

Immaculate Heart of Mary

Children's Faith Formation Programs

Family Handbook

2017-2018

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Faith Formation Staff

Father Michael Ward, K.H.S.....Pastor
Mary Clinton.....Pastoral Assoc. for Faith Formation
Janet Manfredonia.....Faith Formation Secretary

Contact: faithformation@ihmparish.net; 908-889-2100 x 13

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Faith Formation Programs of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church is to support parish families in helping their children grow to love God with their whole heart, mind and soul, and to love their neighbors as themselves through learning and living the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Church.

Brief Description of the Parish Faith Formation Programs

Our parish faith formation programs consist of two dimensions:

- Sacrament preparation for First Reconciliation, First Communion and Confirmation
- Catholic religious instruction for children through 8th grade

Note to Parents and Guardians:

Your child's "readiness" to learn about faith depends on you! Whether your child attends a Catholic school or the parish's Religious Education Program, your role is vital to passing the faith on to your child. No classroom or textbook can provide what you must provide in order to nurture your child's faith.

The General Directory for Catechesis states:

"Parents and other family members awaken in the child a sense of God. This religious awakening within the family is irreplaceable. A child's first Christian experience frequently leaves decisive traces which last throughout life."

SACRAMENT PREPARATION

At Baptism, parents accept the responsibility of training their children in the practice of the faith, teaching them to keep God's commandments as taught by Jesus, and to love God and neighbor.

First Reconciliation and First Communion

A child's remote preparation for sacraments begins by observing his or her parents' or guardians' behavior and priorities, and by coming to Sunday Mass and experiencing time for prayer and a growing relationship with God. They learn by observing how the significant adults in their lives respond to their own Baptismal call. No classroom or textbook can provide this.

Parish families who wish to have their children continue their initiation into the Catholic Church may enroll their children in Sacrament Preparation. This includes parish children who attend Catholic school. At Immaculate Heart of Mary, children generally receive immediate preparation for First Reconciliation and First Communion in 2nd grade, after having completed two years of formal religious instruction.

Formal sacrament preparation for First Reconciliation and First Communion begins generally in 1st grade with parents or guardians attending the Parent/Guardian Sacrament Preparation Meeting. After attending the meeting, parents or guardians may submit a Sacrament Preparation

Enrollment Form, requesting that their child enter into sacrament preparation. This form is distributed at the meeting.

Parents/guardians whose children are older than 1st grade will attend the same Sacrament Meeting mentioned above, and may submit the Sacrament Preparation Enrollment Form. Parish staff will work with the family to create a plan to support the family in preparing their child to receive the sacraments.

Confirmation

At Immaculate Heart of Mary, specific preparation for Confirmation begins at the end of 7th grade and continues through 9th grade. Young people generally receive the sacrament of Confirmation during Easter season of 9th grade.

It is the expectation of the parish that each young person wishing to be confirmed has received ongoing religious instruction in grades 1 – 8 in a parish Religious Education Program or Catholic School. It is also expected that the young person attends Sunday/Saturday evening Mass each week.

Parents who wish that their children prepare for Confirmation should attend the Confirmation Inquiry Meeting at the end of 7th grade. At this meeting, the sacrament preparation process for Confirmation will be discussed. Please see the Confirmation Process booklet for complete information.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Parish families are invited to enroll their children in our Sunday morning Religious Education Program, or the Summer Academy Program, or to contact the Faith Formation Office to discuss participating in the Family-Based Religious Education Program.

Registration Information:

- Families who are new to the parish...welcome! Please be sure to register in the parish prior to registering your children for a religious education program.
- A copy of the baptismal certificate must be submitted at the time of registration.
- Families are contacted via email when the online registration period opens. For Summer Academy Program, registration generally begins in February. For Sunday Morning Program and Family-Based Programs, registration generally begins in June.
- Registration fees cover some of the costs associated with the parish programs. It is the expectation that families are registered members of the parish and are contributing each week throughout the year at Mass or using Parish Giving; these contributions are essential for covering all expenses.
- Each child must have a Baptismal Certificate on file if not baptized at Immaculate Heart of Mary. Please submit a copy of your child's certificate when registering.
- You may choose the program option you prefer for your child. See below for detailed information on each.

