

The Parish of St. Thomas More



*Religious Education Family
Handbook*

MESSAGE FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Catholic Families,

Welcome to the Religious Education Program at the Parish of St. Thomas More which consists of St. Thomas More Church and Our Lady of Mercy Church. This booklet serves as a guide to assist your family in understanding the process of Religious Education. Please take the time to read it carefully in order to avoid frustration and inconvenience in the future. All policies will be uniformly enforced to ensure fairness to everyone.

When a Catholic brings their children to the church to be baptized, they pledge to raise the children in the “practice of the faith”. What does it mean to “*practice the faith?*” Well for one thing, it means to “*Remember to keep holy the Lord’s Day.*” In these words centuries of Catholics have recognized the solemn third commandment of God to worship God on Sunday by going to Church. This solemn obligation has never disappeared from the teaching of the Church. But it has sadly disappeared from the practice of too many Catholics. The observance of Sunday, in particular, participation in the Sunday Eucharist, may seem to be counter-cultural to some, too great a burden to others, or one option among many for others. But the fact remains, according to the law of God, it is not an option.

In the Old Testament, God commanded, “*Keep holy the Lord’s Day*” and in the New Testament He commanded, “*Do this in memory of me.*” This is why canon law instructs that, “*unless impeded by a grave cause, all the faithful are bound to participate in the Sunday Mass.*” There is nothing more important in the whole week than Sunday Mass, and that certainly includes participating in sports, shopping and other secular activities!

But even for those who do come to Mass every Sunday, “*practicing the faith*” requires more. Our faith must extend beyond the doors of the church. It must be a part of our life each and every day. So I ask you, how often are prayers said in the home? Do you take the time to say grace before meals, to pray first thing in the morning and before retiring at night? How often is the Bible read or even opened? Sacraments presuppose that there is a faith to build on. If you are not “*practicing the faith,*” the sacraments will be of little value to you or your children. Remember that in addition to sending your child to religious education classes, “*practicing the faith*” most importantly involves the participation of your entire family in Sunday Mass, prayer in the home, concern for your neighbor, and works of Christian charity.

Rev. Mark W. Crane, Pastor

MESSAGE FROM THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Dear Religious Education Families,

The religious education staff and I welcome you and your children to the opening of the Religious Education school year. We hope that this handbook will help you learn what you need to know about policies, procedures, sacramental preparation and details regarding safety concerns. Please read the entire handbook and keep it in a place where you can refer to it when necessary.

We, the staff and catechists of the Religious Education, will do all that we can to help you teach the children about the importance of God in their lives. We accept the commitment to teach the Good News and to be good examples that will motivate our students toward choosing to live lives rich in compassion, forgiveness, mercy and love of God.

We ask for your support, as you have done in the past, both in the classroom and at home reviewing and reinforcing their lessons. Please pray together and ask them about what they have learned in Religious Education classes. Grades 1-6 has a “Sharing Faith with My Family” review page which is toward the end of each chapter or in the back of the text book. We also encourage you to reference the “We Believe” website at www.webelieve.com for more ideas that can help you grow in faith with your child.

Feel free to call or email your child’s teacher or the Religious Education Office if you have any questions or if we can be of some help.

We pray that the home and the classroom will be filled with God’s love and peace as we do this together!

William Staub
Coordinator of Religious Education
Liz Halstead, Carolyn Petersel, Cristi McCarty
Secretarial Staff
And All the Catechists

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION MISSION STATEMENT

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT:

“The Catechetical Ministry (Religious Education) must be understood in relation to Jesus’ threefold mission. It is a form of the ministry of the word, which proclaims and teaches. It leads to and flows from the ministry of worship which sanctifies through prayer and sacrament. It supports the ministry of service, which is linked to efforts to achieve social justice and has traditionally been expressed in the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Its purpose is to make a person’s faith become living, conscious and active through the light of instruction. Catechesis is a lifelong process for the individual and a constant pastoral activity of the Church”

-- National Catechetical Directory --

The purpose of our Religious Education Program here at the Parish of St. Thomas More is to enrich and challenge the lives of our young people with the Gospel message by word and example in a loving and caring Christian Community.

