

**ST. MICHAEL CHURCH**  
CRANFORD, NJ  
07016

## **FAMILY HANDBOOK**

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM**  
100 Alden Street ~ 908-276-2050  
**Email:** [msilva@stmichaelcranfordre.org](mailto:msilva@stmichaelcranfordre.org)  
**Website:** [stmichaelcranfordre.org](http://stmichaelcranfordre.org)

**OFFICE HOURS**  
Monday-Thursday 10AM—4PM  
Evenings by appointment

### **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION STAFF**

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### **2021-2022 Catechetical Year**

As we guide our families through this time of pandemic, we will begin the catechetical year with both in-person and virtual instruction as suggested by the Archdiocese. Throughout this handbook there are references to policies pertaining to both in-person and virtual learning.

**\*\*See page 4 for our new digital communications policy. \*\***

## THE FAMILY HANDBOOK

This handbook is a resource guide containing program information, guidelines, policies and procedures. Please read and discuss it with your child(ren). It will help your family understand the expectations and responsibilities of our Religious Education (RE) Program.

This handbook is a primary means of communication. It is meant to provide parents/guardians with helpful information on how we intend to conduct classes. St. Michael Catechetical Program reserves the right to amend this handbook as necessary. Parents will be notified, in writing, if changes are made to any procedures or information in this handbook.

Please call the RE Office (908-276-2050) or email at [msilva@stmichaelcranfordre.org](mailto:msilva@stmichaelcranfordre.org) if further assistance is needed.

## FAMILY SPIRITUAL LIFE

The following are suggestions for families in our RE program.

1. Show an interest in what your child is learning in RE. Ask them what they have learned, review their work, and express the importance of knowing God and the promises God offers daily.
2. Attend Mass together every Sunday and Holy Day.... even if it's virtual.
3. Read the parish bulletin or join the Mary Garden blast to keep informed of parish and liturgical events.
4. Pray together daily.
5. Share your faith at home through discussions, faith stories and activities.
6. Establish family Advent and Lenten traditions.
7. Use blessings/prayers to make God a part of family celebrations, birthdays, anniversaries and holidays.
8. Attend special parish events such as the Parish BBQ, 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary events, Reconciliation Services, Stations of the Cross and the Easter Triduum.
9. Reinforce the Corporal Works of Mercy by donating to food drives, special collections and other opportunities to serve those in need. Our program encourages student participation in these works throughout the year.
10. Consider involvement in a parish ministry to set an example for your children. The RE office will be happy to guide you.

## STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES AND CODE OF BEHAVIOR

Jesus asks us to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. As we strive to follow Jesus, we need to show courtesy and respect to others and their property. We rely on parents to encourage and help their children to live God's law of love.

Besides weekly attendance, students need to bring required materials to class and complete all their assignments. In the interest of maintaining a good learning environment, children are expected to follow classroom rules set by their catechist. Should a child's behavior interfere with the learning process of the class the following will apply:

- The catechist will notify the RE office and parent(s) concerning the incident.
- In the event of another incident, the child may be removed from the classroom setting and the RE office will contact the parent(s).
- Should there be another incident other arrangements for religious instruction will be made.

In addition:

- Children may be given periodic assessments from Grade 2 up. Children must have a satisfactory knowledge of the grade level material in order to progress.
- A Religious Education assessment (ACRE) is administered annually to all 5th and 8th graders.
- Children are not to wear or carry any articles that are offensive or contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church. Such students will be sent to the Religious Education Office and parents will be notified.
- Children are not allowed to wear cleats in the school building because they damage the floors.
- Cell phone use (i.e. games, texting, calls) by minors is prohibited in the building. Unnecessary use of cell phones will result in the catechist collecting and returning phones after class. Exception: RE staff has been informed by parents of special circumstances.
- **No food or drink is permitted in the auditorium or classrooms.** If your children need a snack, please have them finish it **before** entering the school building.

## REGISTRATION

The children of St. Michael Parish are required to attend religious education for the eight years of elementary and middle school. All eligible upcoming First Graders who are registered parishioners are mailed a letter inviting them to register for our program.

*New registrants must provide Original Baptism Certificates at initial registration unless they were baptized at St. Michael.*

It is important to inform the RE Office of your child's special needs (health or educational) in order to compassionately and effectively serve the needs of your child. All information is kept confidential.

**Allergy information:** If your child has a severe allergy, please read the Archdiocese Policy about Epinephrine Auto-Injectors. Upload the requested documents at registration. View the policy and access the required forms on our website: <https://stmichaelcranfordre.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/epi-policy.pdf>

**Returning students** are e-mailed registration materials in early Spring.

*To avoid any additional charges, please submit registration forms on time.*

No child will be accepted into the program after the First Week of Advent.

There are additional sacrament preparation fees in Grades 1 and 7. These fees cover additional texts, teaching materials and supplies. Grade 8 has an additional fee for the Grade 8 Retreat which is held off site.

