



CHURCH OF THE SACRED HEART

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Religious Education Office Program Handbook

2016-2017

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Welcome to the Church of the Sacred Heart Parish Religious Education Program

Religious Education is a primary focus of parish life. We are happy to have the opportunity to provide quality and compassionate instruction. Our program provides instruction in the doctrine, scripture, ritual, culture and customs of the Roman Catholic Church.

Our staff consists of a professionally credentialed Director, a part-time volunteer administrative assistant and a large number of Diocesan Certified Volunteer Catechists from our parish family. Through prayer, dedication and stewardship, we are your partners in faith formation in service to our Lord and His children.

This handbook explains the necessary and current policies of our program and will be amended as necessary. We encourage you to join us in the full active participation of parish life with complete cooperation in the process of Faith Formation for all our parish children.

Sunday (or Vigil) Mass attendance is the most important part of our curriculum. As Catholic parents, it is your obligation to model your faith and bring your children to weekly Sunday (or Vigil) Mass. Worshipping together as a family is what makes us Catholic. We expect families to take this responsibility very seriously.

Mission Statement

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son so that all who believed in Him would never die but have eternal life.” John 3:16

Our mission is to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ. We believe God is the source of all truth. We believe that, by faith, we are all saved in Jesus Christ. We are each called by name to be His disciples and faithful stewards of His good gifts. As good stewards we are called to lead others to Jesus Christ through prayer, good works and example. Beginning at Baptism and continuing through life, we hope to enable the members of our parish community to discover, grow and mature in their faith experience. We make every effort to help others to deepen their relationship with Christ and His Church.

Statement of Philosophy

“Parents, you have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring them up to keep God’s commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?”

(from the **Rite of Baptism**)

In addition to instructing your child in Christian truth, we welcome this opportunity to assist you in fulfilling your primary obligation in teaching your children to walk in the ways of faith. This can only be done when each family places Jesus Christ and His teachings in the center of their lives through Sunday worship, family prayer and daily living of the Christian mission.

As partners in faith formation, we look forward to sharing the task of communicating Catholic Christian values to your children. As we pray together, talk together, and plan together, we can fully integrate ourselves as believers of Jesus Christ. We embrace the Catholic standard of living by using as our guide Sacred Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium (teaching authority of the Catholic Church). Together, we can support each other in instilling these values in our children.

A strong foundation in the Catholic tradition of faith in the Most Holy Trinity will help our children navigate all the challenges throughout their lives. Living life in the Catholic lifestyle means being a witness to Jesus Christ everyday by what we say, what we do at home, at work, at school, and at play. We join together each week in celebration of that witness when we gather for Mass.

Programs

Church of the Sacred Heart offers several programs for religious education.

- Whole Community Catechesis – Year round, beginning in Sept., Wednesdays 6 - 9 pm or Sundays 3 - 6 pm, once a month, all parishioners in all age groups.
- Summer Session – Second and third weeks of July, Monday through Friday, 8:30 AM to Noon (Grades K-8); open only to parishioners (registered by March 1) whose children are fully up to date with their religious education.
- Home Study – A family with a child who has special needs may choose to have a parent present the religious education materials in their home. The pastor may require parents to obtain training in being a catechist beforehand.
- RCIA Program Adapted for Children – Available for children who are unbaptized and who have reached the age of 7 or above and for children who were baptized in a non-Catholic Church who have reached the age of 7 or above. Sundays weekly September through May.

Detailed explanations of each program are given below.

Religious Education Office

Our office is located in the Parish Center at 200 Randolph Avenue, South Plainfield, NJ 07080. The Parish Center office hours are Monday through Thursday 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM and Friday 8:00 AM to 2:00 PM (8:00 AM to Noon in July & August), closed for lunch 12 Noon to 1:00 PM. While Religious Education classes are in session, there is someone in the school building to accept paperwork or to answer general questions.

The Religious Education Office is staffed by one fulltime, permanent employee as Director and one volunteer administrative assistant. The Director of Religious Education is a fully credentialed individual as set forth in the standards held by the Diocese of Metuchen Office for Catechesis. The volunteer administrative assistant provides approximately twenty hours of clerical support each week.

