

Saint Philip Neri



Parish Religious Education Program

Family Handbook 2026-2027

Dear Family:

Welcome! We, the people of Saint Philip Neri Parish, guided by the beliefs and teachings of the Catholic Church, and trusting in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, commit ourselves to the service of the Kingdom of God. Through Baptism we become children of God; in Confirmation we receive the Holy Spirit who continuously guides us; through the Sacrament of Reconciliation our sins are forgiven; and, in Holy Communion we receive Jesus, the Light of the World, who transforms each of us into a new and holier person. In union with our Holy Father, the Pope, we wish to build up the Kingdom of God.

TO TEACH AS JESUS DID, we wish to draw on a deeper knowledge of his presence in our lives by:

RENEWING OUR LIVES through prayer, retreat, reception of the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist. We commit ourselves to be continually educated; opening ourselves to the teachings of the Church, and to passing on what we have learned.

LIVING PRAYERFULLY. We can, through his presence in us, draw the children and the families entrusted to us to our God.

WE DESIRE TO CREATE AND NOURISH CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY by the compassion and respect with which we treat each other.

WE DESIRE TO PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS BY SHARING THE INFORMATION of who God is and how He works in our lives.

WE DESIRE TO PROMOTE A RELATIONSHIP between those who are in the PREP program and the larger parish community.

WE ENCOURAGE FAMILIES TO PARTICIPATE by becoming altar servers, lectors, and gift bearers during the Liturgy.

WE PRAY that our parish may become for all a center of spiritual development, a place of prayerful peace and meaningful community worship.

The purpose of the handbook is to set forth the guidelines for those that participate in the Saint Philip Neri Religious Education Program. **By enrolling your child(ren) in PREP, you acknowledge your acceptance and cooperation with the policies of the Handbook.** Parents are therefore encouraged to discuss these provisions with their children to ensure that all parties understand the requirements and obligations of their participation in the Parish Religious Education Program.

MISSION OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

“The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.” (St. John Paul II)

“Catechesis describes the essential ministry of the [Catholic] Church through which the teachings of Christ have been passed on to believers throughout the ages...Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people and adults which includes the teaching of Christian doctrine” of the Roman Catholic Church. (*National Directory for Catechesis*, no.1, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) Keeping in mind that all the baptized have a right to catechesis, every person, however limited, is capable of growth in holiness (*General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 189). Catechetical and sacramental programs are inclusive of parishioners with disabilities and may need to be adapted for some parishioners with disabilities.

St. Philip Neri Parish is committed to the religious education of its children as taught by Jesus Christ. Our goal is to assist you as your child’s first teacher, to nourish the faith which you instilled through instruction in Church doctrine, and to prepare children for the reception of the sacraments in accordance with our Church teachings:

- “Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children” (CCC #2223).
- “The catechesis given by parents with the family ‘precedes, accompanies, and enriches all other forms of catechesis’” (NDC p 234-5, CT #68).
- This “education of the faith” is brought about by catechesis which “includes the teaching of Christian doctrine in an ordered and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life” (CCC #5 and *Catechesi tradendae* #8).

Religious Education is a life-long journey. Since we catechists have only a brief period of time with your children, we will need your continued support and affirmation of this life-giving message. **As parents, your modeling of the faith and full participation at Mass is the best and most effective method to hand on the faith.** As a community of believers we look forward to assisting you and your children in this great act of salvation, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to know, love, and serve God.

May the Lord be with us and keep us and our families in His grace!

PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY CONCERNS

St. Philip Neri PREP remains committed to the health and safety of all of our children. Because we cannot predict the future, **necessary adaptations may need to be updated through the year.** We will follow the guidelines from the Pennsylvania Department of Health, Pennsylvania Department of Education, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, Colonial School District, and St. Philip Neri School. Updates will be shared via email, the PREP website, and the St. Philip Neri PREP Facebook page.

