



***MARY, MOTHER OF GOD CHURCH***  
***Office of Religious Education***

***PARENT/GUARDIAN HANDBOOK***

**2017 – 2018 School Year**

# **Mary, Mother of God Church Children's Religious Education Parent/Guardian Handbook**

## **MISSION**

In conjunction with parents and guardians, guide the children of Mary Mother of God Parish in the ways of our shared, Catholic faith.

Congratulations! You have selected the Mary Mother of God Religious Education Program not just for your child but for your family. This program will help all members of your family grow in faith and their personal relationship with God as it teaches the doctrine and traditions of our Roman Catholic faith.

## **OPERATING INFORMATION**

### ***Permanent Staff and Contact Information:***

**Deacon Christopher D. Conroy – Director, Religious Education**  
**(908) 874-8604 office**  
**DRE@marymotherofgod.org**

**Darlene Machala – Administrative Assistant & Catechist**  
**(908) 874-8604**  
**DRE@marymotherofgod.org**

### ***Volunteer Staff***

Our Religious Education Staff is composed of a very generous, hard-working, faith-filled group of volunteers. These volunteers cover teaching, substituting, classroom aides, childcare for teachers, and clerical help. Our teachers and aides spend many hours in preparation and teaching, as well as attending programs geared toward improving their skills. We thank God for them and ask you to support them, pray for them, and encourage them in their efforts.

We are always in need of volunteers. If you would like to know more about what's involved, please call Deacon Chris. No pressure; no obligation!

## ***Religious Education Office Hours***

Monday 9:30 am – 12:30 pm

Tuesday and Wednesday: 11:00am - 8:00 pm

Thursday 11:00am - 6:00pm

Other hours by appointment.

The Director is not available for meetings during class times. If you need to speak with the Director or schedule a personal meeting, please call the office number (908) 874-8604. If no answer, please leave a detailed message on the voice mail. We will return your call as soon as possible.

## **CLASS SCHEDULE**

Classes are held from approximately mid September through the first of May and roughly follow the Hillsborough Township Public School schedule. Parents will be provided a detailed, month by month schedule of classes and extracurricular activities such as special liturgies. This schedule will also be posted on the Parish Website. Check the website frequently for updates.

Please note that certain liturgies and meetings are mandatory for students and parents as they are part of the sacramental preparation process.

Classes are one hour and fifteen minutes in length. **Students are expected to be on time and parents are expected to pick up children promptly** at the end of the class session.

**Tuesday & Wednesday Classes are 4:15 to 5:30 pm and 7:00 to 8:15 pm**

**Thursday Classes are 5:00 to 6:15 pm**

We ask your cooperation in arriving on time and avoiding early dismissals. We realize there are occasions when there is a significant need to leave early (e.g. doctor's appointments, family emergencies.) If you need to pick up a child early, please call the religious education office or notify the catechist when you drop off your child. If your schedule for sports and other extracurricular activities conflicts with the religious education class schedule then a schedule adjustment for either religious education or the activity is necessary. It is disruptive to the other students to have continual late arrivals and early dismissals.

## **EMERGENCY CLOSING POLICY**

**If the Hillsborough Schools are CLOSED or have an EARLY DISMISSAL, WE WILL BE CLOSED.** We will do our best to email you using the email address you supplied on your registration form. Please notify us via email if there are any changes.

**If we are closed on Tuesday or Wednesday, there will be no bus service from Auten Road School to Mary Mother of God.** Please ensure your children understand this and take their regular bus route home.

### **Other sources of closing information:**

MMOG Religious Education Office announcements on (908) 874-8604

Mary Mother of God Website, <http://www.marymotherofgod.org>

Hillsborough Township School District homepage, <http://www.htps.us>

Hillsborough Township Board of Education message line (908) 431-6600

COMCAST cable Channel 27 (Educational TV)

COMCAST cable Channel 62 (NEWS 12 NJ)

<http://nj1015.com/closings/>

<http://www.wctcam.com/Storm-Closings/>

## **COMMUNICATIONS WITH PARENTS/GUARDIANS**

The majority of information is sent home via email; including emergency closing information. We use a minimum of paper handouts. Therefore, it is extremely important that we have your current email address. If you change your address during the year, please send an update to [DRE@marymotherofgod.org](mailto:DRE@marymotherofgod.org). Some information is also posted on the parish website [www.marymotherofgod.org](http://www.marymotherofgod.org) and in the parish bulletin.

