

St. Michael Parish
Religious Education Program
Policies and Guidelines
Grades K-8

“Faith: Learn it, Live it, Love it”

St. Michael Church
4 Church Street
Netcong, NJ 07857

A Blessing for Families

God, bless our family, both near and far.
Protect us from all harm and need.
May your blessing bring peace and strength, and may our love for one another extend beyond
the walls of our home to all the world.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

For in God our hearts rejoice;
and in your holy name we trust.
May your kindness, Lord, be upon us;
we have put our hope in you.
Psalm 33:21-22

“May God put our faith into action,
To work in love, to persevere in hope,
Through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
1 Thessalonians 1:3

Our Mission

The mission of the Religious Education program at St. Michael parish is to aid parents and families in the faith formation of their children in the Church community setting. Working *with* parents and family members, we seek to prepare our children's minds and hearts to be open to God, trusting that God will be able to reveal himself to them and draw them to himself.

Program Philosophy

Faith is relationship with Jesus. We come to know Him through prayer, through God's Word (Scripture) and through the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist (Mass) and Reconciliation. Every catechetical session includes time for prayer and the reading of Scripture, as well as a discussion of Catholic teachings (doctrine). The catechists regularly encourage and often help to provide the opportunity to celebrate the sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation with their group of 'disciples'.

Faith formation at St. Michael parish is much more than sacramental preparation. It is preparation for *life*. Programs are designed to impart Christian values and knowledge that will aid children as they make choices throughout their lives, helping them to become peace-filled and joyful Christians who know Jesus and all that he calls them to be.

The Church teaches that parents are the primary religious educators of their children.

It is in the home that children first learn about the love that God has for his people. For this reason, the Church calls the family the '*domestic church*'. It is in the home that children learn the rhythm of the Church's seasonal celebrations which flow from the earthly life of Christ: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Ordinary times. It is through regular participation in the parish's weekly Sunday celebrations of the Eucharist (Mass) with their families that children learn that our faith is nourished within our Catholic community.

Partners in Faith Formation

Religious Education/formation is a *partnership* between the Church and families. *The parish Religious Education program can only build on the faith formation that takes place at home.* While we can explain the meaning and significance of our religious practices, doctrine and symbols, children learn best how to live as Catholic Christians from the *daily example* of their parents and family who are their primary role models.

Our Catholic faith is a gift which is to be shared joyfully. The many volunteer catechists who have the

responsibility of sharing the Good News of God's love are committed to making Religious Education at St. Michael parish a rewarding experience. Catechists meet with the children in small groups once a week from mid-September through April/early May. They work hard to capture the children's imaginations, to help them build a relationship with Jesus and come to understand important faith concepts, doctrine and practices as are appropriate for various age/grade levels. They seek to create a comfortable environment conducive to prayer, learning and the building of community.

When parents register their child(ren) to participate in Religious Education classes at St. Michael's, they accept several responsibilities. As the primary religious educators of their child(ren), parents agree to take an active role in faith formation. This is accomplished by discussing the weekly religion lessons at home, helping children make up missed lessons, keeping in contact with the child's catechist, and helping children establish a regular routine of prayer and participation in the Sacramental life of the Church, especially Reconciliation and Eucharist (Sunday Mass).

Attendance at Sunday Liturgy

Faith, our relationship with the Lord, must be nourished on a regular basis in order to grow and mature. The most significant way we have of doing this is the regular worship of God within our Catholic Christian community, our Sunday liturgy (Mass).

The Eucharist is our central celebration of God's love. It is a gift given to us by Jesus Christ to sustain us in living as His followers. Every aspect of our faith is related back to our celebration of the Eucharist. Everything we teach the children about our faith in the weekly religion sessions is connected to our Sunday celebration of the Mass. Particularly in Junior High and Confirmation Prep, discussion includes reflection on the readings that are proclaimed at the Mass on Sunday. **Therefore it is essential and it is expected that every child enrolled in the Religious Education program will regularly take part in either Saturday evening or Sunday morning Mass.**

Young people need to see that there is a connection between their faith as it is learned and as it is practiced. Therefore it is very important that families enrolled in St. Michael's Religious Education worship at *this* parish, in order to build and maintain a consistent community for faith development for their children.

