



The Parish of Saint Catherine of Siena Children's Religious Education Handbook

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Mission Statement for Children's Religious Education:

To faithfully hand down the Deposit of Faith to younger parishioners of Saint Catherine of Siena Parish in order to foster growth in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and in life-long discipleship rooted in reception of the Sacraments, fidelity to the Catholic Church, and active participation in the Christian community.

Preamble and Purpose of Catechesis

(Taken from the Catechetical Handbook of the Diocese of Bridgeport)

"Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity for it is in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the transformation of human beings." (CT, 23)

This transformation primarily takes place within the family because the Christian family is often the first experience of Christian community. Parents are the most influential first educators who catechize primarily by their witness and participation in prayer and the Eucharist.

It is the responsibility of the parish to strengthen the faith of parents or guardians and to assist them in their roles as the primary educators of their children. "...there exists an intermediate situation where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even consider themselves members of the Church and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel." (GDC, 58c) Sacramental preparation of the children is a window of opportunity to catechize the parents or guardians, drawing them into ongoing conversion of mind and heart to Jesus Christ.

Conversion, which is a life-long school of faith, following the major stages of life from childhood, young adulthood and parenthood leads to a maturity of mind and heart. This internal growth inspires discipleship, which expresses this love of God and community. The goal of sacramental preparation, therefore, is to draw members into active participation in the life of the church community and clarify the roles and ministries within the sacred action so that all may experience full, active, and conscious participation in the celebration of the Mass. (NDC, Eucharist, #3, pg 126)

"The Christian community is the origin, locus and goal of catechesis. Proclamation of the Gospel always begins with the Christian community and invites man to conversion and the following of Christ." (GDC, 254)

"If catechesis is done well, Christians will be eager to bear witness to their faith, to hand it on to their children, to make it known to others, and to serve the human community in every way." (CT, 24)

Eligibility to Participate

Families, or the grandparents of children, must be registered and active parishioners of St. Catherine of Siena Parish to enroll children in the St. Catherine of Siena Religious Education Program.

Process of Enrollment

- **Existing Parishioners**

Registration for the upcoming year of Religious Education classes occurs every late spring/summer, with forms due no later than August 15, 2024. This deadline helps assure that we have available class space, proper number of volunteers and books for each child. Families registering by August 15th can take advantage of the Early Bird tuition rates. If you register after August 15th, families will not be eligible for the Early Bird rates unless you are a family registering for the first time.

Registration forms are online and can be found on our Parish website www.stcathtrumbull.com.

Parents may indicate their first and second choice of sessions. The first choice is honored whenever possible. We take requests for specific sessions on a “first come–first served” basis. Some class sessions do fill quickly.

- **Transfer students**

Transfer students whose families are recently registered as members of St. Catherine of Siena Parish are welcome into our program, whether the students transferred from neighboring parishes or recently moved (with a change of address). Families are responsible for all assessed tuition and fees.

Transfer students should submit the online registration form as soon as possible during the registration process. Additionally, transfer students as part of their registration, should include proof of their previous participation in Religious Education Program(s) and a copy of their sacramental records.

At the discretion of the Director of Religious Education, transfer students will be placed into the appropriate grade level based upon their prior participation in Religious Education Programs from their previous parish.

- **Children with Special Needs**

Parents who have a child with special needs are asked to speak with the Director of Religious Education to set an appropriate, agreed plan for catechetical instruction of their child.

- **Classroom Changes**

Due to the large number of children in our program and our desire to accommodate as many family preferences as possible, the process for assigning sessions and classrooms is intricate and lengthy, taking into account many requests and special circumstances. We will honor session changes as class availability permits. For those who carpool, we will try to accommodate requests for the same session; however, children are not guaranteed to be placed in the same class.

- **Tuition and Fees**

Tuition and fees for Religious Education are set by the parish and posted when registration opens. Parents are assessed a fee for each child at the time of registration to cover tuition, sacramental preparation, books and materials. Full payment of the fee online is preferred at registration time. If full payment can't be paid at registration, a written plan for full payment of tuition and fees must be put in place prior to the start of classes. Payment plans must be completed and paid in full no later than 12/31/2024.