If payment of any fees would prevent your child from attending religious education or cause a hardship, other arrangements can be made. Please contact the religious education office to make these arrangements.

## **DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic the Archdiocese of Newark continues to serve the young people of St. Michael, Cranford.

Parish program facilitators and catechists have scheduled some virtual programming and content for its participants, through online platforms. The program(s) will use software, tools and applications provided by third-parties that participants, parents/legal guardians, volunteers and/or staff will access via the internet and use for purposes of communication, programming, and potential content creation. These platforms may include but are not limited to: Google Classroom, GoToMeeting, Webex, and Zoom.

To enroll in any of these programs, you must provide your consent and release for your child to participate in these online applications for distance-based, virtual program purposes. Please be aware that each application collects different information about its users and has its own privacy terms and conditions to which members must adhere and which parish or diocese cannot control or assume responsibility. Please review these carefully before registering your child.

Our commitment to keeping the children and youth we serve safe is always our number one priority. **To that end, we will actively monitor participant activity of children while engaged in our digital learning platforms.** It is parents' responsibility to monitor their child's internet usage as a whole, including their use of any internet sites that are outside of our digital learning platforms. All online activities contemplated hereunder must also comply with the Archdiocese of Newark Safe Environment Protocols and must also follow any use requirements developed by the Archdiocese of Newark and/or the Department for the Protection of the Faithful.

We ask all digital participants to:

- Turn the camera on.

- Be dressed appropriately
- Refrain from use of distracting backgrounds
- Be respectful to the catechist and fellow students
- Be prepared: treat the session the same way you would if it were in person

## **PROGRAMS**

### **SUMMER PROGRAMS**

Most summer programs run for two (2) consecutive weeks Monday – Thursday in July time-frame. Summer enrollment is limited. Presently Grades 4, 5, 6 and 7 are offered.

### **RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION AT HOME**

Parents can opt to home instruct children in Grades 3, 4 or 5. Parents attend a Home Instruction Workshop to learn about the home instruction program. An online component has been added to the home instruction program. All work must be completed no later than the first week of June. Please inform the RE Office if you plan to home instruct so we can assist you with training and planning of your child's lessons.

### **SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION**

Preparation for the sacraments of Eucharist and Confirmation is a two-year period. This is in accordance with the policy of St. Michael Parish.

Children will *not* automatically become candidates for reception of a sacrament simply because they are a certain age/grade level. Only students with a history of *continuous attendance* in a religious education program and *acceptable faith knowledge* for their age/grade level will be eligible. Children are required to make up missed grades of religious education *and demonstrate appropriate faith understanding as evidence of their readiness to receive a sacrament*. Grade placement is at the discretion of the RE office staff.

According to Archdiocesan regulations, a child must receive the sacraments in their home parish (i.e. the parish in which their family is registered). This is true for all children including those who attend Catholic schools. Students who are registered at a parish other than St. Michael must receive written permission from their home parish to receive sacraments at St. Michael.

**First Reconciliation** preparation begins in the early Fall after successful completion of Year I Reconciliation Preparation (typically Grade 1). The sacrament is received in the late Fall of Year II preparation (typically Grade 2).

**First Eucharist** preparation begins in Year I First Eucharist Preparation (typically Grade 1) and is formally completed in Year II Eucharist Preparation (typically Grade 2). Children receive First Eucharist during the Easter Season of their second year of preparation.

**Confirmation** preparation begins in Year I Confirmation Preparation (typically Grade 7) and concludes with the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Fall following Year II preparation. Following Jesus' example of love and care for others, community service is an integral part of preparation. In addition, youth may be required to attend special events during Year I and Year II Confirmation Preparation.

## PARENT MEETINGS

Parent/family meetings/workshops are held for children in all grades. Please check the RE calendar on our website for these dates and make note of them.

If for some reason you are unable to attend a meeting please notify the RE Office *before* the meeting so you can be advised of the agenda and arrange to pick up any material (if applicable) after the meeting date.

## POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

### ATTENDANCE/ABSENTEEISM

**If your child is unable to attend RE class, it is vital for reasons of safety, that a parent call the RE office at 908-276-2050 to report the absence.**

When reporting, please include the following information.

- Child's first and last name
- Date of absence
- Grade level
- Reason for absence
- Catechist's name

***Children who arrive after classes have left the auditorium must report to the RE office with their parent/adult to sign in.***

Should your child become ill during class, you will be called and asked to pick him/her up at the RE office.

If you need to pick up your child early, a parent must come in to the building and sign their child out.

To fully participate in the catechetical process, it is vitally important that your child attend all scheduled classes. Good attendance makes it possible for your child to grasp religious concepts, and even more importantly develop a sense of belonging to a small faith community.