The parish staff is always willing to reach out to any family that has moved away from the regular practice of the Catholic faith. Please contact the rectory or the Religious Education office if you have any questions.

We are sure that your commitment to living the Christian life combined with the programs offered by the Religious Education program will guide your children as they grow in love and knowledge of the Lord and in the practice of their Catholic faith.

GENERAL POLICIES

Registration

Families who wish to participate in our Religious Education Programs **must be registered members** of St. Michael Parish. Please contact the rectory.

Registration for Grades K-8 takes place in early spring. Students already enrolled in the programs from the year before must also register at this time. Since class size is limited, parents are urged to register promptly. *Class assignment is on a first come, first served basis.*

Those registering for the first time must bring the Baptismal certificate of the child/young person being registered. For families transferring from other parishes, please submit a copy of Religious Education records from the former parish. *These must be presented at the time of registration.*

Yearly tuition rates are published with registration documents each year.

Active parish families (attend Mass regularly and use weekly envelopes, contributing at least \$10/week) receive a reduced rate.

Arrangements for paying in installments may be made by contacting the Religious Education office.

Unless other arrangements are made in writing, we ask that all current year balances be paid before registration for the following year is accepted.

Session Times

Kindergarten: Once a month on designated day

Grades 1-6: Choice of

Sunday 10-11:15 AM

Monday 4-5:15 PM

Gr. K-6 meet at the school

Junior High (Grades 7-8):

Meet alternate Monday nights in the Church basement, according to schedule 7-9 PM

Yearly Attendance

Keeping in mind that the primary goal of Religious Education is *not* sacramental preparation but *ongoing faith formation*, young people are expected to participate in the total Religious Education program from grades 1 through Confirmation Preparation. Each grade covers its own specific area of doctrine and Catholic-Christian living geared to the religious and psychological development of that age. Just as each year builds upon the previous year's study, each year is also important to the religious maturity of the child. Acquiring Christian attitudes and skills for moral decision making in light of faith requires consistent and continuous exposure to these values both at home and within the more formal Religious Education program.

If a young person "skips" any year of Religious Education, he will be expected to make it up before registering for the next grade.

Baptized older children entering the program *after* second grade will need to participate in a "catch-up" year which will give them the opportunity to become familiar with basic faith concepts. The following year the child will then be placed in a sacramental preparation class for older children.

Non-baptized children of catechetical age will participate in the parish RCIA program (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) for children.

Every effort will be made to assist all families to participate fully in the Religious Education program.

Please contact the Religious Education office with specific questions or to discuss any special situations.

Parent Meetings

A series of meetings for parents of children new to the program (Grades K-6) is held at the beginning of the Catechetical year. The sessions set the stage for the first *and* subsequent years of faith formation.

The meetings cover adult education components geared toward updating parent faith knowledge, as well as a description of policies, procedures and schedules.

Separate parent meetings are held for Junior High and Confirmation prep.

Parents of children who will be celebrating the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist for the first

time (usually in second grade), will be asked to attend at least four separate meetings. These meetings will help parents to prepare their children to celebrate these sacraments, as well as update parents in the faith.

At least one parent is required to attend each parent meeting held. It is *strongly* suggested that both parents attend. Your participation in these sessions will indicate to your child the value and importance you place on his/her own religious education and formation.

Emergency Closings

This is primarily due to inclement weather.

Whenever classes are cancelled for emergencies, each family will receive a telephone call from a class parent.

An announcement will play on the Religious Education answering machine and will be posted on the parish website (www.stmichaelnetcong.org)

Parents are asked to use their **own judgement** on days when the weather or road conditions may present a safety issue.

Drop-off / Pick-up Locations

Because the parking situation at St. Michael is somewhat challenging, we ask that you carefully read and adhere to the following regulations. This will insure the health and safety of all of our children.

Sunday: Please use the **front** door for drop-off and pick-up. Because the Mass schedule runs at the same time, there is too much traffic in the area to let the children leave by the back door. *The back door will remain locked during Sunday sessions.* Children in first through third grade should always have an older sibling or parent pick them up at the classroom door.

Monday: Please use the **back** door for drop-off and pick-up. You may park in any of the lots and escort your child to the classroom. The back door is locked after the session begins and is opened at dismissal. The front door is locked at all times. At dismissal, please **DO NOT** park in the driveway between the school and convent as parking in this area is dangerous to the children leaving the building. **Please note that the traffic flow into and out of the parking lots beside and behind the school is ONE WAY ONLY:** Enter through the upper lot, follow around to the back of the school and exit the driveway between the convent and school.

