

Religious Education Formation Handbook

Spirit and Light: A Catholic Collaborative for Living Faith

Overview

Welcome to the Children's Religious Education program at Spirit and Light Center, a collaborative of the Oak Park Catholic Community of Ascension and St. Edmund Parish and St. Catherine of Siena-St. Lucy and St. Giles Parish. This handbook has been developed to provide information regarding our program, procedures, and requirements. Please review the contents of this handbook with the students in your household and where applicable, your childcare provider.

Statements in this handbook are subject to amendment with or without notice. The Religious Education program will attempt to keep you informed of all changes as soon as practical, however, some changes might be made immediately due to unforeseen circumstances.

Mission Statement

Spirit and Light Center kindles the fire of faith in each person to bring Christ's presence to the world.

Admissions

Spirit and Light's Religious Education program does not discriminate based on sex, race, color, nationality, or ethnic origin in the administration of its policies, supplementary programs or any other program-based functions.

Absence

Always contact your child's Catechist or appropriate Program Coordinator to inform them of an absence. Participation in the program is an important part of your child's faith formation. **Chronic absence may result in the deferral of your child receiving the sacrament to the following year.**

Registration

Each program year, parents wishing to enroll their child in one of the Religious Education programs will be required to complete the online registration process for the upcoming year. This includes families currently enrolled in one of our programs. Paper copies of the registration form are available upon request.

Sacrament Preparation Fees & Program Tuition Fees

Tuition fees for a Religious Education program are charged on a per student basis with a maximum family amount. Tuition rates are set to cover materials, administration, and operation costs. If at any time a financial hardship develops, please contact the Religious Education Office. Anyone who volunteers as a Catechist or Catechist Aide will be eligible for a 50% discount on tuition fees. Families preparing to celebrate a Sacrament are required to pay a separate, additional fee that covers the expenses for the Sacramental Preparation program. Children preparing for a Sacrament must be enrolled in BOTH a Religious Education program and a Sacramental Preparation program.

Sacrament Eligibility

First Reconciliation / First Communion

- Baptism in the Catholic faith
- In 2nd Grade or above in 2023-2024
- Completed a full year of religious formation through a Catholic church program in the previous year and current year
- If the above requirements are met, the child will be eligible to celebrate First Communion in Spring 2024

Confirmation

- Baptism in the Catholic faith
- In 8th Grade or older in 2023-2024
- Completed a full year of religious formation through a Catholic church program in the previous year and current year
- Celebrated the Sacraments of First Communion and First Reconciliation
- If the above requirements are met, the child will be eligible to celebrate Confirmation in Spring 2024

Student Code of Conduct

Spirit and Light Religious Education programs strive to provide an environment that affords students the opportunity to explore, expand, and deepen their own spiritual growth as well as their knowledge of our Catholic faith. For this to occur, we have established the following student code of conduct:

Each student is expected to:

- Display appropriate conduct both in class (online or in-person) and when arriving or departing from the program
- Cooperate and participate with their fellow classmates during activities and discussions
- Be attentive by actively listening to their Catechist and classmates
- Show courtesy and respect to all
- Treat their classroom and the materials with care and respect

Should the student not honor the code of conduct the following actions will take place:

- First - Child will receive a verbal warning
- Second - Program Coordinator will call the parent
- Third – Program Coordinator will ask parent/guardian to be present in the classroom to assist their child

Communications

As part of our community-wide goal, the Religious Education Office is striving to be more environmentally sound by posting all program information on our respective parish websites located at: www.stgilesparish.org and www.ascensionoakpark.com.

In addition to descriptions of each of our collaborative Religious Education programs, information regarding class calendars, upcoming events, and parent information pages are also posted and updated each month. Parents will also find helpful links with information on faith formation opportunities for adults and children alike.

Flocknote Messaging, Electronic Mail & Text

The Religious Education Office sends the vast majority of our communications via the Flocknote messaging system, electronic mail, and text systems. Please be sure to adjust your SPAM filters to accept messages from our office to be received into your account. Please inform the office of the email address you check most often and notify us of any changes to your email address during the year.

Child Abuse and Neglect

The Illinois Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act requires Spirit and Light Religious Education staff to report any suspected cases of abuse or neglect of children enrolled in one of our programs. As required by the Archdiocese of Chicago, all parish staff, Religious Education staff, and adult volunteers who work with children must undergo a criminal background check and must also be VIRTUS compliant.

Health and Safety

To provide a safe and healthy environment for all our students and volunteers it is essential for the Religious Education Office to be notified of specific allergies, medical needs and learning challenges that your child may have.

Parents/guardians will complete the health and learning needs information sections during the registration process. While this information is confidential, it may be shared with the adults who have volunteered as Catechists and volunteers, only as needed, to assist in your child's formation experience.

Except in extraordinary circumstances that have been approved by the Director of Spirit and Light Center, no adult volunteer or staff person will maintain, supervise the taking of, or the administration of, any medications to students in our programs.

In the event of sudden illness or accidental injury, every attempt will be made to contact the parent of the student(s) involved. If the parents cannot be reached, the student's emergency medical release form containing the parent's instructions will be used.

If emergency treatment is required, the child will be taken to the nearest hospital by ambulance and the Religious Education staff will notify the child's doctor. An adult will accompany your child until the parent(s) can take over.

Parents will be given documents provided by Spirit and Light Center to guide them with educating their children about sexual abuse.

Deciding when to keep your child home due to illness can be difficult. However, children can enter more fully into the experience of religious formation if they are feeling their best. Please have your child stay home if your child does not feel well enough to participate comfortably in usual activities.

Adult Volunteers

All our Religious Education programs/events are staffed by adults who volunteer their time and talents for the benefit of children's faith development. By volunteering your time and talents in one of our Religious Education programs, you will be demonstrating to our children how important their faith development is to all the adults of our community.

Volunteering in one of these programs will not only be an example to our children of how to put your faith into action, but you will also be strengthening the Religious Education community by building relationships with other adults within the program and the community. *Anyone who volunteers as a Catechist or Catechist Aide will be eligible for a 50% discount on tuition fees.*

PLEASE NOTE: All adults who volunteer in a capacity that involves direct interaction with the children enrolled in our collaborative Religious Education programs, or any ministry of our respective parishes that serves children, are expected to complete:

- An online background check with the Archdiocese of Chicago,
- Uphold the Archdiocesan Code of Conduct for Adult Volunteers,
- Agree to the Department of Children and Family Services to conduct regular updates on your background check status
- Completed a one-time Mandated Reporter training
- Complete online VIRTUS training in addition to maintaining VIRTUS compliance throughout the year by responding to the monthly updates in your online VIRTUS account.

I have received, read and understand Spirit and Light's Religious Education Handbook.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____