Through the generous donations of our parishioners, Hardship Assistance is available for families in need. To apply for assistance, families must have timely registered their children and must have completed a Financial Assistance application by August 15th. A new application is required each year the family requires assistance. The application is available by contacting the Director of Religious Education.

Class Location, Schedules, Class and Mass Attendance

- **Location:** All classes are taught on the St. Catherine of Siena Parish campus. Classes 1st – 6th and Confirmation Prep (2 years) generally meet in St. Catherine of Siena School.
- **Class Sessions**

	1 st – 6 th Grade	Confirmation Prep (2 years)
Sunday	10:15 – 11:15 a.m.	NA (possible Year 1 Prep 10:15 – 11:15 am)
Tuesday	4:30 – 5:30 p.m.	6:00 p.m. – 7:15 p.m.
Wednesday	4:30 – 5:30 p.m.	6:00 p.m. – 7:15 p.m.

- **Class Schedules:** Classes are scheduled to meet from the last week in September and running through the first week in May. Breaks are scheduled throughout the year, corresponding to the Church Liturgical Year and local school schedules. Students in Sacramental years, grades 2, 3 and 8, will also be scheduled to attend additional workshops.
- **Closings/Cancellations**
 - ✓ **For Sundays:** In case of actual or forecasted inclement weather on Sunday, we will decide as soon as we have sufficient information (as early as Saturday evening and not later than 8:30am on Sunday) whether to cancel Religious Education classes. Cancellation notices will be posted on the Parish website www.stcathtrumbull.com and the Religious Education Facebook Group page.
 - ✓ **For Tuesdays and Wednesdays:** If the Trumbull Public School System cancels classes or dismisses classes early due to inclement weather, all Religious Education classes will also be cancelled for that day. If the Trumbull Public School System dismisses classes at the regular time but inclement weather is forecasted, we will decide as soon as we have sufficient information whether to hold Religious Education classes on that day. Cancellation notices will be posted on the Parish website www.stcathtrumbull.com and the Religious Education Facebook Group page.

If we have not cancelled class but you are concerned about travel conditions, use your best judgment whether to bring your children to class. Absences due to inclement weather will be treated as excused absences. In most cases, classes cancelled due to inclement weather will not be rescheduled.

- **Class Attendance and Absences**

By enrolling your children in Religious Education, you have made meaningful instruction in the Catholic Faith a priority for your family. As with other classes or activities, regular attendance at Religious Education is crucial for students to master the curriculum, which builds from class to class, and to develop their Faith through consistent participation in a classroom community. Older students begin to express and explain their beliefs and appreciate other points of view during class discussions. Infrequent or irregular attendance hinders students' progress towards these goals, while disrupting classroom learning as catechists re-teach missed lessons or shuffle work group to account for absent students. It may be difficult for catechists to provide take-home assignments for lessons taught through group projects, video or audio presentations, discussions, or games.

For all of these reasons, students are required to attend all Religious Education classes and scheduled activities for the full duration of each class period.

Three unexcused absences are permitted in an academic year. For a missed class to be considered an "excused" absence, the child must complete a take-home assignment and return the finished work to their catechist. Catechists are not required to accept take-home assignments that are incomplete or poorly done.

Students who leave class more than 10 minutes early to accommodate conflicting activities (e.g., sports practices or games, dance or music lessons etc.) must also prepare a take-home assignment as described in the prior paragraph or the early departure will be treated as an unexcused absence. The same applies to arrivals more than 10 minutes late. If you find that your child has a standing conflict that cannot be moved, please contact the Director of Religious Education to have your child reassigned to another session.

If a student does not meet the above requirements for attendance, that student will not be allowed to receive any sacraments related to that year of instruction and/or will be required to repeat the academic year before advancing to the next class.

Policies and Procedures for Safety, Conduct and Discipline

- **Safe Environments**

St. Catherine of Siena Religious Education is committed to ensuring respect for the human dignity of all students, parents, volunteers and staff members. Religious Education is possible only in an environment that embodies that respect.

Accordingly, St. Catherine of Siena parish participates in the VIRTUS - Protecting God's Children program, which helps churches and religious organizations refine their roles as safe havens for children and empowers them with new tools to help them protect children. The program is comprehensive and multidimensional – incorporating the best-proven standards and practices to prevent child sexual abuse and make the parish safe for all people – especially children.