Please note that by order of the Netcong Police Department:

At no time may you park or stop your car in front of the school on the west side (school side) of Church St.

Drivers may not slow down, stop in front of the school and let a child exit the car. Children may not enter a car that is stopped in the street unless it is in a legal parking space.

When parking on Church St., please be sure that you do not block the residential driveways, even to drop off children. Emergency vehicles and residents must have access to driveways at all times! Thank you for your cooperation.

Please know that the Netcong police regularly patrol the area on Sun. and Mon., and tickets **WILL BE** issued for violations.

Also, in order to provide a safe environment for children, we ask that you use **ONLY** the front door on Sunday and **ONLY** the back door on Monday. These are the doors that are monitored for safety. All other doors will remain locked and closed.

Following these safety guidelines gives all of us an excellent opportunity to model for our children true Christian charity toward others!

Attendance and Self-Discipline

Since classes meet for only 75 minutes a week, and the time for faith sharing is precious, we need to keep the following in mind in order to allow the classes to run smoothly:

Please make sure your child(ren) arrive **on time** for class, with books and assignments. Lost books can be replaced at cost.

Please make sure that children have a snack before class on Monday and have breakfast before class on Sunday. Eating in the classrooms is discouraged.

Because attendance at our sessions is part of the whole process, those children who miss too many classes may need to repeat the year. Not only is information obtained in class, but community and trust is built among catechists and learners. Time is needed to assimilate and understand the spirit of the Gospel. This cannot happen if the children are not present regularly. Unless other arrangements are made, **children**

missing more than 1/3 of the class sessions will be asked to repeat the year. Junior High participants missing more than three sessions will be asked to repeat the year.

If your child is absent from class, please call the office or send in a note with a sibling. The catechist will be notified. Please contact the catechist during the following week to arrange to make up any missed work. In general, catechists cover a chapter in the book each week. At the very least, parents should help their child complete the next chapter in the text before returning to class.

*If your child will be more than **ten minutes** late for class, or **needs to leave** before the end of the session, **please do not bring him**.* Late arrivals are disruptive and time is better spent covering the next chapter at home. You can contact the catechist before or after the session for make up work.

For the same reasons, ***no early dismissal are allowed.***

Our goal is to teach the young people "self-discipline". It is interesting to note the similarity between the words "discipline" and "disciple" (follower of Christ). At the beginning of each year, each catechist and class establish their own set of "Rules for Caring and Sharing," which will help the group be considerate of one another, the catechist, and the classroom they are "borrowing" for their sessions. Children are expected to follow these rules each week. The natural consequence of disregarding these rules will be removal from the classroom.

Parents of children who are overly disruptive will be notified. If there is no change in behavior, after consultation with parents and staff, the child may be tutored at home.

Homework/Tests

Catechists are expected to give assignments to the students. Parents are expected to encourage their children in the study and activities associated with learning their faith since this shows the children the importance of their religious formation. Since an entire week passes before the class meets again, children will have sufficient time to complete assignments.

Kindergarten: Family projects and activities will be sent home to be completed each month.

Grades 1-6: Each chapter in the *We Believe* series ends with several "Project Disciple" review pages and

a Take Home suggestion to extend the topic at home with the family. **It is imperative that this page be covered at home every week!** Again, the degree of interest shown by parents will greatly influence the faith development and knowledge of the child.

Children in Sacramental prep classes have additional homework given by the catechist each week to re-enforce the concepts and practices studied during the session.

Junior High: because these grades meet on alternate Mondays, it is *essential that homework be completed every week*. At the beginning of the year a schedule for study of the text is distributed. Additional assignments may be distributed each week. *Mid-term and final exams are given in both grades each year.*

Tests and evaluations are given to help catechist, child and parent track the progress the young person is making. The type of evaluations will be determined by grade level.

Transfers and Changes

If you are moving out of the parish, please contact the office and transfer records will be provided. Any changes in address, phone number, emergency contacts, etc. should be reported as soon as possible. Any health issues or special needs should be reported to the office as soon as possible. These should be updated YEARLY on the registration form.

