



St. Joseph Parish
Office of Religious Education
CATECHIST & AIDE HANDBOOK
2015-2016 School Year

PARISH MISSION STATEMENT

We, the Catholic Community of St. Joseph, are committed to follow Jesus Christ. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we strive to be good stewards in our lives. We pray for peace, forgiveness and for one another as Christ loves us!

Staff and Contact Information

Father Ken Kolibas, Pastor: cell: 1-732-744-4447 (private)

Office: 1-908-725-0163 x 11

Rectory 2nd line: 1-908-725-0282 (private)

Email: frken@sjraritan.org

Jim Piccolo, Office Manager: cell: 1-908-432-2831

Office: 1-908-725-0163 x 10 or 908-725-0282

Home: 1-908-707-9637

Email: parishoffice@sjraritan.org

Parish Website for Forms, etc.: www.stjosephraritan.weconnect.com

CATECHISTS FOR THE 2015/16 SCHOOL YEAR

Grade 1 – Mrs. Agnes Nemergut

Grade 2 – Mrs. Karen Golski

Grade 4 – Brittany Kroeckel and Luanne Kroeckel (Classroom Aid)

Grade 5 – Miss Suzanna Montano

Grade 6 – Mrs. Jane Magliulo (May-u-low)

Grade 8 – Mr. Robert Golski

Special Projects – Mrs. Karen Natale

Nurses on call from our Parish

All our faculty has been approved through Diocesan Guidelines, including background checks and fingerprinting from the State of NJ.

Catechist & Catechist Aide Requirements

Unless approved by Father Ken, all Catechists and Aides must be registered Parishioners in good standing with the Church. All Volunteers eighteen years of age and older working with children in the Parish will be interviewed by Father Ken and must adhere to all requirements of the Diocese of Metuchen, Office of Child and Youth Protection. These requirements include:

Completion of a Diocese Volunteer Application Form
Fingerprinting by MorphoTrust USA
A Criminal Background Check
Attendance at a VIRTUS Training Session

Fingerprinting and background checks conducted by other organizations even if processed by Morpho Trust do not fulfill the Diocesan requirements as information cannot be shared among organizations. Therefore, the Diocesan requirements including re-fingerprinting must be met. Volunteers are reimbursed for the fingerprinting fee by the Parish.

Mr. Jim Piccolo, Office Manager in the Parish Office is the designated Background Coordinator for the Parish and will provide all Volunteers with forms and procedures for initial fingerprinting and background checks and notifications for the three-year follow-ups.

Catechist Responsibilities

The call to the Catechist Ministry comes directly from the Holy Spirit. Catechists must teach what the Catholic Church professes. It is our responsibility to teach the children we come in contact with in our program the principles of the Catholic faith as contained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Faith, Second Edition*. As we all know, children learn as much by what they see as what they hear. Therefore, we are expected to live our faith, not just talk about it. Participation in Church life through regular attendance at Mass and other liturgies, reception of the sacraments, and prayer show that we truly believe what we are teaching.

In the classroom, there will be times when we don't know the answer to a question from a child. Please remember, "I don't know" is an acceptable and better answer than guessing as long as there is follow-up to get the answer. Father Ken is available to help research and provide you the answers.

Catechist Agreement to Teach What the Catholic Church Professes

Catechists are required to present the teachings of the Catholic Church both in faith and morals. As such, Catechists are required to sign and return the Catechist Agreement to the Director.

Regular Curriculum

For Grades 1 through 8 we use the Loyola Press Series which provides the children with a catechesis based on Sacred Scripture, tradition, the Liturgy, the teaching authority, and the life of the Church.

Family Life Curriculum

In 2003 Bishop Bootkoski reinforced the mandate of 1988 that all schools and Parish Religious Education programs in the Diocese of Metuchen must have in place a program of Catholic Family Life Education. The *RCL-Benziger Family Life Program* will continue to be used in the Diocese of Metuchen as the required text.

The *RCL-Benziger Family Life Program*, 2011 Edition, fulfills article 12 of the USCCB “*Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.*” Consequently, Parishes must use the RCL-Benziger, 2011 series. Other texts/publishers for Family Life education are not an option.

To keep book and tuition costs to a minimum, the *Family Life* texts are loaned out to each class as needed. Student texts are not to be written in or taken home. Students are encouraged to do the exercises in class on regular paper.

Family Life is not sex education. However, some language in some lessons may infer knowledge of human reproduction (e.g. pregnancy.) For that reason, parents are encouraged to come in and look at the text for their child’s grade. Should a child ask about specific details regarding human reproduction or any other question the Catechist is uncomfortable answering, the Catechist is to advise the student to discuss the question/issue with a parent.