All adult volunteers (18 years or older) in the Religious Education Program must be VIRTUS certified. They also must have passed a background check, in compliance with the guidelines of the Diocese of Bridgeport's Safe Environments Program and Guidelines. Information about the VIRTUS program can be found at www.virtus.org.

- **Student Arrival and Dismissal**

The safety and security of all students, parents and designated adults is our first priority. To this end, we are implementing the following mandatory arrival and dismissal procedures. We anticipate your cooperation in following them and ask that you do not request personal exceptions from catechists. We are sorry for any inconvenience, but our paramount goal is to assure that all students and their families come and go in a safe, orderly manner.

- ✓ **If your child is in Grades 1, 2, or 3:**

Parents must park their cars in the main parking lot and walk with their children *to* and *from* the *classroom door*. At all times, children must be under the supervision of a parent, legal guardian, or the adult designated in writing as set out below. Parking in the parking spots in the front of the school is not permitted.

All students, grades 1-3, must be signed-out of their class and released to a parent/guardian or an authorized adult. A parent/guardian may designate an adult (18 years or older) who can also pick up their child by completing a [Pick-Up Authorization Form for Grades 1-3](#), available on the parish website www.stcathtrumbull.com. Parents may also provide the catechist with a written note signed by the parent stating the name, cell phone number, and their relationship to the child whereby designating another adult (18 years or older) who may pick up their child for a single occurrence. Catechists will only accept these notes directly from *a parent prior* to the class. Catechists may request a photo I.D. to verify the identity of a designated person and will not release the child without such ID. Catechists will not release students, grades 1-3, to the sole custody of a minor sibling or other minor child.

- ✓ **If your child is in Grades 4 – 6 and Confirmation Prep:**

Drop-off/Pick-up: Parents must park their car in the main parking lot and meet their children in the school lobby. Parking in the parking spots in the front of the school or using the circle driveway in front of the school is not permitted.

- ✓ **If you have children attending multiple grades during the same session:**

Parents must follow the arrival and dismissal procedures applicable to the youngest child in that session. Children in grades 1-3 *may not* be accompanied, dropped off, or signed out by older siblings even in the same session.

- ✓ **General Reminders For children's safety:**

Parents or the designated responsible adults must accompany their children of any age at all times in the main parking lot.

Parents must park *only* in the main parking lot. Parents may not:

- Park in the small parking lot immediately across from the school. Using this lot impedes traffic flow and creates traffic congestion and safety risks as some drivers attempt to exit the lot while others are pulling through the driveway.

Students *may not* be picked up at any location off church property.

Out of courtesy and consideration for the catechists, as well as the safety and wellbeing of your children, please make every effort to drop children off and pick them up at the scheduled times:

- If for any reason you must drop your children off late or pick them up early, please park in the main parking lot and accompany your children into or out of the building *regardless of their grade levels*. This is important because, as set out below, the doors of the building are closed and locked once class begins and remain that way until timely dismissal.
- If you will be unavoidably late picking up your child and you know in advance that this will be the case, please inform the Principal who will make arrangements for one of the catechists or Principal to remain with your child. Beginning ten minutes after the expected dismissal time, or from the time of dismissal for families that are late more than twice a semester, St. Catherine's may, in its discretion, charge a fee of \$1 per child per minute until the children have been picked up by a parent or properly designated adult.
- Parents who consistently drop their children off or pick them up at times other than the scheduled session times should consider whether to request a change in the class session. The Director of Religious Education also may suggest moving the children to another session to avoid disruption to the Religious Education Program. (For reference, see the discussion below regarding attendance.)

- **Building Access**

All doors to the school are to be locked at all times, except briefly during arrival or dismissal. Access to the building will be controlled only by the Rel Ed principal, catechists and hall monitors. Parents and children are not to open any doors to allow a person to enter the building, unless requested to do so by the Rel Ed principal, catechist or hall monitor.

During arrival or dismissal, hall monitors will open the main front doors nearest the driveway to facilitate entry or exit.

During times other than arrival or dismissal, hall monitors will watch the doors and allow a parent or designated adult in upon arrival. There is a doorbell to ring to let us know you have arrived. Please ring and wait for someone to open the door for you. Hall monitors may request names and picture identification to allow entry.

