MISSION STATEMENT

The Parish Religious Education Program of Our Lady of Fatima Church is committed to fulfilling our Lord's command to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." (Mt. 28:19)

This goal is realized through the faithful instruction of Catholic doctrine, the passing on of Christ's message to his people, and the realization that catechesis is a ministry of God's Word, "which is intended to make men's faith living, conscious, and active, through the light of instruction." (Gen. Catechetical Dir. 17: 1971)

Recognizing that "parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children" as stated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church ((2223), we strive to support the work of parents and guardians who seek to bring their families to the fullness of the Faith.

INTRODUCTION

We extend a warm welcome to your family as you begin the religious education school year.

As members of the universal Church, it is the duty, first and foremost, of parents and guardians to ensure weekly family Mass attendance on Sunday (or Saturday Vigil) and Holy Days of Obligation and the regular reception of the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist. In addition, it is the responsibility of parents/guardians to assure their children's regular and uninterrupted attendance of religious education classes for Grades 1-8.

This handbook will provide an overview of the Parish Religious Education Program and furnish answers to many commonly asked questions. ***We ask that you read the handbook and acknowledge its receipt and your acceptance of same by signing, detaching, and returning the agreement which can be found on the last page of this document. This information will be kept on file in the Office of Religious Education.***

PARISH SCHEDULE FOR HOLY MASS

Weekend:	Saturday:	5:00 pm Vigil Mass
	Sunday:	7:00 am; 9:00 am; 11:00 am; 1:00 pm; & 5:00 pm
Weekdays:	Monday:	7:00 am & 9:00 am
	Tuesday:	7:00 am & 7:00 pm
	Wednesday:	7:00 am & 9:00 am
	Thursday:	7:00 am & 7:00 pm
	Friday:	7:00 am & 9:00 am
	Saturday:	8:00 am

Holy Days of Obligation:	7:00 pm Vigil Mass 7:00 am; 9:00 am; 12:00 pm; & 7:00 pm

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

Sacrament of Reconciliation: Saturday: 4:00 pm – 4:50 pm
Tuesday: 6:00 pm – 6:50 pm
Thursday: 6:00 pm – 6:50 pm

OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

50 Van Winkle Place
Piscataway, NJ 08854
Telephone: 914-330-7652
Email: sr.alina@olfparish.org

Religious Education Staff

The Office of Religious Education is staffed by the Director of Religious Education.

Catechists and Volunteers

Approximately 40 catechists, classroom aides, catechetical assistants, and volunteer give their time to share the Faith with the children of the parish.

All employees and volunteers, 18 years of age or older, undergo a criminal history background check and are fingerprinted in accordance with the policy as set forth by the Diocese of Metuchen.

Hours of Operation

The Office of Religious Education is in the ***Parish Center*** (address listed above) and is staffed by the Director of Religious Education. Hours are flexible; however, during the school year, the hours of operation most commonly are ***Monday: 1:00 pm - 5:30 pm; Wednesday: 10:30 am – 2:30 pm.*** Whenever classes are in session (including evening sessions) someone is available in either the parish center or the education center (a volunteer at the auditorium entrance will assist you) to accept paperwork and/or help with questions and concerns.

During June and July, the hours of operation are amended. To reach the Director, it is best to contact her via email at sr.alina@olfparish.org.

Schedule of Classes

Classes begin in early October and yearly calendars are mailed along with room assignments in September. These calendars contain the schedule of classes, special events, and lessons covered during the religious education school year and should be kept for reference.

Students are expected to attend religious education classes beginning in the first grade and continue in each consecutive grade through eighth grade. Classes are held in the Our Lady of Fatima Education Center (school building.)

Classes are held as follows:

Sunday (Grades K-6)	10:15 am - 11:30 am
Monday (Grades 1-6)	4:00 pm - 5:15 pm
Monday evening (Grades 7-8)	6:00 pm - 7:15 pm

Registration for Classes

Re-registration for returning students and **new registration** (registration for families new to the program) take place in the spring/early summer. Families must be registered members of Our Lady of Fatima parish. Registration forms are distributed to a parent/guardian and/or designated adult whose signature is required for release of same.

