

ST. TERESA OF CALCUTTA
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM
CATECHIST HANDBOOK

2023-2024

St. Teresa of Calcutta Education Center
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"Each one of them is Jesus in disguise"
[Mother Teresa](#)



*It is to just such as these that
the Kingdom of God belongs*

ST. TERESA OF CALCUTTA
P.R.E.P. MISSION STATEMENT

St. Teresa of Calcutta Religious Education Program is dedicated to assisting parents in presenting and teaching our Catholic Faith to the children and young adults of our Parish Community.

Our vision is to:

- * Worship God through prayer and the Sacraments,*
- * Nourish the community by meeting the spiritual and temporal needs of all our brothers and sisters,*
- * Proclaim the Good News through our examples and teachings,*
- * Teach the message of Christ by choosing to live our Faith with morals and values,*
- * And to thank God every day for his guidance and strength that we may continue to respond to His worthy call.*

ST. TERESA OF CALCUTTA
EDUCATION CENTER MISSION STATEMENT

- *St. Teresa of Calcutta Education Center will use every opportunity and skill necessary to face the challenges of the 21st Century as faith-filled learners willing to succeed as productive members of society.*
- *Our learning is made possible in a loving, safe and supportive environment.*
- *We believe as Mother Teresa believed, “Be Jesus to everyone you meet; and in everyone you meet, see Jesus.”*

PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

Canon Law states that “Parents above all others are obliged to form their children in the faith and practice of the Christian life by word and example; godparents and those who take the place of parents are bound by an equivalent obligation” (Can. 774). The General Directory for Catechists and the National Directory for Catechists resound the same sentiment. St. Teresa of Calcutta Religious Education Program recognizes and embraces parents in their role as the primary catechists of their children as they strive to fulfill this special role. Our mission is to assist parents by providing sound catechists on the catechism and teachings of the Catholic Church so that their children will be formed in the faith of the Catholic tradition. This is accomplished by providing parents with a variety of resources and programs that will enable their children to cultivate a deep appreciation and understanding of what it means to be a Catholic Christian in today’s changing world. The Parish Religious Education Program provides children with ample opportunities to live and experience their faith through catechists, service, community and worship.

The purpose of this handbook is to set forth the guidelines for those that participate in the St. Teresa of Calcutta Religious Education Program. This handbook and the policies contained within are subject to revision in which case volunteers will be notified in writing of any changes.

ST. TERESA OF CALCUTTA
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM

CATECHIST HANDBOOK

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POSITION REQUIREMENTS

1. Every volunteer over 18 years of age is required to have a current State Police Background check and PA Child Abuse History Clearance check on file with the parish in order to be eligible to serve in the faith formation programs. Background checks must be on file at the start of service in ministry. These background checks need to be renewed every five years. For volunteers who have moved in-state, an FBI background check is required.
2. Volunteers over the age of 18 who currently reside outside the State of Pennsylvania or who have resided in the State of Pennsylvania for less than two years must also complete an FBI background check. This background check must be on file at the start of service in ministry. This is renewed every five years.
3. Volunteers who have lived in Pennsylvania for 10 consecutive years, and therefore do not need to have fingerprints taken, must complete a Pennsylvania Disclosure Application. This form needs to be updated every five years.
4. All adult volunteers over the age of 18 must complete the Archdiocesan mandated training program entitled, ***Protecting God's Children Awareness Session for Adults***, before volunteering with the program. Registration for training dates and times are available online at www.virtus.org. This course is only taken one time.
5. All adult volunteers over the age of 18 must complete the Archdiocesan online training program entitled ***Mandated Reporting (also called Safe Environment, Part II)*** before volunteering with the program. Registration for training is online at www.childyouthprotection.org. This is done once only.
6. The Catechist Orientation Course is required for all new staff members. It is a course with basic catechist information and a first step in catechetical certification. This ten hour course will be done in-house at staff meetings.
7. A Catechist Information Form must be completed and kept in the P.R.E.P. office files for each catechist.
8. Each catechist will receive the ***Qualifications and Responsibilities for a Parish Religious Education Catechist***, please take time to read this carefully.

ROLE OF THE CATECHIST

The ministry of catechist is a vocation, an interior call of the Holy Spirit. It springs from the Sacrament of Baptism and is strengthened by the Sacrament of Confirmation. Commissioned by the Church, catechists participate in a divine calling to teach as Jesus did. Catechists need to be practicing Catholics who participate fully in the communal worship and life of the Church. They are prepared by the Church for their apostolate through appropriate catechetical training.