CLASS TIMES

Levels 1 to 6	Mondays	4:15-5:30 PM
Levels 1 to 6	Tuesdays	4:15-5:30 PM
Confirmation PREP	Sundays as scheduled	9:30-11:45 AM, beginning with Mass
K PREP	Sundays as scheduled	9:30 AM Mass– K PREP is optional!

Typical PREP Schedule for Monday/Tuesday Classes

Recess outside (weather permitting) for those arriving via bus or car before 4:00 PM

4:00 PM-- Snacks and bathroom break. Snacks may be home-packed or pre-purchased Philly Soft Pretzels

4:15 PM-- Class begins.

5:30 PM-- Dismissal from the School Gym

2026-2027 Dates

A full year PREP Calendar will be provided to registered families in August.

Orientation and Meet the Catechists

New Family PREP Orientation		September 13, 2026	10:30 AM	School Cafeteria
Meet and Greet	Monday Program	September 14, 2026	5:30 PM	School Cafeteria
	Tuesday Program	September 15, 2026	5:30 PM	School Cafeteria

We use these occasions to enrich your faith life and help you in your role as the first educator of your children. It is also an opportunity to get to know your child's catechist and ask questions about the program.

FIRST CLASS

Monday Program	September 14, 2026	4:15-5:30	School Cafeteria
Tuesday Program	September 15, 2026	4:15-5:30	School Cafeteria
Confirmation PREP	October 4, 2026	9:30-11:45 AM	Church and School Cafeteria
Kindergarten PREP	October 4, 2026	9:30 AM	Early Childhood Education Building

CLOSING LITURGY

Monday Program	May 3, 2027	4:30 PM in Church
Tuesday Program	May 4, 2027	4:30 PM in Church

MASS ATTENDANCE and PRAYERS

Liturgy is the "source and summit" of our faith life. Full and active participation is a "right and duty." To that end, we not only integrate Liturgical Catechesis into classroom prayer, but also offer direct teaching about the Mass to the children in Levels 3-6. Please be faithful in assisting at Mass every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation. Inspire in your family the importance of your role as the celebrating assembly.

"Know By Heart"

Families should pray together in a variety of ways. Traditional prayers and formulas are one way that we hand on the faith and pray together. Families should work together to help children memorize them.

Level 1: The Sign of the Cross, The Lord's Prayer (Our Father), the Hail Mary, and Glory Be

Level 2: An Act of Contrition as well as the prayers from Level 1

Level 3: The Apostles Creed or the Nicene Creed as well as prayers from previous levels

Level 4: The Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, as well as prayers from previous levels

Level 5: Seven Sacraments, the Parts of the Mass, The Angelus as well as prayers from previous levels

Level 6: The Mysteries of the Rosary as well as prayers from previous levels

Confirmation PREP: The Prayer to the Holy Spirit as well as prayers from previous levels

FAMILY MASSES

On certain Sundays, the 9:30 AM Mass is designated as a Family Mass. Students in SPN PREP and SPN School volunteer for the ministries of Lectors and Gift Bearers. Requests for volunteers are generally sent home via email about three weeks before the Mass. Dates will be announced on the Family Calendar available in August.

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

After a minimum of two years of catechetical formation and instruction, a child is presented for First Penance and Reconciliation and then First Holy Communion. Likewise, the Sacrament of Confirmation takes place in the Fall of 8th grade for students who have received the proper catechetical formation and instruction. All Sacramental Preparation is to be completed via in person classes.

CAMP CARITAS in lieu of SPN Confirmation PREP: To ensure all candidates receive the proper foundation for the Sacrament, please note the following established parish policies:

1. Eligibility and Timing Participation in Camp Caritas is an alternative to Sunday Confirmation PREP, but it is **only available to rising 8th graders**. Students do not begin Confirmation PREP at St. Philip Neri until the Fall of 7th Grade; therefore, any summer camp attended prior to the completion of the 7th-grade year will not be accepted as a substitute for our program.