Registered families of the parish whose children attend parochial schools must contact the Office of Religious Education to arrange sacramental preparation for their children. Children in parochial schools receive their religious instruction at those schools but the sacraments are conferred at the parish in which the students are registered; thus, these students must complete the sacramental requirements (retreats, meetings, etc.) at Our Lady of Fatima.

Under extraordinary circumstances, the religious education program is open to persons outside of the parish with the written permission of their pastor.

Tuition, Fees, and Fundraising

Registration fees (tuition) are payable on a yearly basis. The schedule of fees for the 2021/2022 year are:

- Prior to September 6th: 1 child - $150.00; 2 or more children - $100.00 per child;
- After September 6th: 1 child - $200.00; 2 or more children - $150.00 per child;

Miscellaneous fees associated with sacramental preparation i.e. 8th Grade Teen Outreach, Confirmation Robe, etc. are minimal and parents/guardians are advised of any additional fees at parent sacramental meetings or as the need arises.

The Office of Religious Education sponsors one major fundraiser (Easter candy sale) in the spring. The entire parish is invited to support this endeavor.

No child shall be refused religious education due to finances; therefore, circumstances of financial difficulty should be brought to the attention of the Director of Religious Education.

Inclement Weather/Emergency Closings

The decision for cancellation of classes due to weather conditions and/or other emergency situations is made by the Director of Religious Education in consultation with the Pastor. Catechists are notified individually and are responsible for contacting parents/guardians. An email is sent to all Religious Education parents with children in classes affected by the weather notifying them of the cancellation.

Emergency Parent/Guardian Phone Numbers

It is ***imperative*** that the Office of Religious Education have current telephone numbers on file for each registered family. Contact information (home phone, cell phone, and email address) are requested at the time of registration along with an alternative emergency contact. ***It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to update contact information especially in regard home and cell telephone numbers due to change and/or disconnection.***

Arrival/Dismissal Procedure

Arrival and dismissal of students will be from the auditorium of the Our Lady of Fatima Recreation and Education Center. Parents/guardians of students in grades 1-3 are required to come in with their children at drop off and parents/guardians of students in all grades are expected to sign out their child from the auditorium (gymnasium) for arrival/dismissal to ensure the safety of the children. Only those authorized to pick up the children will be allowed to do so. Each catechist will have your child's sign out sheet for you to sign. Catechists (teachers) will meet their students in the auditorium prior to class and accompany them to their classrooms. Students and their teachers will return to the auditorium for dismissal. Parents will not have access to the classrooms/hallways for arrival/dismissal.

Students will not be released to a driver who is visibly impaired and reserves the right to call the emergency contact number listed on the registration form.

Absentee/Tardiness Policy

Religious education classes, in addition to regular Mass attendance, must be given the highest priority. ***Athletic and social activities are not an excuse for absence from class or early dismissal.***

It is the policy of the Diocese of Metuchen that more than three unexcused absences will be cause for repetition of the current level of education. Excused absences include illness, death in the family, family emergency, etc. It is our policy that an absence is considered unexcused whenever a phone call is not received by the Office of Religious Education advising reason for absence. Parents/guardians will be contacted by the Director of Religious Education in the case of excessive absences and extraordinary circumstances should be brought to the attention of the Director of Religious Education.

Students are expected to be in the auditorium and ready to begin religious instruction according to the times set forth under **Schedule of Classes**.

TEXTBOOKS AND CURRICULUM

All students enrolled in the Parish Religious Education Program receive textbooks and activity books. It is the responsibility of the students/parents to make sure that these instructional materials are brought to class each week. Students who neglect this responsibility will be considered unprepared for class. Loss of textbooks/activity books should be reported to the Office of Religious Education at which time replacement copies should be purchased.