The Faith Formation Team members are volunteer catechists, aides, and hall monitors. All employees and volunteers of the Diocese of Metuchen, 18 years of age or older, who have more than a one-time contact with a minor as defined under New Jersey State Law, undergo a criminal history background check and fingerprinting in accordance with the policy set forth in the Policy on Criminal History Background Checks. All employees and volunteers at the Church of the Sacred Heart have completed this process and are in compliance with New Jersey State Law.

If you have questions or concerns, it is best to leave us a voicemail at 908-756-0633 ext. 143 or email us at religioueducation@churchofthesacredheart.net. The program director will be happy to make an appointment to meet with you at your convenience. All forms and program information are posted on our web page on the parish website. (www.churchofthesacredheart.net)

MASS ATTENDANCE

Regular attendance at Mass with your children is an essential part of their religious education and Catholic faith formation. Our Catholic tradition reminds us that Jesus is present in the Word (Scriptures), Sacrament (Eucharist), and in the people who have assembled. We join together in praise, thanksgiving and worship of God who is ever-present to us in the Most Holy Trinity. The songs we sing and the scriptures we read remind us of the teachings of Jesus. Together, we are renewed, validated and affirmed. We make the choice to grow deeper in faith and love with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As the song by the contemporary composer Marty Haugen proclaims, *"All are welcome in this place!"*

PARISH MASS SCHEDULE

Saturday 5:00 PM (Vigil)
Sunday 9:00 AM & 11:30 AM
Holy Days 6:30 AM, 9:00 AM, 7:00 PM

Daily Mass 7:00 PM Monday (except on National Holidays at 9:00 AM)
9:00 AM Tuesday through Saturday

CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

Jesus told us that the Kingdom of God is within each of us. He gave us the **Beatitudes** to help us to be good stewards of the Kingdom of God. As Catholics, we adopt an "attitude of gratitude" while we share our Time, Talent and Treasure for the benefit of the entire community of faith. We live out the Gospel message through our participation in the **Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy**. We reach out to the global community in **faithful stewardship** to our neighbors. If we want our children to be good stewards, we need to help them live in faithful stewardship.

Attendance

Religious education is continuous and expected to be ongoing from Grade 1 through Confirmation. It is not permissible to skip grades and merely attend grades in which a sacrament is celebrated. Children have spiritual needs every year. Religious education

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is not “rehearsal” for the events of Eucharist and Confirmation. In exceptional cases only will a request for two immediate years of preparation before a sacrament be considered. (Sports or extracurricular activities **do not** count as exceptional cases.)

A student’s attendance at religious education, retreats, sacrament preparation sessions, etc., is protected by the United States Supreme Court 343, US 206 (1952). This decision was cited with approval in the New Jersey Attorney General’s Formal Opinion No. 4, 1965 and is still in effect. State law [NJSA 18A:36-14-16 and NJAC 6:20-1.3(j)] prohibits school districts from assessing a penalty to a student who is absent from school due to the observance of a religious holiday.

Likewise, students cannot be penalized for missing sports and extracurricular activities for attending religious education/formation.

The whole community model of catechesis, in which children attend monthly sessions along with their parents, consists of between a total of 30 hours (ten 3-hour sessions) during the calendar year.

More than two (2) unexcused absences in a school model religious education program will be cause for evaluation of the student’s placement in the program. Examples of excused absences include death in the family, illness, etc. Sports or extracurricular activities **do not** fall into the category of excused absences.

The Summer Session is 10 days during the second and third week of July. This program has a **Zero Absence Policy**. Families wishing to participate in the Summer Session must be registered in the parish no later than March 1st. Additionally, all students above Grade 1 must show proof of having been in a continuous religious education program, completing all preceding grade levels to the one in which they wish to register. There are also no late arrivals or early dismissals permitted in this program.

PUNCTUALITY

Being on time is an excellent way to show your child that attendance in Religious Education is important.