Parents have the right to have their children opt-out of the *Family Life* lessons. A letter explaining this will be sent home by the Director to all parent/guardians before the start of classes. It is also noted in the Parent/Guardian Handbook. An Opt-Out Form supplied by the Diocese is available for this purpose.

Forms are in the Director's Office and on the Parish Website. If a student returns a signed Opt-Out Form, please make note of it and return the Form to the Director as these Forms must be sent to the Diocese Office of Youth and Child Protection. Children who are opted out must be afforded an opportunity to complete alternate material so the Director must know when you plan on teaching lessons from the *Family Life* Curriculum. If you have suggestions for age-appropriate alternative material, please speak with Father Ken. **Catechists are to follow the unit lesson plan order of Loyola Press and Benziger Family Life texts unless substitutions or changes are pre-approved by the Director.** The only exception is text out of synch with the liturgical calendar (e.g. the next lesson is on Lent and we are in Advent or Ordinary time.) Not following the order of the text lesson plans is confusing to the students and to substitutes should a Catechist be absent unexpectedly.

Supervision

Catechists and Aides must supervise young people at all times. **Aides under the age of 18 may not supervise or conduct a class without an adult present.** Unless there is an emergency situation, children cannot be left unattended. This includes the time before and after class as well as during class. We ask that Catechists and Aides be in the building at least 10 minutes prior to class. Children should be directed not to go into a classroom without adult supervision. If a child is not picked up and you must leave, bring the child to the Director's Office where they will remain until pick-up.

Catechist Absence Procedure

If you have a Co-Catechist or Aide 18 or older, contact them first to see if they can cover the class. Contact Father Ken and advise of the situation (sub needed or not.) **Email or fax a brief lesson plan to Father Ken for the session you will miss.** At a minimum, we need to know what chapter(s) you intended to cover.

Arrival and Dismissal Procedure

All students are to be escorted into the building by an adult. Pick-up should be by an adult. *NO CHILD SHOULD BE DISMISSED TO AN ADULT NOT KNOWN TO THE CHILD.* If you have a concern that a person picking up a child might be impaired or is not known by the child, attempt to delay the person and child from leaving by engaging them in conversation and ask another Teacher or Aide to get hold of Father Ken immediately.

Classroom Procedures

Attendance is always to be the first order of business. Please complete the Attendance Form within the first five minutes of class. The Attendance Form is considered a legal document and must be kept on file by the Director for 10 years. With the exception of parents, there should be no "guests or walk-ins" at any time without prior notification and permission from the Director. Any children present who are not on the Attendance Sheet should be escorted to the Father Ken's Office by an Aide.

Chronic absence or tardiness should be reported to the Director. After 3 absences for any reason, notify the Director so he can contact the family. Under most circumstances, late arrival or early dismissal to accommodate extracurricular activities is not permitted. Refer any requests to the Director. Late arrival/early dismissal to accommodate doctor's appointments and family emergencies is permitted. Parents should contact the Catechist or Director in advance wherever possible. If a student is released early to a parent, please make a notation of who picked the child up and the time of pick-up on the Attendance Form.

Prayer

Post attendance, classes are always to begin with a prayer and time permitting, end with a prayer. Each classroom should have at a minimum a crucifix; notify the Director if it is missing or broken. Prayer stations are optional, but if used, are never to contain lit candles. Written or typed prayer aids are permitted but, at the end of the year, students are expected to know and be able to recite the following from memory:

1st Grade: Sign of the Cross, Hail Mary, Our Father, and Glory Be to the Father
2nd Grade: Act of Contrition
3rd Grade: Apostles Creed
4th–8th Grades: All the above

Discipline

Every class should develop rules for their classroom. This should be done at the first class. All of the rules should focus on **respect**: treating all people the way we want to be treated – the way Jesus taught us. Mutual respect between students, between students and Catechists, and respect for themselves is a goal of our program. Keep the rules simple and attainable and appropriate for the grade level.

At most times, our children are anxious and interested to learn about their faith. However, there are occasions when a child is unable to control their behavior and, therefore, disrupts the class. Due to the size of our classes and because we do not want you to be treated with disrespect, we will use the following procedure:

The child will be warned that his/her behavior is not in keeping with the rules created in that class. If a second infraction occurs, the child will be sent to the Office to discuss the situation with Father Ken. For the next infraction, the student will be sent to the Office; the parents will be called and asked to pick up the child.

For any disciplinary problem beyond the above, the student, the parents, the Director, or Father Ken will meet in an effort to affect a change in behavior.

Corporal punishment is **never** permitted under any circumstances. The law defines corporal punishment as any punitive touching (i.e. pushing, shoving, slapping, etc.)

Progress Reports

Report Cards are prepared once for distribution mid-January. Extra Forms are available in the Office. The purpose of the report is to keep the families informed of their children's progress and participation in class. Keep comments simple.