- **Classrooms, Hallways and Restrooms**

Upon arrival, students shall report to their classrooms and remain in them for the duration of class, unless a catechist escorts the entire class to another location on campus. Students will not loiter in the hallways. Students should use the restroom, as necessary, before entering class to avoid leaving during class. Parents will be notified and will be expected to speak to their child if the child frequently requests to use the bathroom in a manner that disrupts class.

- **Food and Drink**

Students may not bring food or drink (besides water) at any time into the classrooms or school. St. Catherine of Siena School is a nut-free environment. Students, who require food for medical reasons, as noted by their parents on the student's **Medical Release Form**, may bring nut-free snacks.

- **Electronic Devices and Cell Phones**

iPads and other electronic devices should not be brought to class. If a catechist or member of the Religious Education Staff determines that a student has such an electronic device and is accessing it during class, the catechist or staff member may remove the device from the student for the duration of the class. The device will be returned after class is complete.

During class, cell phones must remain off or set to “silent” mode and put away. No child may text or use the internet for personal browsing. In their discretion, catechists may require students to place cell phones in a bin upon entering the classroom, to be returned to the students at the end of class, or may take a phone away from a particular student for the duration of a class as necessary for class management or another appropriate reason. Please be certain that all cell phones brought to class are marked, labeled or otherwise readily identified as belonging to your child.

- **Prohibited Items**

While at the St. Catherine of Siena Campus, students may not possess, use or distribute any items, materials or substances (referred to together as “Items”) that potentially could cause serious harm to themselves or to others, could cause significant damage to property, or that students are legally prohibited from possessing. This includes fireworks, weapons of any kind, alcohol, tobacco, traditional or e- cigarettes, controlled substances, illegal drugs or drug paraphernalia, or medications prescribed to persons other than the student. If a catechist or member of the Religious Education Staff determines that a student possesses any of these Items, the catechist or staff member may, in their discretion:

- Remove the Item from the student for the duration of the class. The Item will be returned after class is complete, only to the parent or designated adult; or
- If the Item poses an imminent risk of harm to anyone, remove the student from the classroom, and call the parent or designated adult or, if they cannot be reached the emergency contact listed on the medical form. The parent or adult who is contacted will be expected immediately to pick up the student and remove him or her from the campus. The student will not be allowed to return to the Religious Education campus or class until the student and parents have met separately with the Director of Religious Education to reach an agreed resolution of the matter.

If warranted to maintain safety or security or to address an imminent risk, a catechist or staff member may immediately call local law enforcement for assistance.

- **Safety Procedures**

The Saint Catherine of Siena Religious Education Program follows all Safety Procedures and Protocols observed by St. Catherine of Siena School. The catechists have been instructed safety procedures in the event of a fire and lockdown, should there be a need to use them in an emergency. A fire drill and a lockdown drill will be conducted.

- **Conduct and Discipline**

At all times, volunteers, students, parents and families are expected to display Christian attitudes of honesty, mutual respect, responsibility, consideration and love for oneself, clergy, catechists, fellow students, and school and parish property.

If a student’s behavior becomes a distraction for other children before, during, or after class, parents will be notified by phone, in writing, or in person. We will work together to reach a mutually agreed solution, up to and including requesting the parent’s presence in the classroom as a one-on-one aide for your child. There is a discipline policy in place and every catechist will be following the same procedures. Students disrupting class may be removed from the classroom. Persistent disruptive behavior will result in a child being removed from the Program for the remainder of the year if a solution cannot be found.

In addition, students who engage in the following behavior on the St. Catherine of Siena campus will be subject to appropriate and immediate disciplinary action, which may include public service, short- or long-term removal from the classroom, removal from the Program for remainder of the year, or restitution:

- **Using Inappropriate Language.** Volunteers and students shall refrain from using vulgar or obscene language, language that taunts, bullies, or teases another person, or language that disparages persons based on gender, race or national origin, religious beliefs, or other personal characteristics.
- **Fighting**, physically assaulting another person or any inappropriate touching of another person.
- **Stealing, damaging or destroying the property** of another person, including students, parents or volunteers of the Religious Education Program, St. Catherine of Siena School, or the parish generally. Found items should be delivered to a catechist, volunteer, or Religious Education staff member.
- **Grievance/Complaint**

If a child experiences difficulty during class, please directly contact the Principal as soon as the difficulty arises, either in person or in writing and we will work with you to achieve a mutually agreed solution. All conflict resolutions should focus on the healing Spirit of Christ. If additional issues arise or concerns are unresolved, contact the Director of Religious Education.

