

*RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM*

*PARENT & STUDENT HANDBOOK*

*ST. GABRIEL THE ARCHANGEL*

*SADDLE RIVER, NEW JERSEY*

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*Director of Religious Education*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

“Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire.”

William Butler Yeats

The mission of St. Gabriel the Archangel’s Parish Religious Education Program is to provide an educational program in which the students come together to deepen their relationship with God, begin their mission as disciples of Jesus Christ and become open to the influence of the Holy Spirit in their daily lives. It is through our Catholic traditions, family prayer, Christian example, and regular attendance at Mass that the foundation is laid for each child to live a life in the spiritual awareness of their membership in the broad universe of God’s creation.

At the time of registering children in the parish Religious Education Program, it is required that all parents and/or guardians thoroughly read this handbook, review the contents with their children, and acknowledge their understanding of the contents.

## **OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

Regular office hours are Monday through Friday 8:30am-4:30pm. During the summer months of June, July and August the office is closed on Friday. The Office of Religious Education can be reached on 201-825-0275. The Parish office and answering machine can be reached at 201-327-5663. Any questions pertaining to Religious Education can be directed to Maureen Straut, Parish Office Administrator, or Patricia Pula, Director of Religious Education (DRE).

## **REGISTRATION**

Registration in the parish is required prior to enrolling in the Religious Education program. Please make an appointment to meet with Fr. Frank DelPrete in order to complete the parish registration process.

Registration of continuing students is done each year. With the exception of families who have recently moved into the parish, new registrants are not accepted during the course of the year.

There is an annual contribution of \$150 for the first child, \$225 for two children, \$300 for three or more children per household to help defray the expense of the program. There is an additional \$75 fee for each student in the Sacramental Programs of First Communion and Confirmation during both 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

It is the responsibility of the parents or guardians, out of consideration of the student and teacher alike, that the staff be made aware in writing at the time of registration of any special needs that a student might have whether that be social,

developmental, medical or any other issues that might impact the child's performance in class. Please bring any event that could be of a concern to the child which might take place during the academic year to the attention of the teacher and the DRE so we are better able to partner with you in monitoring your child through a difficult period.

### **PROCEDURES FOR ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL**

It is with the supreme interest of the safety of all the children in the program that they NEVER be dropped or collected directly from the family car on any of the streets in front of the door to the Parish Center or church. This not only holds up traffic on the street but it endangers the children as they scatter around moving vehicles. Please escort all children to their respective classrooms to assure their safe arrival and confirm that a teacher is present to properly supervise.

Please do not leave children unattended in the building. Our teachers are volunteers who often need to collect their own children from school before arriving here to work with their class. (Without their efforts we could not have such an outstanding program. Please introduce yourself to them and offer to support them in any way you can.) If your child is assigned to a classroom in the church, you can use the side entrance of the church proper to drop the child at class. All other students should be escorted through the door to the Kavin Center.

With September of 2016, the parish staff will be located across the street in the Pastoral Life Center and all doors into the building will be locked at 3:45pm. The parents of students who arrive late to the program will need to text 201-294-2875 to gain access to the building. You will need to sign the child in as attendance would have already been taken. This If an early dismissal is requested, the child must also be signed out.

Students are not to "slip out" of the building and either walk home or wait somewhere on the church grounds until their parents or designated ride has arrived. The building will remain open until every child has been picked up. Please call the Religious Education office at 201-825-0275 if you have run into difficulty and will not arrive on time.

At dismissal time, all students are to be picked up from their respective classrooms. Unless otherwise instructed by the DRE, all teachers will hold the children in the classroom until an adult arrives to collect them. Please do not send another family member who is also a student in the program as a proxy for an adult. Keep in mind that observing the requirements of safe arrival and dismissal sends the message to the children that the rules apply to everyone whether they are being observed or not. A Christian conscience is caught not taught. Please be aware that the staff or teachers do not have the authority to drive your child (ren) home.