Textbook Series:

- Grade K: Who Am I?
  Image of God Series (Ignatius Press)
- Grade 1: Our Heavenly Father
  Faith and Life Series (Ignatius Press)
- Grade 2: Jesus Our Life
  Faith and Life Series (Ignatius Press)
- Grade 3: Our Life with Jesus
  Faith and Life Series (Ignatius Press)
- Grade 4: Jesus Our Guide
  Faith and Life Series (Ignatius Press)
- Grade 5: Credo: I Believe
  Faith and Life Series (Ignatius Press)
- Grade 6: Following Christ
  Faith and Life Series (Ignatius Press)
- Grade 7: Life of Grace
  Faith and Life Series (Ignatius Press)
- Grade 8: Our Life in the Church
  Faith and Life Series (Ignatius Press)

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

Preparation for the sacraments of First Penance and First Holy Communion requires two years of instruction and preparation for Confirmation requires two years of preparation beginning in Grade 7.

However, religious instruction begins in Grade 1 and continues, without interruption, through Grade 8. **(Refer to Schedule of Classes)** Just as children need education after the 2nd grade in regular school to develop properly for high school and college, so much more do they need to continue their deepening knowledge of God and the Church through Religious Education to be able to mature in their understanding of the Faith without falling behind due to preventable missed years of classes.

First Penance

Required Preparation: 2 years; Grades 1 and 2 (or equivalent)

First Penance is administered on the first Saturday of March. In anticipation of this day, the parents of the children receiving First Penance are expected to attend a parents' meeting. A Preparatory Workshop and Practice for First Penance may also be scheduled. On the day of First Penance, parents/adults in attendance are invited to receive the sacrament.

First Holy Communion

Required Preparation: 2 years; Grades 1 and 2 (or equivalent)

In addition to classroom instruction, the preparation for First Holy Communion contains an element of family catechesis. In the final week of preparation prior to the reception of the Eucharist, students are expected to attend the ***First Holy Communion Retreat*** which takes place the week prior to the reception of First Holy Communion. Occurring simultaneously, the parents of the First Holy Communicants come together for a ***Night of Reflection for First Holy Communion Parents***. A Preparatory Workshop and Practice for First Holy Communion may also be scheduled.

Confirmation

Required Preparation: 2 years; Grades 7, and 8

The sacrament of Confirmation is administered in the fall of the students' freshman year in high school. Preparation for this sacrament is quite involved for the students, their parents, and their sponsors under the direction of the Pastor and the staff of the Office of Religious Education. It is expected that in addition to the catechetical instruction the children receive in their religious education classes, they will be supported and encouraged in the practice of the Faith by their parents and sponsors (regular Mass attendance) who play an integral part in their formation. Each year opens with a meeting for parents and candidates during which an overview of the year is presented.

Excessive absences and/or failure to complete the instructional requirements are valid reasons to delay the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation.

Grade 7:

In Grade 7, the Confirmation candidate will attend the parent/student meeting and the Confirmation candidates (with parental guidance) choose the saint whose name they will be given at Confirmation. The candidates then compose a report **(*Saint Report*)** which is biographical in regard to their chosen saint and also a personal reflection on this sacrament which "*is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace*." (CCC 1285) .

Also in Grade 7, as a compliment to their saint report, the Confirmation candidate will complete a ***Holy Card***. The student, under the guidance of the parents and sponsor, should be performing ***Acts of Charity*** within the parish, school, and their local community. A prayer

service during which each student is presented with a Bible as a gift from the parish ***(Presentation of the Bibles)*** is held in the fall.

Students, having chosen their sponsor with the advice of their parents/guardians, will be required to have their sponsor submit a ***Certificate of Eligibility (Sponsor Certificate)*** from the parish in which they are registered. (Students whose sponsors are members of Our Lady of Fatima parish have only to submit the sponsor's name to the Director of Religious Education; a certificate is not required.)