Medical Issues

- **Emergency Contact Information**

The Religious Education registration materials will ask parents to supply the name and phone number of an emergency contact person. This phone number should allow us to contact someone who generally will be available during your child's class times.

- **Medical Release Forms**

For all students enrolled in Religious Education, the parent/guardian must complete and sign a Medical Release Form, which can be found on the Parish website www.stcathtrumbull.com. Completed forms must be submitted prior to the first day of class. This Form includes a permission statement authorizing emergency medical personnel to treat a child in the event of a medical emergency.

- **Medical Emergencies: St Catherine of Siena Religious Education Staff or Volunteer will call 911 to obtain Emergency Medical Services for any student who becomes seriously ill, has a serious injury, or for any other similar medical emergency.**
- If a minor illness or injury prevents a child from completing a class, the catechist or staff member will call the parents or authorized adult first. If that person cannot be reached, the emergency contact person listed on the registration form will be called. The parent or adult who is contacted will be expected immediately to pick up the student and remove him or her from the campus.
- For a serious illness or injury, a catechist will call 911 to request emergency assistance. Parents or the authorized adult will be contacted second and informed of the situation. If that person cannot be reached, the emergency contact person listed on the registration form will be called.
- In addition to listing on the medical form, please inform the Director of Religious Education and Principal if your child has a medical condition that potentially could result in a medical emergency (e.g., history of seizures or fainting etc.)
- During cold and flu season, if your child exhibits symptoms of illness, please use your best judgment about whether your child should attend class.

- **Medications:**

St Catherine of Siena Religious Education volunteers and staff members are not allowed to dispense medications, except if an EPI PEN/AVI-Q ADMINISTRATION form has been provided and authorizes the administration of an Epi-Pen or Avi-Q.

- **Students with Severe Allergies:**

If a student has a life-threatening allergic condition requiring the use of an EPI PEN /AVI-Q, parents can sign and complete an EPI PEN/AVI-Q ADMINISTRATION form authorizing a non-medical person at St. Catherine of Siena Parish, who has been trained to use a cartridge auto-injector, to administer epinephrine via cartridge auto-injector to your child if necessary while participating in Religious Education.

Parents who elect to complete the EPI PEN/AVI-Q ADMINISTRATION form are asked to bring their child's Epi-Pen (in its original pharmacy packaging with the child's name) at the start of each session and to collect their Epi-Pen at the end of each session for Religious Education. The Principal is responsible for holding onto the Epi-Pen during class sessions.

If parents elect not to fill out the EPI PEN/AVI-Q ADMINISTRATION form, they must stay in the school building for the duration of each class attended by the child, for purposes of administering an auto-injector in the event of an anaphylactic reaction.

If the child is authorized by a physician to self-administer his/her own auto-injector, the parent/guardian must complete the Authorization to Self-Administer form and have it signed by the child's physician.

Curriculum Content

- **Overview**

The St. Catherine of Siena Religious Education Program is Christ-centered and based on the Diocese of Bridgeport's Guidelines for Catechesis. Each grade level will review, in an age-appropriate manner, the following topics:

- Sacred Scripture
- The Creed
- Worship & the Sacraments
- Christian Morality
- Prayer & Spirituality
- Community & Service

- **St. Catherine of Siena Home School Program**

St. Catherine of Siena Religious Education Program adheres to all suggested guidelines of the Diocese of Bridgeport concerning a Home School Program. Details are outlined in St. Catherine of Siena Religious Education Handout entitled: Guidelines for Family Catechesis (Home Schooling) available through the Religious Education Office.

- **Sacraments**

The Sacramental preparation program centers on parent-child-community participation, because parents are the primary religious educators of their children and our church community is our faith support system. St. Catherine of Siena provides resources, classes, and immediate preparation and celebration for these special Sacramental events.