Although the Church recognizes parents/guardians as the first teachers of the faith, when a child reaches catechetical age, catechists assist them in their role. Therefore, the spiritual life of a catechist should be characterized by:

- love of God and the Catholic Church
- faithful practice of the Catholic faith
- personal prayer and dedication to the evangelizing mission of the Catholic Church

- missionary zeal by which they are fully convinced of the truth of the Catholic faith
- enthusiastic proclamation of the faith
- active participation in their local parish community
- faithful attendance at Sunday Eucharist
- devotion to Mary, the first disciple and model of catechists
- devotion to the Most Holy Eucharist, the source of nourishment for catechists.

MANUAL FOR INSTRUCTORS AND AIDES

Teachers and Aides in Kindergarten through Level 6 will receive the Sadlier series Instructor's Manual. In addition these levels will receive:

Level 2 (Reconciliation) Sacrament guide, student book and music CD from Sadlier.

Level 3 (First Eucharist) Sacrament guide, student book and music CD from Sadlier.

Level 6 (Confirmation) Sacrament guide and student book from Sadlier.

LEVEL BINDER

Every teacher will receive a binder that needs to be returned at the end of each year. Each binder will contain the following:

Middle section:

- Class Schedule – This schedule will inform you when you have class, holy days of obligation, and when the progress reports will be sent home. Parents are informed that this schedule can be found on the P.R.E.P. website.
- Catechist Schedule – It is very important for teachers and/or aides from each class to meet as a group periodically. If you cannot attend a scheduled meeting, you must make an appointment with the Coordinator to discuss the information that was given at the meeting.
- Mass Schedule – every class is scheduled to attend one Children's Liturgy Mass on the second Sunday of every month at the 10:30 Mass.
- Sacrament Schedule – Sacrament dates and important meetings pertaining to the sacraments will be listed on this schedule.
- Children's Rosary Schedule –The Children's Rosary is a prayer group composed of and led by children. Through the prayer of the Rosary, Our Lady will guide our young people and at the same time sanctify families and parishes. Levels 4, 5, and 6 will take part in the Rosary.
- IHM Essential Learnings in Religion – Faith formation flourishes when the family, parish community, and Catholic school/religious education program share the same visions and reinforce one another. This booklet used in conjunction with the Religion Guideline and classroom textbooks can help provide that unity of voice and vision.
- Scope and Sequence – The core curriculum for each level.

- Religion Guidelines - The Archdiocese of Philadelphia has developed these guidelines to assist you in your ministry. There are three different options of the Mid-Year and End of Year tests with the answer key. Make copies to use these tests.

Binder Pockets:

- Planning Sheets – these are to be used for planning your lesson each week.
- Conduct Referral – The conduct referral should be completed when you need to report a disciplinary incident to the child’s parent and also to help prevent a recurrence of that incident. Please make sure the Coordinator receives the blue copy before you give the conduct referral to the parent.
- Progress Reports – The program schedule indicates when the progress reports will be distributed. *Please complete and sign the teacher comment section of each Progress Report.* The Progress Reports and instructions on how to complete will be addressed at a staff meeting.
- Name Plates – for each child in your class

Left side of binder:

- Name badge – Staff members must wear their name badge to every class and P.R.E.P. event.
- Mandated Reporter – Under Pennsylvania law, any person, paid or unpaid, who works, volunteers and/or comes into direct contact with children in a program, activity or service is a mandated reporter and must immediately report suspicions of child abuse or neglect.
- Transportation by Catechist – Permission and Release Form for Transportation by a Catechist: This form must be returned to the office.
- Staff List – List of present staff members by level and session.
- Basic Catechetical Certification Policy – Please review the process provided by the Archdiocese.
- Teacher’s Attendance Sheet (gold) – It is very important to take attendance each week. On the first day of class if a child is not on your attendance sheet, please instruct the parent to report to the office. The Teacher’s Attendance Sheet must be returned to your level folder after every class. Class attendance for each child will be entered into the computer each week. It is the teacher’s responsibility to make sure the attendance sheet is returned, even if the aide takes attendance each week. The second semester Teacher’s Attendance Sheet needs to be returned with all class material at the end of the year. Please mark the child late only when he/she arrives 15 minutes late for class.
- Teacher’s Class List – This list provides you with the student’s name, grade and school, parent’s name, address, phone number and pertinent health information for each child in your class. This list will be given to you the first day of class.

