

**Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Parish
Groton, CT 06340**

**Faith Formation Program
Parent Handbook**

A black silhouette of a person in profile, facing right, with their hands clasped in prayer. The silhouette is set against a white background.

*Come near to
God & he
will
come
near
to you.*

James 4:8

Table of Contents

General Program Information Page 2

Catholic Religious Education Overview Page 3

Mission Statement Page 4

Objectives Page 5

Goals Page 6

Sacramental Programs Page 7

Baptism..... Page 7

First Reconciliation..... Page 7-8

First Eucharist..... Page 8

Confirmation..... Pages 9-11

Attendance Policy Page 12

Code of Conduct - Discipline Page 13

Discipline Procedures Page 13

General Program Information

Catholic Religious Education Program Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Parish Groton, Connecticut



RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CLASSES

Sunday, 9:30 a.m. - 10:45 a.m.
Sept. - May

RCIA

Sunday, 9:30 - 10:30 a.m.

PRIEST

Rev. Dariusz Dudzik (860) 445-2905

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION STAFF

Marissa H. Mills, Director (860) 445-2905

CHURCH MAILING ADDRESS

Sacred Heart Parish
56 Sacred Heart Drive
CT 06340

Catholic Religious Education Overview

The Catholic Religious Education Program of Sacred Heart provides ministry for children from Kindergarten School (age 5) through High School. Our goal is to help the children discover Jesus in a personal way so they will grow up with His teachings. It is our desire that the training they receive here will be taken with them throughout their lives.

Children participate in a loving, nurturing, and age-appropriate environment while attending religious education. Our teaching endeavors to supplement the Catholic nurturing and teachings the child receives in the home environment.

Our curriculum at Sacred Heart Church is a comprehensive Catholic program that combines traditional Catholic artwork with a thorough doctrinal and scriptural presentation of basic Catholic teachings. The series focuses on what we believe (creed), what we do (commandments), the means to our end (sacraments and liturgy), and what we hope for (prayer and Scripture). Eight grade-level themes include the Trinity, Sacraments, Salvation, Creed, Ten Commandments, Grace, Church History, and the structure of the church. Children also learn by observation and modeling; therefore, each classroom is staffed by qualified volunteers who are committed to the spiritual development of your child. Let us help you and your child discover the difference the love of Jesus can make.

Mission Statement

To nurture the Catholic faith development of children of the Sacred Heart Roman Catholic community, encouraging them to grow in their knowledge and love of God, by providing trained and dedicated educators and staff, being supported by the faith life of the parish community.

* * * * *

For as long as we can remember, Church leaders have been sending us an insistent message: **Parents are the primary religious educators of their children.**

Even before Vatican II, the various documents on Christian Education issued by Rome had said it, and more recently, the Bishops of our own country put it this way:

“Parents are the first and foremost catechists of their children. They catechize informally, but powerfully by example and instruction. They communicate values and attitudes by showing love for Christ and His Church and for each other, by reverently receiving the Eucharist and living in its spirit and by fostering justice and love in all their relationships. Their active involvement in the parish, their readiness to seek opportunities to serve others, and their practice of frequent and spontaneous prayer, all make meaningful their professions of belief. Parents nurture faith in their children by showing them the richness and beauty of lived faith.”

-- (U.S. National Catechetical Directory, Sharing the Light of Faith)

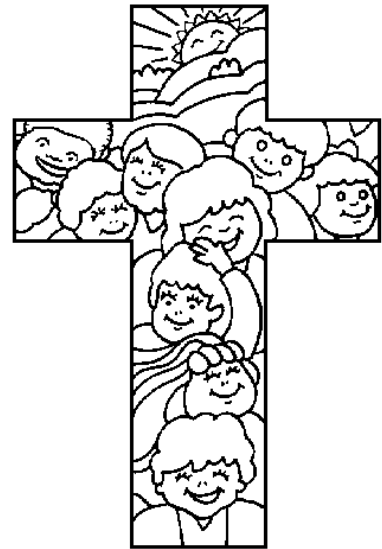
Responding to the challenge of this teaching, our Religious Education Program recognizes that parents are indeed the primary religious educators. It is through parents, together with, and supported by other members of the faith community, that the Gospel of Jesus is proclaimed and celebrated.



Our Beliefs

We believe ...

