



**PARISH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM  
PARENT HANDBOOK  
Revised May 2018**



May 2018

Dear Parents,

Welcome (back) to PREP! Whether this is your first year of religious education or your eighth, we hope this *Parent Handbook* will facilitate communication of the policies and practices of the St. Mary of the Lakes Catholic Church Parish Religious Education Program (PREP) and answer any questions you may have. PREP recognizes that you, the **parents**, are the first and foremost educators of your child(ren). The following quotation, taken from the *General Directory of Catechesis*, defines your role in your child's faith development, as well as the partnership that is the foundation of our program:

*The witness of Christian life given by parents in the family comes to children with tenderness and respect. Thus, children...live in the closeness of God and Jesus made manifest by the parents in such a way that this first Christian experience...lasts throughout life. This childhood religious awakening which takes place in the family is irreplaceable.... And this is made even more powerful when parents connect it to the methodical catechesis their children receive in the parish program. (226)*

At St. Mary of the Lakes, we strive to create a positive atmosphere that allows for the ongoing faith formation of all students. Sharing our faith is a privilege and a joy for us. Our curriculum uses the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as its foundation, source, and inspiration. Liturgy, scripture, and lived experiences are the three sources through which our children are invited to encounter God with a deeper awareness of the meaning of God's unique love for each child. Hopefully, your child will come to know and love God and then grow in the knowledge of how he/she can serve God by serving others.

Catholic morality and values are essential components of our program. Students are taught that they are images of God and that the qualities of truth, love, respect, peace, and justice should be our standards. **We also stress that attendance at the weekly Sunday Liturgy is by far the most important way that you as parents can form your child in the Catholic faith.** Weekly attendance at PREP classes and weekly participation in the Liturgy are both necessary to enable them to flourish in their faith.

May this year be one in which we work together to lead the children of our Parish to a greater knowledge and love of God!

Sincerely in Christ,  
MaryPat Scordato  
Director of Religious Education



## PARISH and PROGRAM OVERVIEW

**St. Mary of the Lakes Parish**

40 Jackson Road, Medford, NJ 08055  
(609) 654-8208

**Pastor**

Fr. Daniel Swift

**Associate Pastor**

Fr. Roy Ballacillo

**Parish Religious Education Program**

196 Route 70, Medford, NJ 08055  
609-654-2546 x 310  
smlprep@smlparish.org

**Director of Religious Education**

Mrs. MaryPat Scordato

**PREP Staff**

Mrs. Gerrie Buzash  
Mrs. Olivia Wheaton

**Office Hours**

Monday: 9:30 AM - 4:00 PM  
Tuesday: 9:30AM – 8:30 PM  
Wednesday - Thursday: 9:30 AM - 6:00 PM  
Friday: Closed

### PREP Schedule

Grades 1 through 6

Tuesday and Wednesday  
4:15 PM - 5:30 PM

Grades 7 and 8

Tuesday  
7:00 PM - 8:30 PM



## GENERAL POLICIES

### A. Registration and Re-registration

Registration for September classes begins in June; early registration is recommended if a special day of the week is required. Registrations are taken over the summer months; however, special needs, carpool considerations, and class requests can be more easily handled with early registration.

All information must be updated when re-registrations are completed. The registration fees and sacramental expenditures (for First Eucharist and Confirmation) are due at the time of registration. At this time, payment must be by check or cash; we are not set up for credit card payment.

Baptismal certificates are required for all new registrants. Any student who is transferring from another Religious Education Program must present a letter of transfer showing attendance and the dates of sacraments received.

Children are expected to attend religious education classes for eight years. Home schooling is permitted for two years in Grades 3, 4, 5, or 6 (Grades 1 and 2 and 7 and 8 are Sacramental preparation years; therefore, home schooling is not permissible).

### B. Attendance and Preparedness

Regular attendance at PREP classes is an important factor in deepening a child's understanding of faith through the study of Scripture, Church teaching, prayer experiences, and community. A calendar for the year is found on the Parish Website ([smlparish.org](http://smlparish.org)) under the Faith Formation, PREP tab. We also ask that you check your email frequently for any changes to this calendar that may arise.