## **REGISTRATION & FEES**

Registration forms are sent home with the students early in the spring for the following year. Forms are also available on the Parish Website, in the Religious Education office, the Parish Office and the Church gathering space. It is imperative that registration take place during the April 1<sup>st</sup> through July 1<sup>st</sup> registration period so that we can prepare adequately for the number of children, order the proper number of books and solicit enough teachers. **Forms received after July 1st will incur a late fee.** All registration forms must contain a first and second choice option for scheduling or they will be returned.

**Registration is on a first-come/first serve basis.** We recognize your need for scheduling other activities but the later in the registration process we receive your form, the more difficult it is to give you your first choice. We need your cooperation in getting the registration back in a timely fashion.

The registration fee covers all program expenses such as books, supplies, audiovisuals, building utilities as well as in-service training for our staff. There are additional fees for Sacramental years (2<sup>nd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>.)

Fees are expected at the time of registration. No child will be refused Religious Education due to finances; therefore, if there is a financial issue, please contact Deacon Chris or Father Sean.

## **NEW STUDENTS**

Students entering our program for the 1<sup>st</sup> time are required to present a copy of his/her Baptismal Certificate at the time of registration unless they were baptized at Mary Mother of God (please note this on the registration form.) If the child received First Eucharist in another parish, the date, parish name and address should be noted on the copy of the Baptismal certificate or a copy of the First Eucharist certificate should be provided.

If a child has attended another parish religious education program and transfers to Mary Mother of God, a copy of the permanent record card from the former program must be provided to the Director at the time of registration.

## **ATTENDANCE**

We recognize that children are involved in many wonderful activities. However, **Religious Education must be a family priority.** Children are expected to be here and to make up all missed work. Our program is geared to completing one or two lessons a week. **In grades 2 through 8, students will be expected to answer the questions at the end of the lesson they miss in writing and turn them into their teacher at the time of the next session.** Grade 1 parents should do the lesson with the children at home prior to the next class.

**The Diocese permits three (3) excused absences a year. The parish permits one (1) additional. After four (4) absences for any reason, the parents will be called to discuss the situation.** In general, we only have one hour a week for about 28 lessons. Clearly, we need your help in recognizing the very limited amount of time we have in formal education; the program has a definite scope and sequence in the weekly lessons. When children miss several weeks of lessons, it sends the wrong message to them and the rest of the class about the importance of Religious Education.

## **TESTING**

We will test all students either written or orally at the end of each chapter or unit for grades 2 through 8. The home school students will be tested at the end of the year. These tests are to help evaluate whether a student has accomplished the goals for the program.

## **PROGRESS REPORTS**

Report cards will go to the children in mid to late January. The purpose of the report is to keep the families abreast of their children's progress. They do not need to be returned.

## **REQUIREMENTS AT EACH GRADE LEVEL**

Children at all grade levels will be expected to study and memorize prayers. It is our experience that *children need to repeat the prayers on a daily basis for an extended period of time in order to commit them to memory.* We ask that parents hear their children's prayers at some point each day until they are memorized.

Students are expected to know and be able to recite the following from memory:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Grade:* Sign of the Cross, Hail Mary, Our Father and  
Glory Be to the Father
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade:* Act of Contrition
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade:* Apostles Creed
- 4<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup>* All the above.

Assignments given by teachers are used to reinforce learning. As with regular school, parents are responsible to see that assignments are completed. Also, please see that your child come to class *prepared with paper, pencil, pen and his/her book(s)*. *We also recommend a two pocket folder for handouts.*

### **COURSES OF STUDY**

For grades 1 through 7, the Sadlier Series “*We Believe with Project Disciple*” provides the children with a catechesis based on Sacred Scripture, tradition, the Liturgy, the teaching authority, and the life of the Church. You can view the objectives of each year of the program, as well as learning aids, at:

<http://www.sadlierreligion.com/webelieve/>

For Grade 8, we are using the *Chosen Confirmation Study* program from Ascension Press. Program information is available at:

[www.ConfirmationStudy.com/about/](http://www.ConfirmationStudy.com/about/)

Also, the Bishop has mandated that each parish program include *Family Life* education as part of the commitment to the *Protecting God’s Children* program. The program texts are published by RCL-Benziger. **We encourage you to stop in and review a copy of the text for your child’s respective grade.** If you are not comfortable with your child receiving Family Life information in class, we will ask you to complete an “opt out” form which will be shared with the Diocese Office of Child and Youth protection. Children who have opted out are not excused from class; they will be provided alternative material for that class session.