- Children are a gift from God and should be handled with love and care.
- Children are important in the kingdom of God and that Christ died to redeem children from their sin.
- Christ has called children to follow him and children can be equipped to serve Christ and others.
- Children deserve a safe, positive, nurturing and age appropriate learning environment that is free of fear, pressure to “grow up”, or prejudice.
- That ministry is not just “to” children but “with” children. We learn from children as we teach them.
- That God has appointed parents as the primary religious instructors of their children and the church’s role is to assist in the cooperative effort of that task.
- Successful ministry is the shared responsibility of children, ministry staff and volunteers, parents and the church body.
- Positive self-esteem promotes both personal growth and growth in a relationship with God.
- Ministry should be creative, innovative and in touch with the children and families of our community.



Our Goals

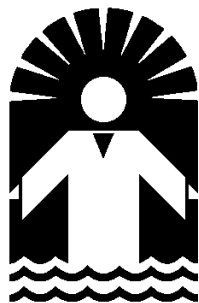
Our Goals Are:

- To provide a safe, secure, loving environment for children to participate in and where parents feel comfortable leaving their child.
- To help children feel a warm sense of belonging to their church family and to insure each child feels welcomed and wanted.
- For each child to know God is real and that a personal relationship with Him gives meaning to life.
- To aid each child in knowing Jesus Christ and developing a dynamic relationship with Him.
- To help each child develop a lifestyle that is built on his/her relationship with Jesus Christ.
- To help each child understand that God's Word (the Bible) is relevant and growth in Bible knowledge results in positive changes in attitudes, action and life-style.
- To provide children the opportunity and direction to participate in ministry.
- To support the family in their responsibility for the spiritual nurture and growth of their child.

Sacramental Programs

Every sacrament is a gift from God. To realize the value of each gift, it is necessary that the community reflect and prepare itself to celebrate each sacrament. It is our hope that the following policies will help us all -- catechists, parents and children -- become more aware that we are truly a sacramental people.

BAPTISM



The sacrament through which an individual is welcomed into the Catholic community.

Most children entering school or religious education have been baptized as infants. It is becoming increasingly more common however, to meet school age children who are either unbaptized, or baptized but uncatechized. Our concern is that the catechetical formation of these children will parallel as closely as possible to that of their peers who have already received the sacraments. Their eventual reception into the community will be planned with the parish priests and the Director of Religious education.

FIRST RECONCILIATION

“Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God’s mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer labors for their conversion.”
(Catechism #1422)



In general, a child is eligible for First Reconciliation if:

- a parent supervises the preparation process;
- the child has participated in “formal” Religious Education programs for one year before the year of sacramental preparation;
- the child is able to distinguish right from wrong.

Parent Requirements

1. First Reconciliation Parent Meeting: *Please refer to Faith Formation Calendar for Fall date.*

In addition, the following requirements have been established to properly prepare students:

- a) **Baptism Certificate:** A Baptismal certificate is required for all children receiving Eucharist and Reconciliation for the first time.
- b) **Attendance:** Please see Attendance Policy.

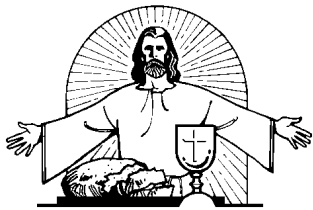
c) **Prayers:** Throughout the year, the following prayers will be required to prepare for the Sacraments. Parents are responsible for teaching their children these prayers. Catechists will provide only a review prior to reception of sacraments. If there are additional questions, please consult the Director of Religious Education.

1. Sign of the Cross
2. The Lord's Prayer
3. The Hail Mary
4. Glory to the Father
5. Act of Contrition

d) **Additional Milestones:** The following goals have been set as important milestones for the children:

1. Know Jesus
2. Forgiveness
3. The Ten Commandments
4. Sin
5. Examination of Conscience
6. Reconciliation
7. The Last Supper

FIRST EUCHARIST



The central sacrament of the Catholic community through which God gives us the greatest sign of his love; his abiding presence under the ordinary forms of bread and wine. In brief, the Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith: "Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking." (Catechism #1327)

In general, a child is eligible for First Eucharist if:

- they meet the same requirements as given for First Reconciliation (please see previous page);
- they have received First Reconciliation 3-4 months prior to receiving First Eucharist;
- they regularly attend Mass with parents and can participate in basic parts of the Mass.

Parent Requirements

1. First Communion Family Meeting, *please refer to the Faith Formation Calendar for Feb/ March date.*

CONFIRMATION

The sacrament of Confirmation is the completion of baptismal grace. For “by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed.” (Catechism #1285).



Confirmation at Sacred Heart Church is approximately a one year program, approximately 16 sessions that runs congruent with the school calendar. We currently offer the program on a bi-annual basis. The Confirmation Program is a time of investigation, reflection, and formation. Candidates are asked to participate in this process and then decide for themselves if they wish to request the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation. At no time can candidates be forced or coerced into the Sacrament—one’s response to God’s call must be free. At the end of this process, the pastor and his representatives will assess the eligibility and proper disposition of the candidates for reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation.