When a child is going to be absent, the PREP Office must be contacted at least one hour before class. Parents should email the Catechist to inquire about missed work. If the child has a contagious illness, please advise the PREP office immediately! A child who has **three unexcused absences** may jeopardize the completion of the year's course of study. A parent conference will be requested to discuss appropriate solutions.

**Attendance at the weekly Sunday Liturgy is the most important way that you as parents can form your child in the Catholic faith. Weekly attendance at PREP classes and weekly participation in the Liturgy are both necessary to enable children to flourish in their faith. As a reminder, all families registered in PREP should be registered in SML Parish. Envelopes must be used as proof of attendance at weekly Mass.**

### C. Arrival and Dismissal

Students are not permitted to enter a classroom before the Catechist is present. No student may leave the premises during PREP classes without proper authorization. If it is necessary for parents or guardians to pick up early, the parent/guardian must sign out the child at the PREP Office; the parent will receive a dismissal slip from the Office to present to the Catechist. The Medford Police Department requires that we know who is in the building at all times!



**ALL** students are required to be picked up at the classroom by an authorized adult. If someone else has your approval to take your child home, written permission must be given to the Catechist. This includes carpools, grandparents, and older siblings. If the parent is late, the student will be waiting safely in the PREP Office. Staff is not allowed to drive children home.

Students are not to open outside doors for anyone. Doors are locked 10 minutes after classes begin and are unlocked 10 minutes before the end of class. In the interest of safety, only doors that are manned by a volunteer will be open for parents and students to enter the building. If we do not have volunteers to serve as monitors, only the PREP entrance (on the Route 70 side) will be used.

Parking is not permitted in the Fire Lane along the curb, by order of the Medford Township Police Department.

#### **D. Weather Emergency**

If local schools are closed due to an emergency weather situation, PREP classes will be cancelled. If you have any questions about cancellations, please check the Parish Website ([smlparish.org](http://smlparish.org)). Also, if the decision to cancel is made during the day, local schools will be asked to announce PREP cancellation.

#### **E. Field Trips and Playground Use**

A Permission Slip approved by the DRE and signed by the parent/guardian must be returned before any student is permitted to attend any activity that takes place off the premises.

PREP students may not use the playground equipment at any time.

#### **F. NO Food in the Classrooms**

Food is never allowed to be consumed during PREP. Many of our students have allergies and keep EPI pens in the PREP Office. Also, several children who attend school here during the day have severe allergies, so certain rooms have been declared as "clean rooms." Consequently, food is never to be brought to or eaten during PREP classes. Gum is not allowed in the school.

#### **G. Appearance**

Students are expected to dress appropriately; specifically:

Clothing should be mid-thigh or longer in length.

Clothing that is revealing is not permitted.

Clothing imprinted with questionable vocabulary, inappropriate images, or double-meaning slogans will not be allowed. The DRE will decide what is appropriate.

Cleats, belly shirts, tank tops, and muscle shirts may not be worn to class.

Hats and sunglasses may not be worn in the building.

#### **H. Behavioral Expectations**

Students are to behave in a manner that fosters Christian values at all times, demonstrating respect for and working cooperatively with adults and other students. Furthermore, students should actively participate in



classroom activities and discussions. They are to attend class regularly; complete any assignments or homework; bring textbooks to class; and treat those textbooks respectfully and not deface them in any way. (A fee of \$25 will be charged for a replacement book.)

**POSSESSION OF TOBACCO, ALCOHOL, OR DRUGS IS PROHIBITED.  
WEAPONS (REAL OR PRETEND) ARE FORBIDDEN ON THE SCHOOL PREMISES.  
BULLYING IN ANY FORM WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.**

Our primary purpose is to serve the religious education needs of our children. Consequently, all students are expected to participate respectfully and actively in the faith learning experiences of PREP. If a child's behavior disrupts the learning process, the following steps will be taken:

- At the first incident, the child will be reminded of expected behavior and the consequences of misbehavior.
- After the second incident the child will be sent to the Office.
- If this inappropriate behavior continues, the student will be sent to the DRE and a parent will be contacted for a conference.
- If the disruptive behavior continues, it may be necessary to discuss alternate solutions with the Pastor.