Family-Based Religious Education Program

Recognizing that the family is the foundation for all faith formation, our parish offers a program for any family who believes their child's religious education will be served best by working at home. Parents and guardians are expected to proclaim the Gospel message through lifestyle as well as instruction, and place a priority on helping their child nurture a personal relationship with God.

Families who are interested in taking this option should contact the Faith Formation Office to arrange for an interview with Mary Clinton.

General Requirements:

- Weekly Mass Attendance
- Parent will uphold the teachings of the Catholic Church
- Timely completion of textbook chapter material
- Attendance at three parents' meetings during the upcoming year
- Parent commitment to ongoing personal faith development
- Family commitment to participating in family-based gatherings and events

Sunday Morning Weekly Religious Education Program

- Offered for 4 year-olds through 7th grade depending on availability of volunteer catechists. (8th grade is available only through the Family-Based option or Summer Academy.)
- Runs from September through late April/early May
- Sunday mornings in the Nazareth Center from 8:45 – 10:15am

Summer Academy Religious Education Program

- Summer Academy is a two-week intensive program that incorporates instruction, mission work, music and crafts.
- Due to the intensive nature, no absences are permitted.
- Two sessions are offered each summer: one at the beginning of the summer and one at the end of summer.
- Due to the popularity of this program, space can be limited.
- Each family is asked to volunteer in some capacity.
- Children gather in the Nazareth Center gym at 8:45pm; dismissal is from the Nazareth Center classrooms at 1pm.

PARENTS' COUNCIL

New in 2016-2017, a Parents' Council has been established. The purpose of the Parents' Council is to provide a vehicle for parent input and involvement regarding children's faith formation programs. The Council, in collaboration with the Pastoral Associate for Faith Formation, leads the coordination of volunteers and offers insights for improving the effectiveness of the parish programs.

Administrative Policies and Procedures

Child Abuse Policy

Consistent with the Archdiocesan policy and legal code of the State of New Jersey, all parish staff members and volunteers have a moral and legal obligation to report any suspected child abuse to authorities to ensure the welfare of a child.

All parish staff, catechists, and regular volunteers are required to:

- Complete a standard archdiocesan application
- Acknowledge receipt of and compliance with the *Archdiocesan Policy Regarding Conduct with Minors*
- Complete a criminal background check
- Complete the *Protecting God's Children* workshop training program.

Catechists

Our catechists are volunteers who dedicate themselves and their time to serving the children of the parish. Students are expected to respect the presence and authority of their catechists. A few important points:

- All catechists are required to complete the Archdiocesan Child Safety requirements listed above.
- Catechists are not permitted to administer medication.
- Catechists are not permitted to drive children to or from the Sunday Classroom or Summer Academy Programs.

Communication

Most communication from the Faith Formation Office will be sent via email. Please inform us immediately if you realize you are not receiving emails from us, or if your email address changes.

Emergency Closings

In the event of inclement weather or other situation that requires closing of the program, you will be contacted by email. Please be sure that we have the correct email on file for you to reach you in such a situation.

Arrival/Dismissal Procedures

- Children should arrive to the Nazareth Center gym by 8:45am where they will meet with the catechist and classmates. (Sunday Program, meet in classrooms.)
- Children are dismissed from the Nazareth Center classrooms at 1pm for Summer Academy; 10:15am for Sunday morning.
- Children in Pre-K through grade 3 **must** be dropped off and picked up by a parent or guardian.
- Parents and guardians for children in grades 4 – 8 should inform the Faith Formation Office in writing whether their child(ren) may leave the program unaccompanied by a parent or guardian.
- Main Entrance only should be used to enter and exit the building, except in the case of fire drills or emergency situations. Doors are locked while programs are in operation; use buzzer at front door when needed.

Please do not ask that your child be dismissed early from the program unless it is an emergency. This is very disruptive to classroom instruction. In the event your child absolutely must leave early, please come into the Nazareth Center to speak to a staff member before signing him/her out in the log book, indicating the reason for leaving early. A staff person will retrieve your child from class.

Attendance Requirements:

Weekly Classroom Program

Students are expected to attend all class sessions. If a child has an unavoidable absence, the parent should contact the parish office to inform us, and then follow-up with the child's catechist about making up class work. Any student who misses more than three class sessions without serious cause and without making up class work may be required to complete an end-of-year assessment before moving to the next grade. If a parent realizes that his/her child will have a continuing conflict with the weekly class schedule, he/she should speak with the Pastoral Associate for Faith Formation to discuss options.