Sponsors and godparents for Baptism and Confirmation must fulfill the guidelines established by Canon Law and the Policies of the Diocese of Bridgeport. Sponsors are responsible for acquiring from their local parish, a sponsor form signed by their clergy.

St Catherine of Siena Parish also follows the Diocesan Guidelines and Policies for Catechesis and Preparation for the Sacraments, which contains the following student requirements for Sacramental preparation:

- For First Communion and Confirmation, students must be enrolled and participating in a Religious Education Program for at least two full years before celebrating the sacrament or must make up the missed year(s) curriculum. Per the Diocesan Guidelines: "Before entering into immediate preparation for First Eucharist, a child is to have completed **one full year** in a catechetical program and be currently enrolled in the second year of the regular ongoing parish or school catechetical program." Similarly, any student wishing to be confirmed in 8th grade who missed one or more previous grades for Religious Education must make up the missed year(s) curriculum. Once completed the student will be placed in the Chosen program prior to Confirmation.
- Regular weekly attendance for Religious Education classes, including the special Sacramental preparation classes, is essential. The Attendance Guidelines on page 5 of this Handbook will be strictly enforced and not waived during Sacramental preparation years.
- All Sacramental preparation assignments must be fully completed and given to the catechist by the due date.
- Baptismal Certificates and all other Sacramental documentation must be on file at the Religious Education Office before reception of the sacrament.

- **Baptism**

The Sacrament of Baptism is scheduled through the Parish Office. Parental pre-Baptism classes are held monthly. You may call the parish office to schedule a date and time for the Baptism and to register for the class.

- **First Reconciliation and First Eucharist**

Preparation for the Sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Eucharist begins in second grade. Parents will receive a detailed informational packet outlining the schedule of events, classes and workshops related to the Sacramental preparation and celebrations. First Reconciliation takes place in late winter/spring of second grade. First Eucharist takes place in May of the third grade.

- **Confirmation**

Confirmation is usually celebrated around late April to early-May. The actual date of the Sacrament is determined by the Bishop's office.

The following foundational topics are addressed over the course of this two-year preparation period:

- Saints (understanding the Communion of Saints/Choosing a Patron Saint)
- Faith in Action (Service commitment)
- Holy Spirit (gifts and fruits received during Confirmation)
- Development of Spirituality (retreats)
- Development of Moral Thinking and Decision Making (special speakers/classes)
- Social Justice
- Role of Confirmed Catholics in the Church

All students preparing for Confirmation are also required to complete 20 hours of community service prior to March of their second year of Confirmation Prep. They can begin accumulating service hours during the fall of their previous academic year.

Parents will receive a detailed information outlining these Sacramental preparation activities and events. These activities and events are also listed in the church bulletin before the date of event and on the Parish website www.stcathtrumbull.com.

Christian Initiation of Children

Children who are not baptized, baptized in a non-Catholic church and those who have no formal Religious Education and wish to learn more about the Catholic Church are invited to learn more about the Catholic Church with their parents. Parents are asked to contact the Director of Religious Education who will work with parents to develop a catechetical plan to welcome these children into the Catholic Church according to the norms and customs of the Catholic Church.

Acknowledgement and Consent

For all students enrolled in Religious Education, the parent/guardian must complete and sign the attached **Acknowledgement and Consent Form**, which confirms that:

- the parent/guardian has received, read, and understands the contents of this Handbook;
- the parent/guardian will discuss the expectations in this Handbook with each of their children who will be attending Religious Education.

The **Acknowledgement and Consent Form** must be returned prior to the first day of class. Electronic copies of the Handbook may be found on the Parish website Parish website www.stcathtrumbull.com. Please direct any questions you may have about the Handbook or its requirements by phone, e-mail, or in person to the Director of Religious Education.

Parent/Guardian Acknowledgement and Consent Form

Child's name	Grade

I/We acknowledge that I/we have received, read and understand The Parish of Saint Catherine of Siena Religious Education Handbook, and will discuss its expectations with my/our child(ren) who will be attending Religious Education. I/We consent to use this Handbook and the enforcement of the policies and procedures that it contains during the 2024-2025 Religious Education year.

Acknowledged (Parents or Guardians):

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Name)

_____ (Relationship)

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Name)

_____ (Relationship)