Our program recognizes that parents are the primary educators of their children and their religious education; therefore, we strive to affirm and supplement, but never replace, religious education in the home.

We continually strive to provide our support and guidance to assist each other in our task, as it is our belief that parents and catechists are partners in the formal religious education process for our children.

We believe that in participating in the life of our parish community through prayer, sacraments and worship at Sunday Mass, our children will learn to live conscious and active Christian lives.

It is our belief that, because religious education is a lifelong process, it is necessary for our children to attend formal classes every year.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION STAFF

Pastor	Rev. Mark W. Crane
Parochial Vicar	Rev. Msgr. Peter Kochery
Parochial Vicar	Rev. John Large
Religious Education Coordinator	William Staub
Religious Education Dept. Staff	Liz Halstead
	Carolyn Petersel
	Cristi McCarty

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OFFICE HOURS:

St. Thomas More Facility

Monday thru Wednesday - 8:00AM to 4:00PM

(Until 7:00 pm when classes are in session)

Thursday and Friday - 8:00AM to 4:00PM

Telephone Number: (732) 446-3232

Summer Hours: Monday thru Friday – 8:00AM to 4:00PM

For all inquiries contact the St. Thomas More RE office

Our Lady of Mercy Facility

Monday thru Tuesday - 2:30PM to 7:00PM

Wednesday - 2:30PM to 5:30PM

Thursday and Friday - Closed

Telephone Number: (732) 786-1835

OLM office closes on the last day of classes and reopens on the first day of classes
of the new school year in September

The following are the class schedules for the religious education school year:

Monday Classes Begin on Monday, September 11th

Tuesday Classes Begin on Tuesday, September 12th

Wednesday Classes Begin on Wednesday, September 13th

St. Thomas More Facility and Our Lady of Mercy Facility

Monday – Tuesday – Wednesday

Grades 1 – 8,	4:30 to 5:30 pm	Grades 1 – 8,	5:45 to 6:45 pm
---------------	-----------------	---------------	-----------------

NOTE: There will be no RE classes at OLM on Wednesday @ 5:45-6:45

ADMISSIONS POLICY

Admission to the Religious Education Program is open to all the children of registered families in the Parish of St. Thomas More.

ENROLLMENT PROCEDURES/TRANSFERS

All children in grades 1 through 8 who wish to be enrolled in Religious Education must be registered by a parent or guardian in the Religious Education Office.

1. All families must be registered parishioners of St Thomas More Parish.
2. A copy of the baptismal certificate for all 1st grade students and transfer students must be provided to the Religious Education office.
3. A release letter from the previous religious education program stating grades completed and the date of sacraments received must be presented to the Religious Education office before a child can be registered.

TUITION

Tuition must be paid in full at the time of enrollment. Partial payment accommodation or schedules can be made through the Religious Education Office. A family's inability to pay tuition due to hardship will not prevent a child from attending religious education. In cases of hardship, please contact the Religious Education Office and be assured of confidentiality.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION RE-ENROLLMENT

Children who have successfully completed a year of religious education based upon good attendance, participation and satisfactory behavior will be promoted to the following school year. Children must attend eight consecutive school years of religious education. They must be re-enrolled every year. A child will be enrolled in the next ordinal year of religious education regardless of grade he/she is attending in secular schooling.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS OR TELEPHONE NUMBER

In the event that a family moves or changes a telephone number or contact email address, it is important that the religious education office be notified as soon as possible. This is important for record keeping and is critical in the event of an emergency.

ATTENDANCE & ABSENCES

In light of the fact that religious education classes meet one hour a week good attendance is essential for a child to maintain interest, achieve success, and develop a sense of belonging to the community. If a true emergency or illness exists and a child is unable to attend class and needs to be excused, report the absence to the child's teacher in the form of a note, email or a phone call. All children will be allowed a maximum of three excused absences for the school year. After three absences it will be up to the discretion of the Pastor and the Coordinator of Religious Education, whether the child is to repeat the school year. If the child does not remain in the process the tuition fee will not be reimbursed.