Summer Academy Program

Due to the intensive nature of the Summer Academy, no absences are permitted.

Behavior/Discipline Policy

All students are expected to treat themselves and others with respect, and to share whole-heartedly and cooperatively in the learning experiences offered by their catechists.

In the event a student's behavior disrupts the learning process for himself/herself or others, the following steps will be taken:

- 1) The catechist will issue a verbal warning to the student
- 2) If the behavior stops, the catechist will speak with the student after class about the behavior
- 3) If the behavior continues, the catechist will contact the supervising staff member who will call the child's parent to retrieve the student and to discuss the situation.
- 4) If the disruptive behavior continues, the student will not be permitted to return to class; parents will be given the option to work at home with him/her on the grade level textbook material.

Health and Safety Procedures

All catechists and staff will keep the health and safety of the children in mind at all times. Children must always be under supervision.

No child shall be released from a class early to a parent or other individual **unless permission has been given by a supervising staff member.** All parents/guardians are required to sign in the log book when picking a child up early, at which point a staff person will come to your classroom to retrieve the child to be dismissed. Under no circumstances should a child be allowed to leave the classroom to be dismissed early without notification from a supervising staff person.

Illness or Injury Procedures

Catechists and/or parish staff may administer Band-Aids, ice packs or drinks of water.

Under no circumstances may catechists or parish staff members administer any medications to a child, even with parental permission. This includes over the counter medicines. The parent may come here to IHM to give the child medication if he/she wishes.

If a child should have a complaint or illness, a classroom aide or co-catechist should accompany the child to the Faith Formation Office. The Faith Formation Office secretary or other Faith Formation staff member will contact the parent (using our program records) to inform him/her of the situation. The parent will decide whether he/she will come pick the child up.

EpiPen Policy

Realizing the absolutely necessity to the child's health to receive the injection quickly and properly should it become necessary, our policy is:

- If a child is old enough to administer his/her own EpiPen injection, the parent must submit a written statement with the registration form (or at another point in the year) informing us that the child has permission and is capable of taking this responsibility.
- If a child is not capable self-administering the EpiPen, a parent must remain with the class during program time in order to assist his/her child should it become necessary.
- **Catechists and staff may not administer EpiPen injections, but should call 911 in the event of an emergency, and then notify the supervising staff person.**

This policy is meant to ensure the safety of each child. If you have any questions, please contact the Pastoral Associate for Faith Formation.

Child Abuse

Corporal punishment- any punitive touching such as pushing, shoving, slapping, etc. is NEVER permitted. In light of the concern for the safety of our children and potential abuse or the accusation of abuse, catechists will take care not be alone with a child behind closed doors or in a secluded area. Another adult should always be present. Catechists are not permitted to drive students to or from the Religious Education Program. If you have any questions regarding these guidelines, please speak with the Pastoral Associate.

Any cause for suspicion of child abuse will be reported directly to the NJ Department of Youth Services (DYFS)

and the parish Pastoral Associate for Faith Formation and/or the Pastor, with all communication to be kept totally confidential. Suspected child abuse is never to be reported to the parents/guardians.

Harassment

It is the policy of Immaculate Heart of Mary Religious Education Program to maintain a learning environment that is free from any type of harassment. No student associated with our program shall be subjected to any type of harassment.

It shall be a violation of this policy for any student to harass another student or volunteer in our program through the conduct as defined below. Administrators and catechists shall be responsible for promoting a learning environment free from harassment within his or her classroom or office.

Definition of Harassment:

The verbal or physical conduct that demeans, shows hostility or aversion toward an individual because of his/her race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, disability or any other physical feature.

Harassing conduct includes, but is not limited to the following:

1. epithets, slurs, negative stereotyping or threatening, intimidating or hostile acts that relate to race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, disability or any other physical feature; and
2. written or graphic material that demeans, shows hostility or aversion toward an individual or group because of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, disability or any other physical feature and that is circulated within the classroom or elsewhere on the premises.

Violations of this policy will be treated as a significant disciplinary matter and will be reported to the Pastoral Associate for Catechetical Ministry and to the Pastor.

Non-Discrimination Policy

Immaculate Heart of Mary Faith Formation Programs admit students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all rights, privileges and programs made available to students who register for this program.