2. Strict Attendance Requirements For those eligible to attend (rising 8th graders), please be aware that the host high schools enforce a zero-tolerance attendance policy. Any lateness, early dismissal, or absence nullifies the camp. If the camp is nullified, the candidate must enroll in Confirmation PREP the following year.

3. Choosing Your Track You may choose between Sunday PREP or Camp Caritas once the Confirmation PREP calendar is released.

- **If choosing Camp Caritas:** You must still notify me directly to ensure your child remains on the official SPN Confirmation Candidate list.

4. Universal Requirements Regardless of the instructional track (Sunday PREP, SPN school, academies, or Camp Caritas), **all candidates** are required to fulfill the following:

- Weekly attendance at Sunday Mass and regular Sacramental Confession.
- Attendance at the Fall Parent/Candidate Meeting (7th Grade).
- Attendance at the Spring Presentation of Candidates Mass.
- Participation in the Spring Retreat.
- Attendance at all practices and the Confirmation Mass in the Fall of 8th Grade.
- Completion of all assignments and documentation in the **Red Folder**.

FIRST HOLY COMMUNION AND PENANCE DATES

The Sacraments of First Reconciliation/First Penance and First Holy Communion are celebrated in the second year of formation, typically in Level 2. First Reconciliation/Penance is celebrated in December and First Holy Communion is celebrated on the first Saturday in May. A separate calendar with all of the dates appropriate to these sacraments will be shared in August.

CONFIRMATION DATES

Confirmation is celebrated in the Fall for candidates in 8th Grade or later.

A separate calendar with all of the dates appropriate for both Confirmation PREP and the celebration of the Sacrament will be shared in August.

KidTalk: A Child Abuse Prevention Program for Children in our Parish Religious Education Program

St. Philip Neri PREP complies with all Archdiocesan Policies and Procedures to ensure a Safe Environment for our children. All catechists must comply with appropriate clearances and training. In addition to these precautions. The Archdiocese is required to teach one personal safety lesson per year, entitled "KidTalk."

KidTalk has been designed for use in the PREP through a collaborative effort of Religious Education professionals and professionals in the field of child protection to help keep kids safe in their personal lives and online. Lessons are available for review at PhillyOCF.org under the PREP Resources tab. Parents are strongly encouraged to review these lessons with their children at home.

Lessons will be presented **on Monday/Tuesday February 8 and 9, 2027 for students in Levels 1-6. K PREP and Confirmation PREP will be presented the KidTalk Lessons on February 7, 2027** If class must be canceled because of inclement weather, the lessons will be taught on the next available class date. Parents/guardians may opt out their children from the lesson by signing an Opt Out form available in the Religious Education Office. An alternate lesson will be provided for children who “opt out.”

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

ATTENDANCE

The faith formation received in PREP is a spiral curriculum: each session builds upon the previous session, each year upon the previous year. Therefore, it is imperative that children attend their program sessions regularly.

If your child is unable to attend a session for any reason, a parent ***MUST*** complete the following procedures:

1. Call or text 484-804-1875 or email spnprep@spnschool.org before 3:30 PM. **Do not leave a message on the school's attendance line** to report the absence on the day of the Program. Please be sure to leave your child's name and level and reason for absence.
2. After the third absence– or 2nd absence for Confirmation PREP– the program director will contact the parents by phone or email to notify parents that the child may be required to repeat the grade level and that dismissal from the program could result should absences continue. Frequent absences which are not remedied may result in the student not being permitted to continue in classroom catechesis or having to repeat the year. An assessment may be required for promotion.
3. Parents should be in regular contact with their child's catechist in an effort to obtain assignments and keep their child's formation up-to-date.
4. Children who are routinely late or dismissed early miss important class time. Accumulated minutes may be added up and treated as an absence. Absences and early dismissal for sports are considered unexcused.
5. Please note: If your child is absent from their day school due to illness, they should not attend PREP that same afternoon. Absences due to illness are not counted toward the three absences. Missed work will still need to be completed.