Whole Community Catechesis	Wednesday or Sunday	6:00 PM to 9:00 PM 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM
Summer Session K – 8	Mon.-Fri.	8:30 AM to Noon

EARLY DISMISSAL

- On the rare occasion that your child needs to be dismissed early, please write a note to the Director of Religious Education.
- A child may not be dismissed early to attend sports or extracurricular activities.
- For safety reasons, we ask that you please come into the school to collect your child rather than having your child meet you in the parking lot.
- Please show your child that Religious Education classes are important by scheduling appointments on days other than the scheduled class time.

CANCELLATIONS

- Classes will be cancelled when the South Plainfield Public Schools and/or Holy Savior Academy are closed due to bad weather or other emergency situations.
- Cancellations are announced over the radio station WCTC-1450AM.
- Every effort will be made to contact you via email.
- Please call the Religious Education Office at (908) 756-0633 ext. 143 as our outgoing message will also advise callers of Religious Education closings.
- In the event of unscheduled early dismissals for snow/ice emergencies at the South Plainfield Public Schools, Religious Education classes will be cancelled.

ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL – SAFETY FIRST POLICY

Arrival:

- Please park your car in the parking lot. Do not park your car directly in front of the school in the driveway.
- Please get out of the car and escort your child to the school entrance foyer.
- Please be on time.

Dismissal:

- Please park your car in the parking lot. Do not park your car directly in the driveway.
- Please get out of your car and come to the school to pick up your child. Children are not permitted to run into the parking lot.
- As a matter of safety for all children, please supervise your children after dismissal.
- We ask that children do not run around on school property.
- Please be on time.

Traffic Flow:

- Please use the proper exits when leaving the parking lot of the church campus.
- Please drive slowly and attentively through the parking lot of the church campus.
- Please do not park or block the parish center/convent parking lot, driveways and fire zones.
- Please do not enter the orange-coned zone with your vehicle.

- For their safety, children who are not picked up immediately must return to the lobby of the school.

Walking/Biking Home

- If there is absolutely no other means of transportation and it is your wish that your child walk home or ride their bike home, **we must have your consent, in writing, on file in our Office.**
- A letter of permission must be dated and signed each year if you wish your child to walk to and from class.
- We strongly recommend that children do not walk or bike home alone.

ABSENCES

- Please call the Religious Education Office before class on the day of the absence.
- Please make every effort to have your child attend the scheduled classes.
- Please show your child that Religious Education classes are important by scheduling appointments on days other than the scheduled class time.
- Excessive absences (more than 2 classes) for the whole community catechesis program means that credit for that grade level is not given.
- No absences are allowed in the Summer Program.

Student Discipline Policy

STUDENT CODE OF BEHAVIOR

- Students are expected to comply with standard classroom rules.
- Cell phones **MUST** be turned off during class time. Catechists can require students to turn in their cellphones for the duration of the session time.
- Students are expected to show self-control while on the church and school campus.
- Students are expected to show respect for all persons in words and actions.
- Students are expected to respect the property of the church and school campus and are not to remove or damage property on/from the church and school campus.
- Candy, chewing gum, snacks or soft drinks are not permitted in the classrooms, hallways or lobby.
- Zero Tolerance Policy consequences for physical harm to one's self or others.
- Zero Tolerance Policy consequences for drugs, alcohol, or weapons on the church and school campus.
- Zero Tolerance Policy consequences for any and all verbal and non-verbal threats.

CONSEQUENCES

- If a student is found to be in possession of any illegal substances or weapons, makes any verbal/non-verbal threats, or physically hurts one's self or others, the student will be detained. The police will be notified. The student will be immediately dismissed from the formal program and placed on home study.
- Parents are financially responsible for all church property that has been damaged by their child.
- If a student comes to class with an electronic device of any sort, the device will be kept in the office until class is concluded.
- If a student causes any of the above listed disruptions, the student will be removed from the classroom and appropriate measures will be taken, i.e., notifying police, notifying parents and/or dismissal from the program.

CLASS SCHEDULES

- Calendars for all Religious Education classes are posted on our parish website (www.churchofthesacredheart.net).
- When South Plainfield schools are closed, no Religious Education classes are scheduled on those weekdays.
- Please do not drop off children without being certain that class is in session.