Information on the Family Life program can be viewed at:

[http:// www.rclbfamilylife.com](http://www.rclbfamilylife.com)

Username: flfamily Password: flrclbf01

## **SACRAMENTS**

In keeping with the Policy of the Diocese of Metuchen, children **must attend two years** of formal Religious Education before receiving First Eucharist and Confirmation. A copy of the child's Baptismal record must be on file in the Religious Education Office prior to First Reconciliation, First Eucharist and Confirmation.

Meetings will be held during the year for parents of children preparing for First Eucharist and Confirmation. Dates will be in the calendar. **These meetings are informational but the attendance of a family member is highly recommended.**

In order to maintain a spiritual atmosphere during reception of the Sacraments, **There is NO picture-taking during any Sacramental Liturgy.** We hire a professional videographer for the liturgy and you will be given the opportunity to purchase a copy of the service prior to the event.

## **FIRST EUCHARIST & FIRST PENANCE**

Children will receive the sacrament of First Reconciliation in January. The date and time will be posted on the calendar. A parent/guardian is required to be present for First Reconciliation.

Children generally receive the sacrament of First Eucharist (Holy Communion) in April or May. The date and times(s) will be posted on the calendar as soon as we confirm them with Father's schedule.

## **CONFIRMATION**

The 8<sup>th</sup> grade class will receive the sacrament of Confirmation in the spring. The Diocese usually advises us of the date in late January/early February. **As soon as we know the date and times, we will advise you via email and post an update to the annual schedule on the Parish website.**

The Confirmation Candidates, both 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grade, are expected to perform Community Service as part of their Confirmation preparation. Usually, approximately 10 hours are completed in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and 10 hours in 8<sup>th</sup>. However, it is permissible to complete all 20 hours in either year if volunteer



opportunities are available to the student. Volunteer opportunities of which the religious education office is aware of are posted on the parish website. Please check the site frequently.

10 hours must be for the Church and 10 serving the community or all can be in the Church. If a child participates in a youth ministry (e.g. Altar Servers, Youth Choir, Youth Usher/Greeter, a maximum of 3 hours in their ministry may be applied to the 10 hour Church service commitment. The Church commitment is the universal Church not just Mary Mother of God parish. Therefore, volunteer work done in support of Catholic Charities, Pregnancy Aid Center, Knights of Columbus, etc. counts toward the Church commitment. If you have questions, contact Deacon Chris.

The 7<sup>th</sup> grade class will participate in an Inscription Mass. Students will sign a pledge to do their part in preparation for Confirmation. The Liturgy is mandatory for students and a parent/guardian.

The 8<sup>th</sup> grade class will participate in a Presentation Mass. The Liturgy is mandatory for students and a parent/guardian.

**The Diocese of Metuchen mandates that all Confirmation Candidates attend a Confirmation Retreat.** A retreat will be scheduled at Mary Mother of God for our 8<sup>th</sup> grade candidates. If a Confirmation candidate cannot attend our parish Confirmation retreat, it is their responsibility to call neighboring parishes and locate a Confirmation retreat they can attend. Proof of attendance is required in order to be confirmed.

It is our sincere hope that every 8<sup>th</sup> grade student will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation with their peers. ***However, the primary requisite for reception of the Sacrament is not age - it is readiness.*** The students indicate their readiness to receive the Sacrament by their participation in the program and regular attendance at Sunday and Holy Day Mass. Participation also includes class & retreat attendance, completing assignments well and in a timely manner, and behavior during class and activities. If a young man or woman does not appear to be ready, we will ask that they take some time off and let us know when they feel they are ready – perhaps in the next year or two, when the parish will welcome them back to complete preparation under the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) adapted for children.

## **RULES & POLICIES**

In keeping with the diocesan directive, all families of students in our Religious Education Program **must** be registered in the Parish. Special situations may be permitted with the approval of Fr. Sean or Deacon Chris.

Children must be escorted into the building to their classrooms. This includes 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. Children will only be released to a KNOWN adult at the end of class at their classroom. Deacon Chris or the Catechist will not send a student home with a driver who appears to be impaired. The Catechist will notify Deacon Chris who reserves the right to call the student's Emergency number.