CUSTODY AGREEMENTS

It is the responsibility of both parents to provide the Parish with the latest, most up to date Custodial Order or Custody Agreement. Saint Philip Neri will request these documents in the beginning of the year. If either the Custody Order or Custody Agreement changes during the course of the year, it remains the responsibility of both parents to provide that document to the Parish immediately.

Our program abides by the provisions of the Buckley Amendment with respect to the rights of non-custodial parents. In the absence of a court order to the contrary, our program will provide the non-custodial parent with access to the records and other program related information regarding the child. If there is a court order specifying that there is to be no information given, it is the responsibility of the custodial parent to provide the program director with an official and latest copy of the court order.

If a court order prohibits releasing a child into the custody of a non-custodial parent, it is the responsibility of

the custodial parent to provide the program director with an official copy of the court order or custody section of the divorce decree. It is also imperative that you notify the DRE if there is anyone not included in the Custody Agreement who should NOT pick up your child. We cannot be in compliance if we are not informed.

CYO

Students enrolled in the PREP program for one full year or more and up to date on their sacraments may participate in CYO sports. CYO enables the partnership of parents, coaches, priests, religious, teachers and catechists, and adult leaders to manage and support a sports program that allows youth to grow in their relationship with God and come to better understand themselves and their Catholic faith. All decisions regarding team placement are at the discretion of the SPN CYO Board. Enrollment in PREP does not guarantee a certain position.

DISCIPLINE

- Children must respect the property of others, and follow the instruction of the Catechists and Yard Monitors, and bus drivers. Vandalism will not be tolerated and restitution must be made in order to re-register in PREP the following year.
- The parish grounds and building are the property of everyone and must be used with respect.
- Supervised play will be provided before class; children are to be inside the area blocked off by the orange cones.
- When the bell rings, the children are to stand in line and wait for the Catechist or aide to bring them to the cafeteria
- WALKING QUIETLY is required in the hallways.
- Lavatories may be used properly.
- Children who violate the discipline policy on the bus may be removed without refund.

The Parish Religious Education Program offered is designed to assist parents with the faith formation of their children, as well as foster values and behavior that are in accord with Catholic Church teaching. The program has **NO TOLERANCE** for behaviors that are contrary to Catholic faith and morals, including but not limited to ongoing disrespect of the catechists and aides, acts of obstinacy, improper language, fighting, or physical, emotional or psychological intimidation, vandalism, demeaning behavior such as name-calling, obscene language or gestures. Such behaviors violate the central teaching of our faith and will not be tolerated in any form, including social media. Conduct by children or parents/guardians, or anyone acting on their behalf, incompatible with the educational and religious mission of the Parish is grounds for disciplinary action.

In the event a participant engages in any of the above listed behaviors or any other inappropriate conduct, and has failed to respond to a catechist's attempt to stop or correct the behavior, the following action may be taken and at the discretion of the Pastor or Director of Religious Education (DRE):

1. **First Incident:** The student will be removed from the session and the parent or guardian will be immediately notified by phone by the program director. The program director will schedule a conference with the parents/guardians, student, and catechist to discuss the matter. Any work missed must be made up.
2. **Second Incident:** The student will be removed from the session and be suspended from the program for a period of one session. The parents/guardians will be immediately notified by the program director and required to pick up their child. Prior to returning to the program the program director will schedule a conference with the parents, student, and catechist to further discuss the matter. Any work missed must be made up.
3. **Third Incident:** The student will be removed from the session and dismissed from the program. The parents or guardians will be immediately notified by the program director and required to pick up their child. Following a conference with the program director, parents, student, and catechist, the parents will be

provided with the option of having their child repeat his or her current grade level the following school year or opting to complete the current year's material by homeschooling their child. In either case, no refund of tuition or material fees will be made.

Saint Philip Neri reserves the right to supersede the foregoing course of action depending on the particular circumstances of any given situation.