Grade 8:

Once again, the parent/student meeting is an important requirement of the candidate's formation. It is during the eighth grade year that the candidate will submit a written review of his/her ***Acts of Charity***. A program sponsored by the Diocese of Metuchen, ***"Because…I'm Worth It!"*** (a teen outreach event on the subject of chastity) gives the students insight into the relationship between sexuality, spirituality, and self-respect. During this time, sponsors should be regularly guiding the Confirmation candidate into a fuller understanding of mature Catholic living through regular sponsor-candidate meetings (via phone or virtually for sponsors at a distance) whereby they go over assigned readings together to help the candidate understand more deeply the importance of the Sacrament of Confirmation and his own responsibility in the Church under the guidance of his sponsor.

Grade 9:

As previously stated, the sacrament of Confirmation is celebrated in the fall of the students' freshman year. Parents/guardians are not required to re-register the Confirmation candidates for religious instruction for this year. However, students and their sponsors are expected to attend an ***Afternoon of Reflection*** as scheduled by the Office of Religious Education prior to reception of Confirmation.

Role of a Sponsor:

The role of sponsor is an important one which requires that the sponsor be a confirmed Catholic living in full Communion with the Church. They must be a practicing Catholic who regularly attends Holy Mass and receives the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist frequently.

PROGRESS REPORTS AND PERMANENT RECORDS

Permanent records are maintained by the parish in regard to the reception of sacraments. These same records, as well as grade level attendance for religious instruction, are maintained by the Office of Religious Education.

Progress reports for students in Grades 1-8 are issued in January and at the end of the religious education school year. Report cards are kept on file as long as the student remains in the program.

Transfer of records is obtainable by calling the Director of Religious Education and should be requested when a family is moving from the area or to another parish or religious education program.

HOMEWORK AND EXAMS

Homework is part of the curriculum and is expected to be completed by all students. Failure to complete all assigned homework may jeopardize the student's ability to move on to the next grade. Parents and catechists are to work together to help the children understand the importance of knowing the Faith and making every effort to do their best for God.

At the catechist's discretion, quizes will be used periodically to help the students prepare for Exams, but they will not be included on the Fall and Spring Progress Reports.

Exams are a part of the curriculum and administered according to the lessons plans of the Faith and Life Series curriculum.

STUDENT CODE OF BEHAVIOR

- Students are expected to comply with standard classroom rules as set forth by the Director of Religious Education and the classroom catechist.
- **Cell phones** are to be turned off and placed on top of the desk while class is in session. All other electronic devices are strictly forbidden in the classroom.
- Students are expected to maintain self-control; to show respect for others in words and actions; and to be respectful of church property.
- **Chewing gum** is strictly forbidden.
- There is a zero tolerance policy for physical harm to one's self or others; for possession of drugs, alcohol, or weapons; and for any and all verbal or non-verbal threats.

CHILD ABUSE POLICY

If a catechist and/or director suspects that a child has been abused, New Jersey law requires that the State Division of Youth and Family Services be notified immediately and Diocesan policy requires that the Director of the Diocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection also be notified of suspected abuse.

PARTIES, SNACKS, AND FOOD ALLERGIES

Classroom parties are permitted at the discretion of the Director of Religious Education. Catechists must clear all celebrations with the director and are reminded that parties during the liturgical seasons of Advent and Lent are discouraged. These celebrations are more appropriately celebrated according to the liturgical calendar during the seasons of Christmas

and Easter. In addition, Religious education classrooms are **peanut/nut free** rooms so no exposure to peanuts is permitted

Snacks are not permitted in class and should be eaten before or after Religious Education sessions begin.

Food allergies should be recorded by parents at the time of registration (applicable section on the registration form). All allergies and serious health conditions are passed on to the individual catechists in writing.

AGREEMENT

I have read and I agree with the policies as stated and set forth in the *Religious Education Handbook* of Our Lady of Fatima Church.

_____

(Family Name)

_____

(Parent/Guardian – **PLEASE PRINT**)

_____

(Parent/Guardian **SIGNATURE**)

Child's/Children's Name & Grade

_____

_____

_____

_____

This agreement must be signed and returned to the Office of Religious Education. If the Religious Education Office does not receive the signed agreement page of this handbook and your child/children are enrolled in classes, the Office of Religious Education will accept your child's/children's enrollment in classes as your formal acceptance and agreement of this handbook and its policies.