- Family Handbook – please ask parents to read this handbook and review with their children. The handbook can be downloaded from the P.R.E.P. website.
- Substitute List – The substitutes are sent a letter informing them that a copy of the Instructor’s manual will be on the shelf in the classroom closet. The Teacher’s Attendance Sheet for the level they will be teaching or aiding will be in the level bin found in the Staff room. They are also given information for emergency closing. It is very important to inform the office of substitutes that will teach or aide in the classroom.
- Traditional Prayers – List of prayers provided by the Archdiocese
- This Week at P.R.E.P. – This will be sent by email the Thursday before class. If you are not receiving this, please inform the office. If you do not have an email address, a paper copy will be put in your level folder.
- The Copier – The copier is in the staff room.
- Level bin – The level bin will be in the staff room. Before going to class please check the level bin folder for important information from the office to give to your students. Take the attendance sheet from the level folder and return it to the folder after every class. **Do not take the level folder out of the bin.**

Right side of the binder:

- Welcome Letter – check name, phone # and email of Teacher and Aide
- Checklist for Meet and Greet Teacher – Parents will meet their child’s teacher and be given a syllabus or overview for the year. Beginning of the year paperwork is filled out at this time. Attendance of parents will be taken and counted toward perfect attendance for the year. Please use the checklist for the first day of class – email form attached.
- Carpooling and Permission for child’s picture to be used (pink) – **Every child must return this form to the Teacher after it is signed by the parent. Teachers, please make a copy for the office; teachers keep the pink form so this information is available for your reference about carpooling and permission for child’s picture to be used.**
- **KID TALK** – Opt Out Letter
Article 12 of the Charter for the Office for Child and Youth Protection calls for all dioceses to establish safe environment programs at all grade levels, both in P.R.E.P. and Parish Elementary Schools. The Archdiocese of Philadelphia provides a personal safety lesson for each level of P.R.E.P. and mandates that this lesson is taught during one session of the instructional year. These lessons are known as “Kid Talk, Child Abuse Prevention Lessons” and are posted at:
<https://childyouthprotection.org/index.php/protect-children/trainings/kidtalk-overview>

- Volunteer Opportunity– Hall Monitors are needed for each session. Please go over this with your parents and ask them to sign up to help. Their name will be put on a rotating schedule. They will not be asked to do this every week.
- Sample Parish Giving Email – emailed in September to all families. The email will provide each child’s class and room number.
- Mass Reporter – Each level will be given two steno books and Mass Reporter badges that are given to the student when he or she is scheduled to report at a Mass. **Do not leave these in the level bin.** There is a sign-up sheet for your use at the Meet and Greet. If you would like an electronic copy of the sign-up sheet in order to insert the dates, please email the office.
- Room Assignments – please locate your classroom, staff room and P.R.E.P. offices.
- Catechetical Sunday – The date is on the Catechist schedule. All catechists and aides will be acknowledged for their ministry at Mass.

FIRST DAY OF CLASS

Remember to wear your name badge to every class. Please give each parent their child’s folder and textbook. The students should bring their textbook and folder to class each week. **The white dot on the child’s folder represents the youngest in the program.**

CLASSROOM SUPPLIES

There will be a supply of paper, pencils, crayons, scissors, etc. in each of your classrooms. One shelf in the closet of the classroom has been reserved for P.R.E.P. supplies. If you need anything else, please notify the P.R.E.P. office. Any purchases made by staff for the Religious Education Program, need prior authorization from the Coordinator of the Program before purchasing and submitting your receipts for reimbursement.

ARRIVAL/DISMISSAL

It is very important that your students arrive no later than class start time and are picked up promptly at the end of class. At no time may the parents drive, park or stop along the curb in front of the Education Center. Upon arrival, parents will park their car and walk their child(ren) to class by entering the middle doors of the Education Center. Parents will stay with their child(ren) until the teacher and aide arrive in the classroom. At dismissal, parents and or guardians will wait in the lobby until they are released by the hall monitor to go to the classroom to pick up their child(ren). Parents will wait in the hallway until the teacher/aide opens the door of the classroom to signal the end of class. The teacher/aide will release the children one at a time to the parent/guardian. (See Carpooling on previous page)

TECHNOLOGY USAGE

There are computers and projectors in the classrooms. A user name and password will be given before you can use any technical equipment in the Education Center.