In addition, in the case of threats of violence or harassment in any form, including but not limited to oral, written, or electronic, by a child against any member of the PREP community, the child, if suspended but not dismissed, may be required to have psychological or psychiatric clearance before returning to the program.

- **Contraband**

Bringing contraband to PREP is strictly prohibited and will be confiscated and returned to parents only. Additionally, it is unlawful for minors to be in possession of weapons, drugs, alcohol, or tobacco. Depending on the contraband confiscated, the proper legal authorities could be notified. Items considered contraband include, but are not limited to: weapons, drugs, alcohol, tobacco, toys, electronic entertainment, etc.

We realize that devices such as cell phones have become a necessary tool in keeping communications open with children, especially for working parents. However, it is the policy of this program that such devices may not be used during catechetical sessions. If a student uses a cell phone during the program, the device will be sent to the school office and must be picked up by a parent/guardian.

- **Search and Seizure**

It is the policy of SPN PREP to respect the privacy of participants. Unnecessary intrusions into persons and possessions are to be avoided. However, in the event that a student is suspected of having weapons or drugs in his/her possession, the administrator will be notified immediately. The administrator will conduct a search with an adult staff member as witness. Refusal on the part of the participant to cooperate will result in the parents/guardians being contacted and asked to assist in the search. Parental refusal will result in the participant's immediate dismissal from the program.

EMERGENCY CLOSING and AT-HOME LESSONS

We follow the decision of the Colonial School District and St. Philip Neri School with regards to the decision to cancel PREP due to inclement weather. When either school has early dismissal for inclement weather, or afternoon and evening activities are canceled, we are also canceled and will post an assignment on Google Classroom. A message will be placed on the PREP phone and parents will be notified via email. Announcements will also be placed on the KYW NewsRadio School Closings broadcasts.

Please Note: The decision to cancel in the event of an evening snowstorm, even if CSD does not cancel, may be necessary if our lot and sidewalks cannot be cleared.

As soon as a decision is made, you will be notified via email. These procedures would also apply to unplanned possibilities like no heat or electricity. In any event, your child should always know what to do in case of an emergency closing should it happen on a Monday or Tuesday **during school**.

At-Home Lessons

If PREP is not able to meet in person, At-Home Lessons will be assigned and communicated either through email or via Google Sites. Missed lessons will be counted as an unexcused absence.

FIRE DRILLS AND SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

We will conduct a fire drill to ensure the safety of all students, teachers and staff. Students are asked to follow the directions given to them by their catechist. They should leave the building in a quiet and orderly manner.

The state of Pennsylvania and the Federal Government have mandated that every effort be made to protect children, teachers and staff from the possibility of transmitting an infectious disease. We will comply with these regulations. Disposable gloves are available in case of an emergency.

- **Allergies and Medical Emergency Plans**

If your child has a severe allergy, please notify the administrator. If you have a Medical Plan from your doctor, please provide a copy to the administrator. Please be aware that we do not have a nurse on staff. In the event of an allergic reaction, parents will be notified and we will call 911. Parents are welcome to remain on site to administer medication if necessary. Please speak to the administrator if you have any concerns.

- **Shelter in Place and Evacuations**

We follow the Shelter In Place protocol established by SPN School. Parents will be notified as soon as possible in an emergency situation. Should our program be instructed to *shelter in place*, we would notify each classroom via the PA system. Children will be escorted to the Cafeteria/Social Hall. Roll will be taken. Staff will be instructed to secure doors and windows if possible. Once the “All Clear” sign is given, we will dismiss children only to their parents.

Should we need to evacuate the building, staff will direct children to use the nearest exit. We will all meet in the Church. Parents who are already present may elect to wait with their children, but no one will be permitted to re-enter the building or be dismissed until emergency personnel give the direction. Please be prepared to show identification when picking up your child after an evacuation.

Please obey all law enforcement and emergency personnel if there is an emergency. Do not block driveways and be mindful of emergency vehicles in the parking lot. Please be aware that this plan does not cover all situations. The administrator or her designee may need to make decisions. We will make a reasonable effort to keep parents informed should the plan need to change.