More than three (3) absences may hinder participation in the program. Remediation may become necessary for satisfactory progress. Arrangements are made for prolonged illness or other difficulties. ***ALL ABSENCES COUNT, EVEN IF EXCUSED.***

### CHILD SAFETY

***MASKS MUST BE WORN AND CHILDREN ARE ASKED TO MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCE.***

St. Michael RE adheres to the New Jersey State Statutes that require the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) be notified immediately if a RE staff member suspects that a child has been abused or neglected.

Please inform the RE office of any custodial situations concerning your child.

All St. Michael Religious Education catechists and aides participate in ***Protecting God's Children***, a program which trains adults to be pro-active in discerning child abuse. This awareness, coupled with the screening of all volunteers who have access to children, helps St. Michael create the safest environment possible for children.

We cannot transport your child to or from any aftercare programs. This is a parental responsibility.

### **EMERGENCY SCHOOL CLOSING**

When Cranford public schools are closed due to inclement weather, RE is cancelled. If severe weather develops on Sunday, students will be notified at Mass, email, or by a phone chain, if possible. If severe weather develops during Tuesday, the RE office will notify the Board of Education and they, in turn, inform the public schools to announce the closing. The RE office will do our best to update our website and phone message system to inform families of any closing. In all circumstances, parents should use their good judgment.

### **OPENING DAY**

Families will be contacted before classes begin. Information regarding catechist, class time and classroom number will be given at that time. Be sure to make note of this important information. Textbooks will be issued on the first day of class. Replacement textbooks can be purchased at the current book fee.

Year I Confirmation Preparation youth gather in the Youth Room and enter the school building using the front doors.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

### **Arrival & Dismissal**

***GRADES 1-2 WILL ENTER/EXIT ST. MICHAEL SCHOOL THROUGH THE "MAIN DOORS" ON ALDEN ST. AND MEET THEIR CATECHIST(S) IN THE AUDITORIUM***

***GRADES 3-5 WILL ENTER/EXIT ST. MICHAEL SCHOOL BUILDING THROUGH THE "FRONT SIDE DOOR" BY THE SCHOOL PARKING LOT AND MEET THEIR CATECHIST(S) IN THEIR CLASSROOM.***

***GRADES 6-8 WILL ENTER/EXIT ST. MICHAEL SCHOOL THROUGH THE "MAIN DOORS" ON ALDEN ST. AND BE DIRECTED TO THEIR CLASSROOM OR THE YOUTH ROOM.***

All other entrance doors will be locked. For access into the school, ring the bell at the front door of the building.

***Car drop-off and pick up*** – Vehicles should park in designated parking spaces on the street or in the school lot and children walk or be escorted to enter through the correct doors of the school building. Please be sure children DO NOT cross the street unattended.

*Please be aware that double parking and "no parking" zones are subject to ticketing by police.* To avoid being towed, please do not park at Cleveland Plaza, a private business' property surrounding the Church and school property.

Please reinforce with your children that if their ride has not arrived after dismissal they should go to the RE office to wait. ***YOUR CHILD MAY USE THE RE OFFICE PHONE ANY TIME THERE IS A NEED.***

Uber, Lyft or other car services are not permitted to pick up any child from religious education classes. For the safety of all children, please cross at the corner assisted by the crossing guard. Children should *not* walk across the parking lot or street without an adult.

## PERMISSION SLIPS

A signed permission slip is required for each student participating in activities off St. Michael parish property.

## PARISH LIBRARY

Located next to the RE office. The library offers a variety of books and videos that focus on positive moral values. These books and tapes must be signed out and may be borrowed for a two (2) week period, free of charge. Please note: ***religion classes have first preference for materials***. Lost or damaged materials need to be paid for or 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 BY AFOREMENTIONED EVENTS 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.



## PHILOSOPHY

St. Michael Religious Education strives to provide a program in which parish children and youth can experience God's love through a growing knowledge of Jesus Christ and the Gospel message to assist them in developing a personal relationship with Jesus. Through prayer, faith knowledge and worship, children experience a gradual commitment to a life of discipleship that is appropriate to their age and ability.

St. Michael Parish believes the family, the *domestic church*, is the most important Christian influence on their children. It is in the home that a child first encounters love and trust. It is through this lived experience that children first perceive a loving God in whom they can place their trust. In this way, faith is nurtured. Baptismal promises, made by parents on their children's behalf, like seeds of faith, take root and start to grow.

***The primary goal of the catechetical program at St. Michael Roman Catholic Parish is to assist families in the faith formation of their children.*** This goal is best achieved when there is cooperation and communication among families, the parish and the Religious Education program. We are members of the St. Michael Parish Family, members of the Body of Christ, living signs of Christ's presence in the world. As a community that shares this responsibility and celebration, we seek to reflect the love of Christ. We pray to be open to hear, understand and live the Gospel, while reaching out to those who have yet to hear the Good News.