If a child has THREE CONSECUTIVE ABSENCES and the teacher is not notified, we will assume that you and your child are no longer interested in participating in the religious education program.

TARDINESS/SAFETY

For your child's safety all entrances to hallways will remain locked during class times. In addition to maintaining safety we also want to discourage tardiness and early pick-up as it is disruptive to the class. Any child leaving early will have to be signed out by a parent with an I.D. in the office. Texting is not acceptable way of signing a child out of class. The child will be brought to the parent.

EMERGENCY OR SNOW CLOSING

Whenever the Manalapan/Englishtown public schools are closed due to inclement weather, it is automatic that Religious Education classes will also be cancelled for that same day. If snow begins during the day when your child is in school and you have any questions regarding class cancellations, kindly contact your child's teacher. Cancellation of classes will be posted on the parish website, www.moremercy.org; an email will be sent to the email address used at registration; and an announcement will be posted on the parish Facebook page.

TRANSPORTATION

Parents or guardians must provide transportation to and from religious education classes. If a person other than the normally designated driver is providing transportation to or from the religious education classes for your child, please notify your child's teacher with the information prior to class time for the protection of all. Children are not permitted to use any form of taxi service when leaving classes.

ARRIVALS AND DISMISSALS

At the St. Thomas More Facility:

Drop Off: Please accompany your child to their classroom at the start of class time.
Pick Up: Pick up your child from their classroom. No child will be dismissed from a classroom alone. Each child must be accompanied by a parent, approved 7th or 8th grade sibling or a family member previously designated and the teacher notified.

At the Our Lady of Mercy Facility:

Drop Off: Please accompany your child to their classroom at the start of class time.
Pick Up: Pick up your child at the end of class time in Valentine Hall. Each child must be accompanied by a parent, approved 7th or 8th grade sibling or a family member previously designated and the teacher notified.

- **At both facilities, at the end of classes, all parents must wait outside the building until 5 minutes before classes end. This is to ensure the safety of the children and to maintain the educational environment.**
- Seventh and Eighth grade students will be allowed to exit the building without being accompanied by a parent. If any parent does not wish to allow their child to exit the building without them, the parent should notify the teacher who will retain the student in the classroom until the parent arrives.

- Sibling Pickup: An older sibling in 7th or 8th grade may pick up a younger brother or sister from the classroom if a Sibling Pick-Up form is completed and given to the younger child's teacher signed by a parent.

TEXTBOOKS

Children should care of their religion textbooks and are responsible for bringing these textbooks to class with them each week. Replacement of books due to damage or loss will be \$25.00 per textbook. If used textbooks are available, they may be purchased by the child for \$2.00 and the money will go to the St. Vincent de Paul Society for the needy.

HOMEWORK

Please review your child's religious education lessons each week. Some classes will be given supplemental pages to complete. Since these lessons are varied and based on the catechist's lesson plans, each child in each grade will not have the same "homework" to do each week. Catechists will often use supplemental lessons to reinforce particular lessons, to review concepts taught that week or to provide students who might have been absent an opportunity to catch up. In addition, some assignments will require your child to discuss concepts at home and report back on those discussions.

PRAYERS EXPECTED TO BE MEMORIZED BY GRADE LEVEL (See prayers in student textbook)

Grade Level 1-2-3-4: Sign of the Cross, Glory Be, Hail Mary, Lord's Prayer, Act of Contrition

Grade Level 5-6-7-8: In addition to the above: The Creed

RESPECT FOR PROPERTY

All religious education classes at St. Thomas More Church are held in the education wing, which is also home to Bridges Nursery School at St. Thomas More Church during the day. We must all do our best to respect the rules and regulations of the parish and school while sharing space as good catholic friends and neighbors. Religious education students are expected to respect the private property of the students and teachers. Care is to be exercised in the classroom, in the parking lot and on the church grounds. We all look to preserve the good condition of the school and all its belongings and furnishings. To accomplish this it

is important to remember that food and chewing gum are not permitted at any time. Smoking is not permitted on church property. A smoke free environment is to be maintained at all times.