- **Accident or Mishap**

Sometimes accidents happen when children are playing. If an accident happens, a child should notify the yard monitor or catechist immediately. General first aid (bandaids, ice, antiseptic creams) may be administered as needed. If anything serious occurs, you will be notified and an Incident Report will be placed on file.

HOME SCHOOLING POLICY

Requests to homeschool will be considered on a case-by-case basis and must be approved by the Pastor or his delegate, the DRE. St. Philip Neri follows the Guidelines for Home Based Catechesis of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. **Weekly Mass attendance on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligations is a requirement for approval.** A signed contract listing all requirements for the current school year will be placed on file in the PREP office. Home Schooling is not permitted for sacrament preparation.

HOME WORK AND MISSED ASSIGNMENTS

Each Catechist will communicate his or her own homework and missed assignment make up policy. If homework is assigned, it is expected to be completed on time. If a child regularly misses homework or fails to complete missed assignments, parents will be notified by the catechist. If that fails to resolve the problem, the DRE may be called upon to intervene. Refusal to complete missed assignments or homework may result in a failing grade, repeating the level, testing, or dismissal from the program.

Every participant is assigned a workbook at the beginning of the year and is required to bring the workbook to **EVERY** program session. Please be aware that some catechists may keep the workbook in their classrooms. Lost

books may be replaced for a fee to cover the cost of the workbook.

REGISTRATION FOR PARISH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM

- Families must be registered members of St. Philip Neri Parish in order for children to participate in the religious education program. Exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis with the approval of the pastors from both parishes.
- All forms must be filled out completely and a copy of the Baptismal Record must be provided before enrollment is processed. No child will be admitted to the Sacraments without a valid Baptismal Record on file.
- If a child is transferring from another program, a copy of the permanent record must be provided.
- Because Religious Education builds upon the previous year, it is essential that participants remain enrolled in the program consistently. Children who miss a year or more of religious education will be required to complete the missed year. The DRE will work with parents/guardians to assist them in meeting the requirements.

Payment/ Fees

- \$250 for one child, or \$325 for two or more children.
- **Busing** is available for children who attend Whitemarsh Elementary, Ridge Park, or Colonial Elementary Schools at \$75/family. Unfortunately, we are not able to bus from other locations.. Parents whose children are taking the bus must write letters of permission to their child's school before the start of PREP.
- Please note that refunds will not be issued once classes have begun.

No child will be refused religious education due to the inability of the family to pay. Please discuss this with the Pastor or DRE.

Children with Disabilities

St. Philip Neri PREP accepts children of all abilities. We will work closely with parents to build inclusive classroom experiences for all children, to the extent that each individual child can participate. If your child has any exceptionalities, requires modification of materials, or other needs, please speak with the DRE. Please provide a copy of your child's IEP.

Re-Registration

Renewal takes place in the spring for the following academic year. Parents are asked to provide updated information with regards to any special educational, custody agreements and medical/allergy information when enrolling.

Evaluation

Although faith development cannot be measured numerically, effort must be made to note intellectual progress, participation, cooperation and conduct that we experience with each child. Each Catechist will communicate to you his or her method of evaluation.

Progress Reports

You will also receive a progress report as to how your child is doing during the year. Please call us if you have any concerns or questions. We appreciate your keeping in touch with us.

Dates to be issued: January 2027 and May 2027

CATECHISTS and Aides

We are always in need of catechists and classroom aides! Please speak with the DRE if you think you're being called to the catechetical ministry in some way. We offer initiation training, professional development and continuous support.

PARISH STAFF

Rev. George J. Szparagowski, MDiv.

Pastor

Mrs. Donna Ryan

Administrative Assistant

Mrs. Sharon Otto

Director of Religious Education (DRE)

484-804-1875 e-mail – SharonOtto@spnprep.org

Website: spnprep.org

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