Communication

A yearly calendar is distributed in August/ Sept. Please know that you should follow that calendar. If there is a change, we will inform you via letters sent home and information posted on the website and in the Sunday bulletin.

You should also regularly consult the Sunday bulletin and parish website for reminders for upcoming meetings, activities, start-up dates and changes in the schedule. Please take a copy of the bulletin after Sunday Mass and read it every week.

St. Michael Church website : www.stmichaelnetcong.org Go to Faith Formation at the top, then Religious Ed from drop-down menu.

Notes are occasionally sent home with children. Please provide your child with a labeled folder (name, grade) to bring papers back and forth to class. Please check with your child each week for handouts.

Please check all of these sources regularly in order to stay apprised of important dates and activities.

CURRICULUM GRADES K-8

Kindergarten: Children who have reached the age of 5 or who are in Kindergarten in school are eligible for the program. This is an optional program and class size is limited. Sessions meet once a month according to the schedule distributed at the beginning of the year. The curriculum focuses on the liturgical (Church) year and seasonal celebrations including Creation, All Saints Day, Thanksgiving, Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter. A variety of teaching methods is used, including story, crafts, music and videos.

Grades 1-6: *We Believe, Project Disciple* series, Sadlier publishing.

This text series has the approval of the Paterson Diocese. The content is in accord with the National Catechetical Directory and the Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis of Pope John Paul II, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

This series employs a three-part process for sharing in each session: *We Gather, We Believe, We Respond*. At the beginning of each session, groups *gather* to pray and reflect on their life experiences. In the *We Believe* section, children explore the truths of our Catholic faith as found in Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Throughout the chapter, children are invited to *respond* to these truths in prayer, faith and life. This approach, which Jesus Himself models for us in Scripture, helps the child move to a deeper understanding and living out of his relationship with God and others.

Grade 1: Doctrine covered includes creation, Blessed Trinity, main events of Jesus' life, Holy Spirit, Baptism, Mass. Bible stories and videos are used to introduce children to the Scriptures and life of Jesus.

Grade 2: We use the St. Mary Press program *Go, Seek, Find: Discover God's Treasures* for our 2nd . This Bible based curriculum enables the children to understand the biblical roots of our faith as they prepare for the sacraments of Penance - Reconciliation, and the Eucharist. Each week the children will bring home the lesson sheet that was covered during class time. Parents are asked to review the Family Page *each week* with the children as part of their preparation. Supplemental resources are often used for immediate preparation for the celebration of First Reconciliation and First Eucharist and for lessons on the church year and the saints.

Grade 3: Doctrine covered includes Jesus gives us the Church, Church membership, the marks of the Church, God's call to each of us to worship, and discipleship.

Grade 4: Doctrine covered includes the Kingdom of God, the Beatitudes, Law of Love, sin and Reconciliation, the 10 Commandments in detail, the Mass, our call to holiness, virtues.

Grade 5: Doctrine covered includes Jesus is God's Son, the Paschal Mystery, the Sacraments in detail, the marks of the Church.

Grade 6: Doctrine covered includes the Bible in detail, particularly the Old Testament, the importance and meaning of Covenant, inspiration and revelation, Jesus as fulfillment of the Covenant.

Prayer: Children in each grade are responsible for learning certain traditional Catholic prayers. Learning traditional prayers has several benefits. Formal prayer enables us to pray together as a community (i.e. the Our Father). Many of the traditional prayers of the Church are beautiful illustrations of theology and spirituality that have been handed down from the earliest Christians. When we cannot find the words to speak to God on our own these traditional prayers can help us to begin our conversation with Him.

We encourage parents to help their children learn the assigned prayers each year. This will also give families a good opportunity to pray together, perhaps at meal or bedtime. A list of required prayers is distributed at the beginning of the year by the catechist.

Junior High: Grade 7 and 8

The Junior High years of adolescence is a time of change, a time of trying to "fit in" between childhood

and teenage years. Along with the great physical and emotional changes experienced by the young people, there is also a need for time spent with friends outside of the school environment. Often the young people begin to spend more time at extra-curricular activities in the evenings. All of these new developments have great bearing on the moral and religious formation of the young people.