## **DISCIPLINE**

In general, our program is based on ***RESPECT***. We expect ***mutual respect*** between students, with catechists, for property and for what they are learning. Our goal is for the children's behavior to reflect the fact that they are Christians and to treat everyone the way the children would like to be treated – to do what Jesus would do – to learn to ask themselves, What would Jesus Do? It has been our experience that the vast majority of participants in this program are here to learn and that they are very respectful. Unfortunately, our classes are larger than we would like them to be. The numbers in the class make it even more challenging for our teachers. Therefore we have to have the ***full cooperation of each and every student with regard to behavior. If a child is unwilling or unable to be respectful and well-behaved, the following procedure will be followed.***

Each class will develop rules to be observed by all the students and any infraction will be noted. The child will be warned that their behavior is not in keeping with the rules and is, therefore, unacceptable.

If a second infraction occurs, the child will be sent to the Religious Education office to discuss the situation with Deacon Chris.

For the next infraction, the student will be sent to the Religious Education office, the parents will be called and asked to pick up the child.

For any disciplinary problem beyond the above, the student, the parents and Deacon Chris or Father Sean will meet in an effort to affect a change in behavior.

### **HEALTH AND SAFETY**

It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to inform the Director of their child's allergies or other significant medical conditions on the registration form or by some other means in writing.

We have numerous children in our program who have life threatening allergies to certain food products. The Diocese some years ago adopted New Jersey State Guidelines and Procedures for managing Life-Threatening Food Allergies for all Catholic Schools and Parish Religious Education Programs. Therefore:

### **NO FOOD OR DRINK OF ANY KIND (EXCEPT UNFLAVORED BOTTLED WATER), IS PERMITTED DURING PARISH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SESSIONS.**

When children have health issues that require medication and/or medical treatment, parents must inform the Director in writing and sign the releases and waiver of liability to hold harmless. The forms are available in the religious education office and on the parish website.

**The religious education program does not have trained, personnel available to administer medication.**

In the event of an on-site accident or illness involving a child or volunteer, the Catechist or nearest adult volunteers will first tend to the injury and second, advise the Director so that professional medical assistance can be obtained if necessary. The Director will notify the parents/guardians or emergency contact person, and arrange for completion of appropriate insurance forms.

If a student is found to be in possession of a controlled substance, the Director will contact the police and the student will be detained until they arrive.

If a catechist suspects a child has been abused, NJ State Statues require that DYFS be notified.

Fire Drill and Lock-down procedures are in place and are in each classroom.

## ***Student Cell Phone Policy***

Diocesan Policy 4.2 on use of cell phones is in appendix A. The Student Cell Phone Policy Agreement form must be signed by all students in grades four through eight. Signed forms must be returned to the Catechist's for retention in the student's file.

**A PARENT/GUARDIAN IS REQUIRED TO SIGN AND RETURN THIS FORM:**

I agree to abide by the policies and guidelines set forth in the Parent/Guardian Handbook. I further agree to discuss the discipline policy with my children and pledge my full support.

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Parent/Guardian

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Student grades \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE SIGN AND RETURN TO YOUR CHILD'S CATECHIST.  
THANK YOU!**

## Appendix A

# Diocese of Metuchen Office for Catechesis Student Cell Phone Policy Agreement

*The use of electronic devices of any kind is disruptive to the spirit of learning and prayer that takes place when children and catechists gather to grow in their faith.*

*However, cell phones may be brought to PARISH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION/FORMATION under the following conditions:*

1. Phones **MUST** be turned off for the entire duration of any and all activities including, but not limited to, classroom instruction, church visitation, prayer experiences, liturgies, etc. Cell phones must be kept out of sight upon entering the building and until the student has exited the building.
2. If a parent needs to contact his/her child(ren) regarding a late pick-up or other problem, please call the Parish Office for Religious Education/Formation, and we will relay the message directly to your child(ren) and their catechists. In this way we can monitor their safety until the child(ren) are picked up.
3. No cell phones may be used for picture taking.
4. No harassment or threatening of persons via cell phones is permitted.
5. Cell phones may not be used to play games, for Internet and email access, for conversations, music, gambling or making purchases of any kind.
6. No pagers, iPods, MP3 players or other communications devices are allowed.
7. Those who violate any of the rules regarding cell phones or other devices will forfeit their privilege of bringing cell phones to religious education/formation.

We have read the Diocesan Cell Phone policy and agree to abide by the rules stated above:

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Level: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