COMMUNICATION

- Our event calendar is published on the Religious Education page of the parish website (www.churchofthesacredheart.net).
- All communication from the Religious Education office is sent via email. If you do not have internet service, please notify us by phone or regular mail.
- Please check our parish bulletin for other relevant information.
- Leave a phone message at our office 908-756-0633 ext. 143; we will return your call as soon as possible.
- Please add our email address to your email account. Our email address is: religiouseducation@churchofthesacredheart.net.

FAMILY CONTACT INFORMATION

- Please keep us up-to-date with your contact information.

FOOD ALLERGIES

- Parents of highly allergic children must make known the special needs of their child to the Director of Religious Education.

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- We do not have a nurse on premises.
- A parent whose child has a life-threatening allergy is required to remain in the building while their child is in class. Another family member may be designated to remain with the child.

CHILD ABUSE POLICY

- If the Director of Religious Education or a catechist suspects a child has been abused in any way, State of New Jersey statutes require that the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) be notified immediately.
- At the discretion of the Director of Religious Education or a catechist, a student will not be sent home with a driver who is visibly impaired and unable to drive.
- The Director of Religious Education reserves the right to call an emergency number to arrange an alternate means of transportation.

TWO FIRE/EVACUATION DRILLS

- For the safety of your children, two fire/evacuation drills will be conducted during the year.
- A lockdown drill will also be conducted during the year.

LEAVING THE PARISH

Please notify us if you are moving out of town and leaving the parish. We will provide a letter of completed grade levels for the Religious Education program when you register at your new Catholic parish.

VALUABLES AND LOST AND FOUND

- We strongly recommend that all valuables be left at home.
- We are not responsible for lost or stolen items.
- All lost articles that are turned in may be claimed at the Religious Education Office.

RE-REGISTRATION PROCEDURE

- All children must be enrolled every year, whether or not they are preparing for a sacrament. Discipleship is lived and deepened every year of a child's life, especially while they are in the process of initiation, which goes from Baptism through Confirmation. (The three Sacraments of Initiation are Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation.)

- All families participating in Religious Education programs must be registered parishioners or have a permission letter from the parish where they are registered. For the summer program, only the children of registered parishioners will be allowed to participate.
- Students MUST make up all missed years of instruction before being admitted to the grade level concurrent with their public school grade level, especially before enrolling in a sacramental year.

TUITION AND FEES

- Registration Fees: Tuition per child is \$125.
- Grade 2 Eucharist: Tuition + Sacramental Fee \$50.00 = Total \$175 per child
- Grade 8 Confirmation: Tuition + Sacramental Fee \$50.00 = Total \$175 per child
- Tuition and fees are collected for every student in all of the programs.
- All sacramental fees are collected for all candidates.
- Monthly tuition payment plans are available upon request.
- To pay by credit card or debit card, please use our Online Giving portal located on the home page of the parish website (www.churchofthesacredheart.net).
- All registrations received after the published deadline will be subject to late fees per student.
- Please call the Director if you wish to discuss tuition options; no families will be turned away for financial reasons. (908-756-0633, ext. 143)

NEW STUDENTS

- All families participating in the Religious Education Program must be registered parishioners.
- Please call the parish office if you are not sure you are registered or considered an active registered parishioner.
- Parish Registration forms are available at the Parish Center Office.
- A Baptismal Certificate is required for all new students in addition to any previous records if a child has attended a Religious Education program in a different parish or diocese.

INTERPARISH STUDENTS

- All families who are registered in another parish and wish to have a child attend a Religious Education program in this parish are required to have a letter from their pastor granting them permission to participate in this program and/or to receive the Sacraments of First Reconciliation, First Eucharist, or Confirmation.
- The Office for Catechesis of the Diocese of Metuchen does not encourage shopping for religious education programs among parishes. Children should

receive their religious education in the parish at which the family worships and is registered. The pastors of the parishes involved have the final say.