NO SNACKS

Consideration to food allergies prevents us from bringing snacks to class. If on special occasions snacks are brought in, prior discussions with all parents in your class must be done.

LIBRARY RESOURCE/CENTER

The Resource Center is located in the staff room on the first floor. The library has many teaching tools for you and your students. Please sign out Saint's kit, books, etc.

FIRE DRILL PROCEDURE

Catechists are responsible for checking the procedure for exiting the classroom in the event of an emergency, fire or drill. This procedure is posted in the front of each classroom. Catechists should walk students through this procedure at least twice during the program year so that they may become familiar with it. Please stress walking and no talking to help insure an orderly exit and reduce the possibility of injury.

SHARED SPACE

Catechists and participants are sharing the use of the classroom with the day students of St. Teresa of Calcutta School. It is important that catechists exercise extreme care and concern for the orderliness and property of the classrooms.

Desks and chairs are to be put in order after use. Windows are to be shut and locked. Wipe down classroom desks, if using glue, etc. After class, all sessions should leave the lights on and the doors open for the cleaning staff. Be sure to report any unusual conditions or any broken items to the Coordinator before departing.

If you have ongoing issues with your classroom, such as no available board space, or students' textbooks on top of the desks for example, please let the Coordinator know so the proper school faculty member can be informed.

PERSONNEL POLICIES

1. Catechists/volunteers are required to arrive at least 15 minutes prior to the beginning of the catechetical session. Catechetical sessions are to begin promptly at their appointed time.
2. If a Catechist/volunteer is unable to attend a catechetical session at any time due to illness or personal matters, he or she must email the P.R.E.P. Office:
 - At least one week in advance for prior commitments.
 - By 2:00 pm on Friday for the Sunday session or by 2pm Monday for the Monday session in the event of illness or unexpected emergency when possible.
3. Catechists are required to provide to the Substitute Teacher, the lesson plans and take home assignments for sessions that they will be unable to attend when advance knowledge of such an absence is foreseeable. In the event of an unforeseeable absence, the catechist is to provide the Coordinator with a basic outline of the lesson plan along with take home assignments via the phone, email, or fax.
4. It is not the duty or obligation of a catechist/volunteer to provide transportation to the program. Any catechist/volunteer that does provide transportation to children other than their own, does so at their own peril and that individual's insurance is solely applicable. Parents/guardians must also complete a Transportation Release Form and return to the Coordinator.

5. Catechists/volunteers are expected to dress and conduct themselves in a professional manner. As Christian witnesses, catechists are expected to uphold the teachings of the Catholic Church, not only during their catechetical sessions, but also in their everyday lives. Failure to do so may result in dismissal. Catechists should model Christian behavior and values.
6. Catechists/volunteers are not permitted to distribute any personal handouts or letters without the prior approval of the Coordinator. This includes, but is not limited to material relating to personal or religious causes. The only exception is with regard to assessments and Progress Reports.

SNOW EMERGENCY/ CLASS CANCELLATIONS



For emergency and snow closings check the Parish web site at www.stteresacalcutta.com under P.R.E.P.

INAPPROPRIATE METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

1. The following list contains methods that should not be used to contact a student by a catechist or volunteer. The list is by no means exhaustive and the catechist or volunteer should assume that other methods of communication similar to those listed below would also be deemed inappropriate.
 - a. Cell phone
 - b. Text messaging
 - c. Instant messaging
 - d. Twitter
 - e. Facebook
 - f. E-mailing using a personal e-mail account
 - g. Any social networking website
2. Use of such methods not only violates the program policies established for volunteers, but can also place the volunteer at greater risk for accusations of inappropriate behavior by students or their families.

RETURN CLASSROOM MATERIAL

On the Catechist schedule will be noted when to return classroom material. These items must be returned: Level binder, Teacher's manual, Teacher's Attendance Sheet, last page of Progress report, Permanent Record cards, Mass Reporter books, and name badges (teacher and aide) and sacramental material to the labeled boxes located in the P.R.E.P. office on the first floor of the Education Center.