In addition to protecting the feelings and rights of others, we must also respect school property. While the school does belong to the Parish, the contents of each classroom desk belong to a child enrolled in SML School. If a PREP student takes or vandalizes someone's belongings, he or she must take responsibility for the damage done. If the damage is significant, parents will be asked to replace what has been taken or vandalized.

At no time should anyone sit at or remove anything from a teacher's desk. The white boards mounted in each classroom may only be used under the guidance of a Catechist and only for classwork.

#### **I. Cell Phones**

Cell phones are to remain out of sight. If a student is texting or using his/her personal phone for any reason, the phone will be confiscated, and a parent will have to retrieve it from the DRE. This is nonnegotiable.

#### **J. Noise in the Halls**

Always knock before entering a classroom. Students of any age are **easily distracted**, so we ask all parents and siblings to wait outside the classroom quietly until the Catechist releases the children. You are encouraged to wait quietly in the Chapel until dismissal or help out in the PREP Office. ***We have so little time with the children, and we take advantage of every minute!***

#### **K. Accountability**

In Grades 6, 7, and 8, students will receive "Truths of the Faith," a series of questions (with answers) that they are to study and master as proof of readiness for Confirmation.



#### **L. Communication**

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, please share them with your child's Catechist or call the PREP office. We welcome and encourage communication between the Catechist, parents, Pastor, and DRE.

#### **M. Safety Procedures**

The safety and well-being of the children you have entrusted to us is of primary importance. We follow the same guidelines mandated for public and private schools in New Jersey. We will practice procedures throughout the year for fire, bomb scare, lock down, and shelter in place. Students are instructed not to use their cell phones during drills or actual incidents. We need to control the situation and the response as much as we can. We also ask parents not to call their children directly or the PREP Office during a drill or actual event. Information will be conveyed via the website or email when we are able.

We are also responsible for the physical and emotional well-being of each individual child, as outlined by the Trenton Diocese Department of Child and Youth Protection. To provide a safe environment for the children and youth in religious education programs, we are mandated to implement the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. This involves criminal background screenings (fingerprinting) and training certification programs that advance the safety of our children (VIRTUS and RCL Family Life).

Refer to Arrival and Dismissal section of this handbook for the proper procedures.



## **SACRAMENT PREPARATION**

### **FIRST RECONCILIATION and FIRST EUCHARIST**

The program of preparation for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist begins in first grade and culminates with the reception of the Sacraments in second grade. Children are required to attend first-grade Religious Education classes before enrolling in second grade.

The First Reconciliation program requires parent participation, including a parent meeting in second grade. At this meeting, parents will be given a book on the Sacrament of Reconciliation to assist them in preparing the child for the Sacrament. First Reconciliation is celebrated in winter.

The First Eucharist program requires parent participation, including a parent meeting in second grade. At this meeting, parents will be given a book on the Sacrament of Eucharist to assist them in preparing the child for the Sacrament. A retreat day will be offered to the second graders one weekend in the spring. First Eucharist is celebrated after Easter. PREP parents will be offered a choice of two Masses. Sign-ups are held generally in early December.

Older children who have been baptized, but who have not received First Reconciliation and First Eucharist, will work with the DRE to prepare them for the Sacraments.

### **CONFIRMATION**

The Confirmation Preparation Program is a three-year program that begins in sixth grade. The sixth graders attend a Mass of Initiation early in the school year during which time they pledge to take their sacramental preparation seriously. Their service commitment begins this year.

During seventh grade, students continue the formal Religious Education program, but they are also introduced to a more in-depth study of the Sacrament. Additionally, each student is obligated to perform service, select a Confirmation name, and choose a sponsor.