CLASS PLACEMENT

- Becoming a Catholic requires three sacraments: Baptism, through which we become Christians, Eucharist and Confirmation. It is only after the reception of all three sacraments that one is a Catholic. The period between Baptism and Confirmation is a period of initiation. Just like adults joining a religion, children must learn the beliefs of the Catholic faith and make a good faith effort in practicing the Catholic faith. Religious Education is continuous and is expected to be ongoing between Grades 1 and 8.
- Candidates for First Eucharist must complete the first two years of the program and receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before receiving First Eucharist.
- Candidates for Confirmation must complete religious education from Grade 1 to Grade 8. Please speak to the Director if your child has missed any of the grade level preparation.
- A child older than age 7 who has not been baptized is eligible for the RCIA Program Adapted for Children. (See below for more details.)

Programs

WHOLE COMMUNITY CATECHESIS

This multi-generational program meets monthly throughout the year offering faith formation sessions, activities, speakers, and discussion groups for all age levels of the parish. Participants gather for fellowship and a meal before furthering their faith in age appropriate groups. This program is perfect for families who are raising children and preparing for sacraments, but also has the flexibility to accommodate adults who want to learn more about their faith and not commit to a lengthy program of study.

SUMMER SESSION

This intensive two-week, half-day (mornings from 8:30 to Noon) program is available for K-Grade 8 for registered parishioners whose children are up-to-date with their religious education. In addition to following a textbook-based curriculum, additional activities and events occur to enhance and nurture the children's faith formation.

HOME STUDY

A family with a child who has special needs may choose this option. The pastor may require parents to obtain training in being a catechist beforehand. A textbook is provided and some special needs educational materials especially designed for religious education can be provided as well. Full tuition is charged for this program.

RCIA ADAPTED FOR CHILDREN

This program requires the participation of the parents and regular attendance at weekly Mass as well as class sessions. There is no set time for this program but parents should expect that it will last at least two years. The child is determined to be ready to be baptized when he or she desires to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and a member of the Catholic Church.

RCL BENZIGER FAMILY LIFE PROGRAM

- The RCL Benziger Family Life Program is mandated for all students in parish schools and Religious Education programs in the Diocese of Metuchen.
- The series provides a comprehensive moral catechesis for families.
- The series is designed to complement the religious curriculum in our school or parish.
- The series integrated child safety education into a holistic approach to family life education.

Sacramental Policies

- All children seeking the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation must have a valid Baptism.
- Formal Religious Education is a continuous developmental process that begins with two years of preparation for First Communion and continues through Confirmation. Students who miss years of religious instruction are not permitted to celebrate a sacrament the year they normally would based on their age. With the permission of the pastor, per the policy of the Diocese of Metuchen, they must complete at least two years or more of preparation before celebrating the sacrament.
- Sacramental preparation takes place in formal religious education classes.
- Attendance at rehearsals, workshops, retreats and special liturgies are part of the preparation process.
- Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation also requires documented twenty hours of stewardship.

FIRST RECONCILIATION

- Preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation takes place in second grade. Students must complete Grade 1 before entering Grade 2.
- Religious Education is a partnership effort of parents and the Religious Education Faith Formation Team.
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation continues the forgiving and reconciling work of God. We are acknowledged by the Father through the accomplishment of Jesus who is God the Son and by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Catechesis of children for Reconciliation must always respect the natural disposition, ability, age and circumstances of individuals.
- A clear understanding of the relationship of the sacrament to the child's life helps the child recognize moral good and evil, repentance of wrong doing, and turning toward God for forgiveness.
- Encouragement and parental example leads the child to approach the sacrament freely and regularly.
- Regular attendance at Sunday Mass with your child is an essential part of their sacramental preparation process.
- Attendance at the First Reconciliation Workshop is required of all candidates along with one or both parents or another adult family member. Please make your own babysitting arrangements for siblings.

