK

Homework is a necessary and required part of a student's participation in the Program. Parents should expect homework to be assigned on a weekly basis. Homework assignments will be used to reinforce the day's lessons and should be reviewed by parents for quality and completeness. Homework may consist of worksheets, completing assignments in the textbook, study and memorization, projects, web activities, or any other means deemed appropriate by the catechist to reinforce and review the material presented during class.

Families will receive a PREP Class Curriculum Calendar from their child's catechist which details the chapter(s) and homework assignment due each week. Failure to complete homework assignments may warrant a conference with parents to remedy the situation.

Should parents have any questions concerning homework assignments or need assistance, they may email the Program Director.

PROMOTION

Students are eligible for promotion based on attendance and appropriate progress in mastery of material taught. Final decisions for promotion and retention are made at the end of the program year by the program director.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Each student enrolled in SS. Philip and James PREP has the right to be treated with respect and the responsibility to treat others with respect. This respect is in regard to persons, materials, activities, liturgy, and studies. Student responsibilities for creating an atmosphere of mutual respect include:

- Respectful attitude and language:
 - toward catechists
 - toward fellow students
- Respectful use of shared space:
 - Belongings of other students are not to be disturbed.
 - Any damages due to accidents must be reported to the catechist immediately.
- Cooperation in classroom and program projects
- Reverent attention and participation in church liturgies, prayer experiences, and instruction time
- Personal habits of:
 - Punctuality (arrival **ON TIME**)
 - Preparedness (**book bag**, religion book, folder, HOMEWORK, and study)
 - Appropriate dress
 - Attentiveness (Lavatory needs are routinely taken care of before class, distractions are put aside, cell phones and other electronics are kept in book bags for the duration of class.)

TEXTBOOKS

The textbooks used in the Program are approved by the Office for Catholic Education. Every student will be assigned a textbook. This textbook is a necessary tool in helping the catechist achieve the required learning objectives. Therefore, students must bring their textbooks to class every week. Parents should exercise caution in making sure that the textbook is secured in a set place within the home so it is not lost during the academic year. Lost textbooks will need to be replaced. Parents assume full responsibility for all costs associated with the replacement textbook, including any taxes, shipping, and handling fees.

COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION FOLDERS

Every student will be issued a two-pocket folder at the beginning of the program year. This folder will serve as the Communication Folder for weekly assignments and other important papers. Parents should check this folder after each weekly session to view any fliers, bulletins, assignments, etc., that may be sent home. Parents are also to use this folder to send any communiqués to the child's catechist or program staff.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Program Director's Office:

**Sister Marie Garman, IHM
SS. Philip and James Religious Education Office
721 East Lincoln Highway
Exton, PA 19341
610-363-1307**

E-mail: dresspj@sspj.org

Website: sspj.net

Additional Numbers/Addresses to Know:

Parish Website: sspj.net

Rectory: 610-363-6536

Fax Number: 610-363-6495

Catechist emails will be updated and sent home to families.

UPDATING CONTACT INFORMATION

The contact information that you provide at the time of registration will be used as the primary means of contacting you. Updating changes to this information, especially changes to email addresses, is your sole responsibility. In order to receive necessary and vital information pertaining to our child's participation in our program it is imperative that you notify the program director as to any changes in address, phone numbers, or email.

While individual messages may be sent directly to you via email, bulk notices are usually sent via SCHOOL MESSENGER. It is important to look through your "junk" email and if a

School Messenger notice appears there, mark it “not junk” so that subsequent messages will go to your inbox.