## **ATTENDANCE**

Classes for Grades 1-5 are held in the Parish Center on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 3:30 pm to 4:45 pm. Classes for Grades 6 - 8 are held on Tuesday evenings in the Parish Center from either 5:45 to 7:15 or 7:30 to 9:00pm. The availability of any particular class on any of the days will vary according to the number of students enrolled for the different grades as well as a qualified volunteer teacher.

A student cannot switch days of attendance in order to avoid an absence or to accommodate a sports schedule. If the child is absent for what constitutes 25% of the particular program hours, the student may be asked to repeat the grade the following year. Opportunities to offset absences are available throughout the course of the year. Special arrangements will be made for children with prolonged illnesses or other family situations that require pastoral consideration.

## **SCHOOL CLOSINGS**

At the beginning of the year, the office provides each family with a calendar of important dates and the vacation closings for the program. **This calendar is posted on the parish website at [www.stgabrielsr.org](http://www.stgabrielsr.org).** As we have families in the program from a number of school districts, the best attempt is made to have our schedules coincide. In the case of cancellation due to emergency closings, please consult this webpage. The staff will make every effort to get this information out in a timely manner barring any problems with the power or cable service.

## **DISCIPLINE**

In order to grow in Christian maturity, children must learn to respect the dignity of all persons. The teachers are instructed that any student who is continually disruptive is to be sent to the Director's office and the teacher will notify the parents as to the nature of the problem. If the occasion arises that a student is sent out of class a second time, the DRE will call the parents for a telephone consultation. If there is an occasion to send the student to the office for a third time, the student and parents will be asked to meet with the pastor and DRE to discuss the matter. After this meeting, any student who cannot conduct himself or herself in a cooperative manner will be asked to continue the program

as a home schooled student for the balance of the year or if necessary, return the following year and repeat the grade.

## **BULLYING**

As Christians, every student in the program is expected to treat each other with civility and respect. Any act of harassment or bullying, which has the effect of insulting or demeaning a student or a group of students will not be tolerated and will be handled as seen fit by the DRE in consultation with the Pastor.

## **DRESS CODE AND GENERAL RULES**

All students are to attend class respectfully dressed as the Religious Education classes are an extension of the church and classes may be relocated to the church for special programs at any time. Clothing or accessories such as those depicting violence, profanity and/or are, suggestive, offensive or too revealing, advocate illegal or unhealthy behavior are not permitted. Hats of any kind should not be worn inside the building. The ultimate decision as to appropriateness of dress rests with the DRE.

**If you child has a cellphone, it is not to be turned on during class. Any child who receives or sends a telephone call or text message will be asked to surrender the telephone to the teacher until the end of class.**

**All sporting goods such as but not limited to basketballs, lacrosse sticks, footballs and the like shall be given to a staff member during the time the students are in the building.**

In consideration of the well-being of all students, snacks and drinks should be consumed before the students enter the building or placed in the kitchen until time of dismissal. Students are not permitted to chew gum at any time.

## **THE SACRAMENTAL PROGRAMS**

“The sacraments...celebrate the coming of the Spirit at special moments in the life of the community of faith and its members and express the Church’s faith and interaction with Christ. The Church celebrates the mysteries of God’s presence through word, bread, wine, water, oil and the actions of the ordained ministers and the people.”  
*(National Catechetical Directory #114)*

The sacraments are celebrations of the parish faith community and involve both Catholic school and public school students in a coordinated and unified fashion. In recognition of the blessing of parents as the primary catechists of their children, it is

mandated that the preparation for First Reconciliation, First Eucharist, and Confirmation and actively involve parents in the process. Parent meetings are mandatory and at least one parent or guardian must be present at the required meetings although all adults significant to the child's faith formation are welcome. Regular Sunday Mass attendance is a requirement for sacramental preparation throughout the entire period of preparation.

The Archdiocesan policy remains in effect regarding eligibility of reception of the sacraments. Only children of registered St. Gabriel's families will be enrolled in our sacramental preparation programs. The Archdiocese prohibits transferring between local parishes for the reception of the sacraments.