Our program is designed to accommodate the varied needs of Junior High learners. The grades meet on alternate Monday nights (7th grade one week, 8th the next) from 7 to 9 PM in the Church. Each meeting begins with 15-20 minutes of prayer often in the church, followed by large and small group discussions in the church basement. With a catechist, the young people also gather to discuss the readings proclaimed at Mass the previous Sunday. To guide the discussion, we use a weekly resource written specifically for Junior High groups. Each student receives a Catechism book and homework assignment list indicating the chapters to read and study to prepare for the next week's discussion. Some of the catechism will also be reviewed during the session.

Because we only meet 14-15 times a year, **homework assignments and readings must be completed weekly.** Regular attendance at all sessions is also mandatory. We encourage parents to spend time with their teens on the "off" weeks reviewing the material in the Catechism books. This is a good opportunity for parents to review their own understanding of Catholic doctrine and practices.

Junior High is considered to be remote preparation for Confirmation. Before a young person is accepted into the Confirmation program (9th grade), he/she must show a basic understanding of Catholic doctrine, the life of Christ, the liturgical year, the Mass, etc. A mid-term and final test are given in the 7th and 8th grades to evaluate each student's understanding. Those young people who do not have adequate background in the faith will be required to postpone their entrance into the Confirmation program.

ACRE Evaluation

According to Diocesan policy, every year all 5th, 8th and 10th grade children will take this standardized evaluation of religious knowledge, usually in January. The information gained through the evaluations helps us create better and more effective programs for sharing the faith of the Church at the Diocesan and parish level. Each year a letter is sent to the parents of all children participating in this evaluation.

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION PROGRAMS

First Reconciliation and First Communion

The readiness of a child to celebrate Sacraments is proportional to the religious formation and preparation done both at home within the child's family and within the Religious Ed program in the parish community. Preparation of the child by the Church community alone or by the parent alone is not sufficient. *We work together as a team.*

Parent Meetings: Prior to the reception of the Sacraments, there are parent meetings. These meetings include an adult education component designed to update parents' understandings of the Sacraments, as well as an explanation of the text and supplemental resources used to prepare the children. There is also a description of the celebration of the Sacrament (readings, music, actions, symbolism, etc.). We strive to make our meetings informational, interesting and an expression of the Catholic Christian community. Since these meetings are important, *parents are expected to attend.*

CHILDREN ELIGIBLE FOR THE PROGRAM:

All sacramental programs are a two year preparation period. Therefore, remote preparation for First Reconciliation and First Communion begins in first grade.

Children in the first (school) grade are eligible to begin the regular schedule.

Children who are entering the second grade in school but have not completed grade one in the Religious Ed program will be placed in grade one for their first year, grade two in their second year, etc.

The placement of children older than second grade will be determined by the Coordinator of Religious Education in consultation with the parish staff. Our goal is to do what is best for the faith formation of the child. As a rule, older children will enter the program at their grade level and the following year will be prepared separately to celebrate the sacraments.

The Sacrament of Confirmation

In the Diocese of Paterson, Confirmation is celebrated in the sophomore or junior year of high school (age 16-17). Confirmation Prep is a two-year program. It generally begins in the fall of Freshman year, and the Sacrament is celebrated during the Easter season of the Sophomore year.

Eligibility for the Program: Those young people who have begun their freshman year in high school and have participated in a continuous Religious Education and faith formation program are possible candidates for Confirmation. An interview with a member of the parish staff before beginning the program is required. Basic knowledge of Catholic Doctrine, practices, the liturgical celebrations of the Church is required of all who enter the program.

Program details may be found in the Confirmation Preparation Handbook.

Children's Liturgy of the Word

Each Sunday at the 8:45 AM Mass, children in Grades K-4 are invited to participate in Liturgy of the Word for Children. After the opening prayer of the Mass, children are invited to process down to the Church hall with the Minister of the Word to hear the readings and a homily prepared for their age group. Children are brought back up to the church in time for the Profession of Faith. This is a wonderful opportunity for the young people to explore the meaning of Scripture in their own lives.

Volunteer Opportunities

We are always looking for catechists, aids and office assistants to help in the Religious Education program. No offer of time or talent will be turned away! If you are interested in helping, please call the Religious Education office at 973- 347-1465.

Young people Grade 3 and older are welcome to become altar servers. Please contact the rectory to sign up for the next available training.

Revised 4/2014

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