FIRST EUCHARIST

- Students must complete Grade 1 before entering Grade 2.
- Instruction for First Eucharist (First Holy Communion), a Sacrament of Initiation, is conducted separately from religious education for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- First Eucharist is usually celebrated on the first Saturday in May.
- A clear understanding of the relationship of the sacrament to the child's life helps the child recognize that the Eucharist is the heart of Christian life and our Catholic belief that Holy Eucharist is the real presence of Jesus Christ in His Body and Blood.
- Encouragement and parental example leads the child to approach the sacrament freely and regularly especially during the Sunday Mass.
- Regular attendance at Sunday Mass with your child is an essential part of their sacramental preparation process.
- Attendance at the First Eucharist Workshop is required of all candidates along with one or both parents or another adult family member. Please make your own babysitting arrangements for siblings.
- Regarding a dress code for First Eucharist, we ask that families dress their candidates in their "Sunday Best" outfits: a dark colored suit for boys with white shirt and a plain, white or solid-color tie (no logos, no patterns). No sneakers, flip flops or boots may be worn. Girls should wear a white dress and veil or

headpiece. They may not wear gloves. They may not carry flowers, purses, rosaries, etc.

CONFIRMATION

- As one of the three Sacraments of Initiation, Confirmation is thoroughly related to Baptism and the Eucharist. In fact, a person is not a Catholic until he or she has received all three sacraments.
- Candidates for Confirmation must complete Religious Education from Grade 1 to Grade 8. Please speak to the Director if your child has missed any of the grade level preparation. At a minimum, he or she will be required to complete two years of religious education before celebrating Confirmation.
- A clear understanding of the relationship of the sacrament to the candidate's life helps the candidate recognize that, through "the laying on of hands" and anointing with Chrism by the bishop or his delegate, they become more perfect images of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. They are renewed and strengthened in their baptismal call to continue the mission to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ. They are welcomed into full membership in the Church to live and to share the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- Encouragement and parental example lead the candidate to approach the sacrament freely.
- Regular attendance at Sunday Mass with the candidate is an essential part of their sacramental preparation process.
- Each candidate is required to complete the entire process of preparation by actively participating in the following:
 - Completion of the Confirmation Registration Form;
 - Provide proof of a valid Baptism;
 - Attendance at all scheduled classes;
 - Attendance at the Confirmation Retreat;
 - Attendance at the Sponsor & Candidate Retreat;
 - Completion of the Journal pages;
 - Completion of the twenty documented hours of stewardship;
 - Completion of the Stewardship pages;
 - The reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to Confirmation; and
 - Provide the Sponsor Certificate of Eligibility.
- All forms and documents are available on the parish website (www.churchofthesacredheart.net) and from the Religious Education Office.
- Regarding the dress code for Confirmation: we ask that candidates and sponsors be dressed in their "Sunday Best": a dark colored suit or suit jacket for boys with white shirt and a plain, white or solid-color tie (no logos, no patterns). No sneakers, flip flops or boots. Girls should wear a dress that is no more than two inches above the knee. No spaghetti straps or halter tops may be worn. No gowns. The longest a dress can be is tea length (mid-calf). No sneakers or flip flops.

Parental Rights and Responsibilities

The religious education and formation of children demands that there be a partnership between the family and the parish. Church documents are very clear that the first and most important catechists of children are their parents. Without a lived faith in the home and family attendance at Sunday Eucharist, religious education and formation of children will be very difficult. A covenant between parents and parish is essential in order to help the entire family grow in faith and relationship with Christ.

Parents and parish should be aware of the following parental rights and responsibilities.

PARENTAL RIGHTS

- To have your child's safety be a priority.
- To have your child receive an authentic Catholic religious education in a Catholic environment.
- To have your child's learning needs met if the program can reasonably accommodate them.
- To have a competent, compassionate catechist who respects and cares for your child.
- To have your questions and concerns heard and answered in a timely manner.
- To review your child's records.
- To participate in the sacramental life of the parish and the religious education program.

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- To worship at Sunday Liturgy with your child.
- To be a partner with the parish in the religious education and formation of your child, to pray with your child and to assist your child in understanding the Catholic faith.
- To understand and abide by the policies of your parish religious education program.
- To review all communications from the pastor, Director of Religious Education and catechist, and request clarification if necessary.
- To know your parish clergy, Director of Religious Education and your child's catechist.
- To attend parent meetings, family gatherings and conferences.
- To be actively involved in your child's religious education and volunteer assistance when possible.
- To promote your parish and speak well of your parish community.
- To appreciate that Catholic education and formation is a privilege.