The regular eighth-grade curriculum is supplemented with additional lessons on Confirmation. The students must complete a Confirmation Project and a service project and, participate in a retreat. The Celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation takes place in the spring of eighth grade before Holy Week.



## CURRICULUM

We use the *We Believe* series, published by Sadlier. This series embraces the four pillars of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: CREED, LITURGY and SACRAMENTS, MORAL LIFE, and PRAYER. The series uses a three-step catechetical process: *We Gather - We Believe - We Respond*. This echoes Jesus' pedagogy of faith: gathering his disciples into community, teaching them, and inviting them to respond. Additionally, each grade level has seven seasonal chapters that help children understand and live the liturgical year. In seventh grade and eighth grade, we introduce the text *Confirmed in the Spirit*.

GRADE 1	<b>GOD:</b> Introduces the children to our relationship with God, and invites them to know God through the Holy Trinity.
GRADE 2	<b>JESUS:</b> Presents the life of Jesus and celebrates the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist.
GRADE 3	<b>CHURCH:</b> Conveys the good news of Jesus proclaimed in the life of the Church and the Body of Christ, while examining their faith as members of a community.
GRADE 4	<b>MORALITY:</b> Encourages the living of a Christian life in harmony with the Commandments, the Beatitudes, and the Works of Mercy. Provides models of living in stories of Jesus, the saints, and other members of the Christian community.
GRADE 5	<b>SACRAMENTS:</b> Focuses on the sacramental experiences of ritual and symbol and the centrality of the Paschal mystery.
GRADE 6	<b>SALVATION HISTORY:</b> Presents the Scriptures as the story of God and humans, from creation to the coming of the kingdom in fullness..
GRADE 7	<b>WE LIVE OUR FAITH (UNITS 3 and 4)</b> <b>CONFIRMED IN THE SPIRIT (Chapters 1 to 4)</b>
GRADE 8	<b>WE LIVE OUR FAITH (UNITS 1 and 2)</b> <b>CONFIRMED IN THE SPIRIT (Chapters 5 to 8)</b>

Furthermore, Father Dan teaches in all eight grades as his schedule allows.

### FAMILY LIFE SUPPLEMENTAL SERIES

RCL Benziger Family Life integrates child safety education into a holistic approach to family life education. In every lesson of every grade level, children are provided with opportunities to develop the knowledge, self-confidence, and assertiveness skills that they will need to recognize dangerous situations, avoid them if possible, and respond appropriately in time of need. Also, the program is designed to help reduce guilt feelings among children, encourage them to speak frequently and freely with their parents and other trusted adults, express their feelings appropriately, and to practice forgiving themselves and others through the following concept repetition and reinforcement:

- Basic safety rules in an age-appropriate manner.
- The difference between appropriate and inappropriate touching.
- To say “no” to any touch or action that causes them to feel uncomfortable.
- How to respond to situations that cause them fear or discomfort.
- The importance of honest communication with parents or guardians and of identifying people they can trust in times when they need to talk to someone besides their parents.



## PREP VOLUNTEERS

All St. Mary of the Lakes Catechists, aides, monitors, and substitutes are volunteers. Each year approximately 130 faith-filled individuals of all ages and professions offer their time and talent so that our children learn what it means to be Catholic.

In order to be a volunteer in PREP, an individual must complete an Application and Code of Conduct, which is kept on file in the PREP Office.

For every volunteer over the age of 18, the Diocese of Trenton requires a criminal background check. Even if the candidate has been fingerprinted previously for a job or other volunteer activity, he/she must be (re)fingerprinted with the correct documentation from the Diocese. If the candidate passes the background check, he/she will be issued a badge from the Diocese; this badge is to be worn at all times when in the building.

Furthermore, every volunteer over the age of 18 must also attend a VIRTUS training session, which addresses appropriate and inappropriate behavior toward children. The Diocese also recommends that every Catechist be “certified.” This process comprises two components: Methodology (live classes) and Theology (on-line sessions).

**The strength of our program is dependent upon dedicated volunteers. We invite all parents to give serious consideration to participating in this important ministry. Tuition is waived for all Catechists.**