CLASSROOM RESPECT AND PROTOCOL

Class time is precious in our Religious Education Program

- **Please remember to have your child use the restroom at home before coming to class.**
- Students are NOT to enter their classroom until their teacher arrives.
- Students are to wait quietly in the hallway outside of their classroom.
- Students are expected to treat the teacher and other students with respect.
- There is zero tolerance for bullying.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

With the exception of approved classroom use, cell phones, iPods, iPads, and all other electronic devices is strictly PROHIBITED.

Any child who uses electronic equipment will be instructed to surrender the device to the teacher where it will be placed on the teacher's desk and returned at the end of class. Students may use phones to contact parents after the class ends and the teacher gives permission or in the event of a true emergency.

DISCIPLINE

1st Incident: If a child is sent to the religious education office for disruptive or inappropriate behavior, parents are contacted via telephone and are notified of the situation and circumstances.

2nd Incident: Parents are called to take the child home.

3rd Incident: If the situation occurs a third time, the child will be removed from the classroom program OR an adult family member will be requested to attend with the child for the remainder of the school year.

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION
FIRST PENANCE & FIRST EUCHARIST

In accordance with the guidelines of the Diocese of Trenton, our sacramental programs are designed to provide a sound catechetical foundation for both parents and children alike. A child should successfully complete at least one year of religious education before entering into the sacramental preparation program. Every child is obligated to attend Mass every weekend and on Holy Days of Obligation. Children should have some basic familiarity with liturgy. Regular attendance at class is especially significant for students entering into or continuing in a sacrament preparation program. A student's absence may indicate a need to evaluate readiness or intent to participate in the preparation process. Parents and students accept the responsibility and make the commitment to work together in a shared learning experience using sacramental preparation books. Parents must attend the required parent meetings held for each sacrament.

CONFIRMATION

Middle school students are enrolled in our two-year Confirmation program. Preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation includes the 7th and 8th grade school years with all students being expected to attend weekly religious education classes in order to be fully prepared to receive the sacrament of Confirmation.

A student must be willing to commit to participating in and completing all of the requirements of the Confirmation program. It is expected that the student receive the Eucharist every weekend and the sacrament of Reconciliation on a regular basis along with maintaining a good class attendance record. Unexcused absence from class may result in a need to evaluate a student's readiness to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.

The 8th grade students will be required to complete a Confirmation portfolio that will be distributed at the parent meeting at the start of the school year. This will include dated written assignments and prayer testing.

REQUIRED PARENTS' MEETINGS

In accordance with the guidelines of the Diocese of Trenton, meeting(s) are held which are required for those parents of students in Grade 2 and Grade 8. Students in these grade levels are in a sacramental preparation year. Parents are provided with the opportunity to attend their child's classes which are especially designed to help update their understanding of the sacraments while being informed about the preparation their children are receiving.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The curriculum developed for Grades 1-8 follows the directed guidelines of the Diocesan Office of Religious Education for parish religious education programs. Each year the story and vision of our Catholic family is shared by a faithful presentation of the Church's Doctrine through teachings and traditions as well as a growing experience of and a reverence for the Sacred Scriptures, with opportunities for participation in the communal, sacramental and liturgical life of the Church.

Family Life is taught as mandated by diocesan policy and is part to the RE curriculum. Family life fulfills USCCB guidelines for the protection of God's Children.

VOLUNTEER TO HELP

Our Religious Education program depends on many wonderful people, mostly parents and guardians like you, who have a love of children and a strong desire to share their faith. The commitment they make is rewarding and enriching and our youth are the beneficiaries. Volunteer catechists are committed to the development of their own faith community and share prayer and community-building experiences so that their own faith may be strengthened. Our catechists give their best efforts to building a sense of community in their classrooms with their students. There are a variety of ways in which to become involved. You may volunteer as a Catechist, Assistant Catechist, Substitute Catechist, Hall Monitor or Class Parent. Every adult volunteer will be required to take the Virtus training course, be fingerprinted along with a criminal background check and then upon approval be given an ID badge to be worn at all times while in the St. Thomas More and Our Lady of Mercy facilities. Any adult not displaying an ID badge while at the facilities will be subject to removal from the building.