**St. Michael Parish**

**Office of Religious education**

Cranford, NJ 07016

**Catechist/Aide Manual**

**Office of Religious Education**

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**Mission and Goals**

Our Catechetical Ministry, while supporting parents in the Domestic Church, requires that we carefully educate the students in our care to learn about and understand how:

* To proclaim the Good News by investigating, accepting and loving Jesus Christ as he is revealed in Sacred Scripture, the Sacraments and the Teachings of the Church.
* To worship and pray by participating fully, actively and consciously in a life of prayer, most especially the Sunday Liturgy.
* To build Community in the home, parish and the world by serving, and helping others to serve, as disciples of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Spirituality**

At the center of catechetical instruction is the catechist’s ability to communicate the Gospel message through their actions and words. In order to do this a catechist must have and continuously develop their own faith life through:

Prayer Mass attendance

Reading Developing relationships

 Attending parish enrichment events

**Catechist Certification**

Training for catechists is offered for three levels of certification: Basic (12 hours); Specialization (12 hours); Doctrinal (24 hours). Essential elements of the certification process are faith development, content of church doctrine, and development of teaching methods/skills.

Participation in *Protecting God’s Children*, a three (3) hour course that trains adults to be proactive in discerning child abuse, is required of each catechist and aide. Catechists and aides also agree to a volunteer screening process.

**Classroom Techniques**

**Before the First Class**

* Become familiar with the curriculum, procedures and calendar.
* Call, write, or email students to introduce yourself and let them know you are looking forward to meeting them. At that time you should verify the name, address, phone number and email of your students as well as make a note of the parents’ cell phone number (if applicable).

**At the First and Subsequent Classes**

* Greet your students warmly and learn their names ASAP.
* Discuss the ***Golden Rule***. Have students help you set a few rules and the consequences, then have students write them in their books.
* Set a routine for the removal of outerwear to help the students quickly settle in.
* Establish lavatory rules: one or two at a time, only for emergencies. Urge your students to use their bathrooms at home or when first arriving to class. The classroom aide (if applicable) should wait in the hall to make sure the student goes into the lavatory and back to class without incident or detours.
* Develop and update a seating chart that helps determine the best location for each student.
* Avoid using the SMS teacher’s desk. Walk around the classroom, sit among your students. Please do ***not*** sit students at the teacher’s desk. *Do not use any of the teacher’s materials.*
* No food or drink of any kind is allowed in the auditorium or classroom. This includes catechists and aides.
* If you need to use food as part of your lesson, please reserve the cafeteria by informing the RE office of your plans. If you are giving out treats to your class, distribute them as your students leave the building. NO PARTIES ALLOWED IN THE BUILDING.
* Make an effort to involve as many students as possible in the lesson – helpers, readers, etc.
* Don’t make up an answer to a ‘hard’ question or give information you’re not sure of. If you don’t know, tell the class you'll find out the answer and let them know.
* Use the ‘buddy’ system whenever a student needs to come to the RE office – sick, errand, discipline.

**Discipline**

* “What you are willing to accept, you will get more of.” Handle discipline problems immediately, directly, briefly, and calmly.
* Ongoing disruptive behavior should not be permitted. Step into the hallway with the student and let the child know you will not tolerate misbehaving. Do not hesitate to seek assistance from RE staff.
* Point out, congratulate and reward WWJD behavior. Praise publicly, discipline privately.
* Never discipline the whole class for the actions of a few. Send the few to the RE office.
* Should a student’s behavior interfere with the learning process of the class, the catechist follows the following procedure:

1. The catechist will notify the RE office and parent(s) of the incident.

2. In the event of another incident, the child may be removed from the classroom setting and the RE office will contact the parent(s).

3. Should there be another incident other arrangements for religious instruction will be made.

* Corporal punishment is defined as any punitive touching (such as pushing, slapping, grabbing) and is strictly forbidden.
* Students may not be disciplined by excluding them from your visual or physical space of supervision (i.e. putting a student out in the hall).

**Procedures**

**Catechist Arrival**

* Arrive at the RE office 10 minutes prior to class time by using the front door.
* Pick up your supply box and check your mailbox.

· Mailbox contains attendance cards, handouts for students, announcements and

 information for you.

· Supply box contains pencils, chalk and board erasers. Check with the RE office for

 additional supplies.