The Director is to review, sign-off, and, where appropriate, add comments to the Progress Report **before** it is sent home. Parents are **not** required to sign and return the Progress Reports.

If you have a child who is exhibiting less than satisfactory behavior, please bring this to the child's parents and the Director's attention. Parents should be notified as soon as a problem starts – don't wait for Report Cards.

Confidentiality

Catechists and Aides must maintain confidentiality regarding children's special needs and learning challenges, medical information/allergies, family status, etc.

Photos of children may not be reproduced or published without the written consent of the parent/guardian and completion of the Photo Release Form, available in the Director's Office.

Social Networking, Email, and Cellphone Guidelines

If a Catechist has a need to communicate with a parent/guardian other than in face-to-face or telephone conversation, the nature of the situation and draft of any written material must first be given to the Director for review. The final version of the material may only be sent to the parent/guardian and the Director must be copied on the email.

Please see Diocesan Policy 7.2, *Communication with Students Outside of Religious Education and Policy on the Use of Social Media for Parish Catechetical Leaders, Catechists and Volunteers*. Compliance is mandatory.

The *Student Cell Phone Policy* is covered in Diocesan Policy 4.2 (see appendix B.) The Student Cell Phone Policy Agreement Form is Appendix A in the Parent/Guardian Handbook and is to be collected from all students in Grades 4 through 8. The Office will supply extra forms if needed. Signed forms should be returned to the Director's Office for our files.

Food, Health, and Safety

I cannot emphasize this enough: We have numerous children in our program who have life-threatening allergies to certain food products; most have been identified to us based on prior years' experience, and some have not. Consequently, we do not know every child at risk.

The Diocese of Metuchen 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) FOR ANY REASON IS PERMITTED DURING PARISH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SESSIONS.**

I know this is difficult, especially during certain holidays when Catechists would like to reward the students with a party or treat. It simply **is not permitted**. We discourage food as gifts, but if you chose to do so for Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day, etc., the food products must be in a wrapped and sealed bag and not distributed to the children until the parent/guardian picks them up *and* with their permission. These gift bags may not be opened until the child is out of the building and with a parent/guardian. *Any Catechist or Aide who violates the no - food - or - drink mandate will be asked to leave the Program.*

Classes are assumed to be **IN THEIR ASSIGNED CLASSROOMS** unless prior scheduling or an emergency dictates they are elsewhere in the Parish Complex. The Director must always know the location of each and every student and volunteer.

In the event of an on-site accident or illness involving a child or volunteer, the Catechist or nearest adult Volunteers should 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 and arrange for completion of appropriate insurance forms. Catechists should inform the Director of any unsafe conditions in the classrooms, hallways, etc. as soon as conveniently possible.

Classroom doors are always locked. Classroom doorframes are equipped with lock-down magnets that permit students to leave and re-enter the classroom even with locked doors. The magnets are only to be removed in the event of a crisis-management situation.

If a student is found to be in possession of a controlled substance, the Director should be notified. 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. Please bring the situation to the Director's attention.

Fire Drill and Lock-Down Procedures should be in each classroom.
Advise the Director if they are missing.

End of Year Procedures

All Attendance Records must be turned in so that they can be put on file. They are legal documents. Teacher's manuals and activity books should be turned in as well.

Web site resources: Other resources:

<http://diometuchen.org/Offices-and-ministries/Formation-and-leadership/catechesis/links/>

(Diocese Office of Catechesis Links; New Advent for Catholic Encyclopedia, US Conference of Catholic Bishops for Bible and Liturgy, Vatican for Papal Documents)

Literature, Music Videos, DVDs: Bibles, books on prayer, saints, and liturgy are in the Religious Education Work Room and Office. We also have VCR tapes and DVDs which you can borrow (please leave them in the Office to be shared by others after class), resources including Catechisms and other religious education series which may be helpful to you and which you are welcome to use at any time. We have a varied and quite good selection of videos available to be used in conjunction with your lessons. *These resources should be used to supplement, not replace, textbook lessons.*

Policy 7.2 POLICY ON COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS OUTSIDE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND POLICY ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR PARISH CATECHETICAL LEADERS, CATECHISTS, AND VOLUNTEERS

It is strongly recommended that the policy stated below be inserted into the Catechist Handbook, and that other Catechetical Volunteers receive a copy of this policy annually.

COMMUNICATING WITH STUDENTS: OUTSIDE THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SETTING

Parish Staff, Catechists and other volunteers engaged in Religious Education play an integral role in the faith formation of students. As representatives of the Parish and the Catholic Church, they are expected to convey and maintain a professional image, particularly with respect to communication outside the classroom. As reported by the media, there have been instances of educators demonstrating professional misconduct while engaging in inappropriate dialogue with students. With this in mind, please be advised that the following policies are in effect.