### **FIRST PENANCE**

The celebration of First Penance takes place prior to the reception of First Eucharist. Generally, this preparation takes place during the child's second year of religious education. There is an introductory meeting for both parent and child early in the fall at which time they are given a preparation program. The parents then work with the child on a regular basis in the weeks prior to the sacrament. If the child has not completed the preparatory kit in time for the assigned day of First Reconciliation, reception of the sacrament for the child will be postponed until the child has been properly prepared.

### **FIRST EUCHARIST**

During this year of preparation, we remind the parents that it is of utmost importance that the children attend weekly Sunday Mass. Children receive First Eucharist with the instruction, encouragement, and support of their parents, teachers, and the entire parish community. The children must have completed the First Penance program satisfactorily in order to make their First Communion. The preparation includes a mandatory mini-retreat for the children. As with reconciliation, the parents are given the appropriate materials to work with the child in the weeks prior to the sacrament. If the parents, DRE or Pastor should decide that the child is not ready for reception of the sacrament, it may be postponed until a later date.

### **CONFIRMATION**

The catechetical program includes experiences of Christian communal life through regular Sunday worship, class attendance, service projects, a retreat day, and parish liturgies. The purpose of the program is to help the young person to understand in a personal way one's spiritual relationship with self, others, and God. Confirmation is a sacrament of personal choice and the candidate must be able to express a willingness to be involved in the communal aspects of the program and have the personal desire to freely request the Sacrament of Confirmation and give his/her reasons for doing so. All students who register for the sacrament must have been enrolled in the parish for sixth grade unless they are new to the area. During the two-years of preparation the students

are required to complete five phases of the program satisfactorily to be recommended to the bishop for reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation:

First, the student is to attend weekly Sunday Mass. The discussion of the gospel and homily are an integral part of the program. When a family does not participate on a regular basis in the liturgy, the message received by the teen in that Confirmation is a cultural event much like graduation rather than a personal commitment to faith, belief in Jesus Christ and the influence of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Second, regular class attendance is mandatory. When a candidate arrives a half hour late or leaves a half hour early, the attendance record will indicate partial attendance. Let us be brave and reach an understanding with all of our coaches, directors, dance teachers and tutors that faith formation is integral to the development of our children. Body and soul need to be present. Class attendance also requires active participation and cooperative classroom behavior.

Third, over the course of these two years, it is required that the students complete 20 hours of service that is to be of a Christian outreach nature. The project should have the candidate use personal time to touch the lives of others who are less fortunate than they are. The candidates may work in groups. If a candidate chooses to work directly with their sponsor, ten hours of service is considered as satisfying this obligation.

Fourth, retreat days are a part of the program, during which the candidates have an opportunity to reflect on the step that they are preparing to take. *Any student who cannot make a retreat must report the need for non-attendance to the DRE in advance and will have to complete an approved retreat program. There are **no** early dismissals.*

Fifth, at some point during the preparation year each student meets with the Pastor or Parochial Vicar to discuss his/her understanding of the responsibilities of an individual who is fully initiated into the Catholic faith. Class attendance, knowledge of the Catholic Faith and completion of a service project are all taken into consideration. A decision whether or not to recommend the candidate to the Bishop for Confirmation rests with the Pastor.

## CONCLUSION

These are precious and quickly passing years of formation for our children. We are enveloped in a culture that does little to promote development of character and morals but rather one of excess and experiences far beyond their years. When we work together to remind them that God cares about them and all creation, we open them to belief that they matter – they matter very much.

I close with the Confirmation prayer:

My Lord, you have committed some work to me  
That you have not committed to another.  
I am a link in a chain  
A bond of connection between people.  
I will trust you wherever I am.  
I believe You know all things and do nothing in vain.  
Though friends may be taken away,  
Though I feel lost and alone,  
Though my spirits sink and my future is hidden from me  
Still I will trust You.  
I ask not so much that I see your plan for me  
But that I serve You as You choose.  
I have a mission.

Amen

Adapted from John Henry Cardinal Newman