* Join your students in the auditorium. Quiet them for announcements and prayer.
* Classes are dismissed by grade. Lead your class to the assigned classroom. In general, the side you exit from the auditorium is the same side of the building of your classroom.
* If you know you will be late, please call the RE office so your class can be covered until you arrive. No class will be dismissed from the auditorium without a catechist or aide.
* If you know you are going to be absent, the ***best*** substitute is to call your class and have them do a lesson ***at home***. An alternate plan is to arrange for your aide to take the class. In any case, call the RE office if you know you will be absent.
* If classes are cancelled you will be notified by the RE office.

**Class Attendance**

* Using pencil, mark an “A” in the date column of any absent student. If a parent has called the RE office of the absence ahead of time, an “E” is marked. Homes of the “A” marked students will be called by the volunteer office staff as a safety precaution.
* Place the completed attendance card on the floor outside the classroom door. It will be collected by an attendance monitor.
* Students who arrive after your card has been collected must obtain a late pass from the RE office. The attendance card will be corrected by the RE office (“L” for late).
* All absences count, even if they are excused.

**Dismissal**

At the end of your lesson, dismiss your students warmly, distribute any fliers/announcements and give the date of the next class. Let your students know you look forward to meeting with them again.

* Put furniture back in the order you found it.
* Erase your writing from the chalkboard.
* Close/lock any open windows.
* Turn off the lights.
* Close the classroom door.
* Walk your class to the front doors of the school. Parents meet you at the steps. Any child not picked up should be brought to the RE office.
* Return your supply box to the office and re-check your mailbox.

 **Textbooks**

* Distribute textbooks.
* Have your students immediately write their name, telephone number and your name inside their books.
* Additional books can be picked up at the RE office. Return extra books to the office.

**Permission Slips**

 Permission slips are required for all activities off St. Michael parish property. Ask for forms at the RE office. Visits to the Church or outdoor classes don’t need permission slips however, ***the RE office must be informed of your plans if you will be out of your classroom.*** You must re-enter the building by the front school doors. (Ring bell)

**Child Safety**

* Any person (catechist, aide, other volunteer or employee) having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse or is under the influence of drugs or alcohol shall report it immediately to the Pastoral Associate.
* Under no circumstances is medication to be administered to any child.
* The younger the child, the greater the standard of care. The best way to prevent negligence on the part of the catechist is to be able to answer “YES” to these questions:

\* Would a reasonable person have acted in the same manner?

\* Was a reasonable effort made to implement the rules and regulations?

* Unless there is an extreme emergency, ***children of any age can never be left unattended***. This includes the time before and after class as well as during class. Send a messenger to the RE office for coverage or assistance. Have the aide or a ‘buddy’ accompany a student who is sick or hurt to the lavatory or RE office.
* At dismissal, any child not picked up should be brought to the RE office.

**Student Accountability**

* Students may be given periodic testing from Grade 2 and up. Students must have a satisfactory knowledge of the material presented at their grade level in order to progress. A Religious Education assessment (ACRE) is administered yearly to all 5th and 8th graders.
* Bring to the staff’s attention students who have reached their third absence. Parents will be contacted. Special arrangements are always made for a student with a prolonged illness or family crisis.
* Students are not to wear any articles that are offensive or contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church. Such students should be sent to the RE office. Cleats are not allowed in the school building.

**Parish Library**

 Located next to the RE office, the parish library contains books and videos that can be used for personal use and lesson enrichment/reinforcement. The staff will be happy to assist you in finding appropriate materials and are appreciative of suggestions for future purchases. Donations made to the library are also appreciated. Items can be signed out and borrowed for two (2) weeks. Lost/damaged items should be replaced.

**U.S. SUPREME COURT CASE**

**Zorach Vs. Clauson 1956**

**(343 U.S. 306)**

**Ruling: It is a child’s constitutional right to attend a church event or religious instruction at a parochial school even if this should disrupt a public school schedule.**

Public school schedule has been interpreted by the law to include sporting events, band competitions, school plays and the practices of the aforementioned and any other event sponsored by public school systems or those municipal programs open to public school students.

**ANY TYPE OF PUNISHMENT FOR LEAVING EARLY, ARRIVING LATE OR MISSING AN EVENT IS NOT PERMITTED AND IS IN VIOLATION OF THE LAW.**

Further examples:

* A child cannot be threatened or intimidated in any way (i.e. removal from a team) because of absence due to a religious affiliation/responsibility.
* A child cannot be mocked or ridiculed for religious convictions.
* The reason a child is not present, arriving late or leaving early cannot be pointed out or discussed with other students or staff members.
* Other penalties such as benching, extra laps or any other kind of punishment because of absence, late arrival or early dismissal due to the student’s religious practices and/or responsibilities are also violations of the law.

If your family experiences a problem with a teacher or coach, please contact St. Michael Religious Education Office at 908-276-2050.