All communication regarding students, or related to the classroom, should be directed to the parents/guardians of the students, and not to the respective student themselves. As such, Parish, Staff, Catechists and other volunteers are prohibited from phoning, text messaging, emailing or corresponding via social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Myspace, etc.) directly with current students or former students under the age of 18. Likewise, Parish Staff, Catechists and other volunteers may not provide their personal email address (Yahoo, Hotmail, AOL, etc.) or telephone/cell number to current students or former students under the age of 18. Catechists may however, provide their personal contact information to parents/guardians. Whenever possible, communication with parents/guardians should be made through the Parish Email or Telephone System.

POLICY ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media are defined as "any web-based application that allows people to broadcast information to an entire network." The network can be "user-defined," like Facebook, or open, like YouTube. Social media differ from email and websites, and include LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, YouTube, and various web logs or blogs. In general, the Parish respects the rights of its Staff, Catechists and other volunteers to use social media during non-working hours as a medium of self-expression.

However, Parish Staff, Catechists and other volunteers should be aware that although these are generally viewed as mediums of personal expression, the posting of certain comments and information may have a harmful effect or negative impact, including adverse legal consequences, on the Parish, its reputation and its Staff, Catechists, and other volunteers. In light of this, the Diocese/Parish has instituted the following policy designed to protect the Parish and its Staff, Catechists, and other volunteers, rather than restrict the flow of useful and

appropriate information. Parish Staff, Catechists, and other volunteers shall conform to the moral and ethical principles of the Catholic Church during the public discharge of his or her ministry. As such, Parish Staff, Catechists, and other volunteers should not take any action against the Church, its teachings, or its leaders on social media, nor affiliate with any organization or movement which is directed, or has as its prime principles the criticism, rejection, or disrespect of the Church.

Parish employees, Catechists, and other volunteers are expressly prohibited from accepting and extending invitations to "friend" current students, or former students under the age of 18, on social networking sites. In the event you receive a student-initiated friend request, you should decline it and report the matter to the Parish Catechetical Leader.

Parish Staff, Catechists, and other volunteers who elect to publicly identify their employment/affiliation with the Parish on social media should not take any action against the Church, its teachings, or its leaders on social media, nor affiliate with any organization or movement which is directed at or has as its prime principles the criticism, rejection, or disrespect of the Church. Likewise, Parish Staff, Catechists, and other volunteers are prohibited from disclosing any information that is confidential or proprietary to the Parish on his or her personal websites, weblogs, or social networks.

In the event you identify yourself as an employee, Catechist, or other volunteer of the Parish on a personal website, weblog, or social network, we require that you prominently display the following notice to help reduce the potential for confusion: **"The views expressed on this site do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer/the Parish."**

Parish Staff, Catechists, and other volunteers may not use Parish trademarks, materials, or logos on personal websites, weblogs, or social networks without receiving prior authorization from the Pastor. Parish Staff, Catechists, and other volunteers are similarly prohibited from providing a link or otherwise referring to the Parish Website on their personal website, social networks, or weblogs without receiving prior authorization from the Pastor. In all circumstances, the Parish will comply with applicable laws and this policy will be applied consistent with those laws. Any prohibition on conduct stated in this policy is not intended to interfere with employee/volunteer rights under applicable law. To the extent any provision of this policy conflicts with any applicable current or future law, the Parish will follow and comply with the law and not this policy. If you have questions about this policy, or any matter related to your site that this policy does not address, please consult with the Office for Catechesis.

Catechist Mission Statement and Agreement

As a Volunteer Catechist in the Parish of St. Joseph, I agree to carry out the mission and philosophy of the Office for Catechesis as stated in the Diocesan Policy Handbook.

I understand that my responsibilities include:

To present the teachings of the Catholic Church both in faith and morals

To offer those I catechize warmth and acceptance that they may grow in their faith and learn to follow Jesus Christ

To establish and maintain a safe environment for our young people

To prepare, develop, and implement systematic lesson plans incorporating prayer, scripture, tenets of the faith, faith sharing, and a variety of activities and media, according to the Curriculum and Calendar

To discipline the students with loving concern for their needs, but expecting respect and attention to the Catechists and fellow students at all times. Serious discipline problems will be made known to the Parish Catechetical Leader and parents immediately

To maintain appropriate records, e.g. Attendance Roster, children's progress, etc.

To maintain the confidentiality of children, families, and other volunteers

To share appropriate information with parents

To continue to update my personal spiritual growth through participation in Catechist Formation and other programs offered through the Parish and the Diocese of Metuchen

To be a witness of my faith by how I live, personally and in the community

Volunteer's Signature Date

Pastor's Signature Date