One important aspect of the sacrament of Confirmation is that it is a choice, made freely, by the candidate. As an infant, the parents and Godparents spoke on behalf of the new member of the family of God. Now, the candidate must speak freely, and decisively, for themselves.

Sacred Heart follows the *Oneight* Confirmation Series. This program offers a series of sessions based on creative and experiential catechetical methods based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

A candidate for reception of Confirmation meets these requirements:

- Enrolled in High School
- Must have received the sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist and Reconciliation before receiving Confirmation;
- Select a sponsor at the beginning of the first year, who will journey with them through this process, participating in designated formation sessions.
- Full participation in the schedule of classes, retreats and activities.

Preparation Process

Confirmation is a long term process with many and varied facets. It includes learning about one’s faith, participating in service opportunities, experiencing a retreat, sharing faith in small and large group interaction, and dialogue with parents and sponsor to name a few. In order to accomplish this there are several requirements of the program.

Confirmation Program Requirements:

Prior to Confirmation Preparation, each candidate must have had one year of formal Religious Education in the year immediately preceding.

1. Belief – Candidates must profess belief and have basic understanding of God, the Trinity, the Eucharist, and the teachings of the Catholic Church professed in the Creed.

2. Respect– Candidates must respect themselves and others by their actions, language, and dress (no short shorts/skirts, exposed undergarments, spaghetti straps, midriffs exposed, etc.)

3. Mass Attendance – Candidates must attend Mass on all Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. “...the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation...Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin.” CCC 2181

4. Program Attendance – No more than three absences will be allowed. Missed Confirmation sessions will require a written makeup assignment completed by the due date listed on the assignment.

5. Reconciliation – Candidates must celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once during the course of the Confirmation Program.

6. Retreat – Candidates must attend the Confirmation Retreat. If there is a serious scheduling conflict, please contact the Confirmation Director.

7. Ministry Hours of Service – A minimum of 20 hours of service within the ministries of the church will be expected from each candidate. Each candidate will be expected to update the catechist’s records each week with service hours. A list of parish ministries and suggested community service projects will be provided.

8. Saint Report - Candidates must write a 1-2 page report on the Saint they chose for their Confirmation name. The report should include a brief history about the Saint and the reason why that Saint was chosen. Detailed information can be found in their Confirmation Handbook

9. Documents – Candidates must complete and submit the following documents: Candidate Covenant, Confirmation Candidate Information Form (CCIF), Baptismal Certificate if not baptized at Sacred Heart, Sponsor Validation if sponsor is not a member of Sacred Heart Parish.

10. Letters– Candidates must write a letter to the Bishop requesting the Sacrament of Confirmation. Sponsors must write a recommendation letter to the Confirmation Director concerning their Candidate.

11. Parish celebration of Confirmation: This is celebrated within the context of the Eucharistic Liturgy. We anticipate Confirmation to take place in mid-November to early December at Sacred Heart Parish.



Practical Details

Choosing a Sponsor

When choosing a sponsor for Confirmation, please keep in mind the following requirements:

- 1.) Sponsors must be confirmed members of the Catholic faith.
- 2.) Sponsors can be no younger than 16 years of age.
- 3.) Sponsors must be "practicing Catholics" and active members of their parish (each sponsor is asked to get a letter of validation from their pastor or parish staff confirming that they are active members of their faith community. This is standard operating procedure in most parishes and a simple form letter can be generated and sent.)
- 4.) Sponsors should be someone who is able to dialogue regularly (and meet, ideally) with the candidate throughout the preparation process.
- 5.) As per canon law requirements, a parent cannot be a sponsor for a candidate.
- 6.) The individual be a practicing Catholic, leading a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken.

Photos

A backdrop will be available for families to take photos with the sponsor and candidate. After the Confirmation Mass, the Bishop (or designee) and/or Pastor are often available for photos with candidates.

Certificates

Confirmation Certificates are prepared after Confirmation reception and will be available at the Reception.

Attendance Policy

It is the responsibility of the parents to ensure regular attendance and timeliness of each student. Regular attendance of weekly religious education classes is critical in your child's faith development and is assumed once you have made the commitment to this program.

The Director of Religious education must be notified directly about any absence of your child(ren) from the program. The individual classroom catechists are not responsible for administrative record keeping.

If a child has more than 3 absences from religious education, parents will be called for a conference with the director of religious education /priest to discuss future participation in the program. An absence or three (3) or more classes may result in a repeat of the grade level class and/ or a meeting with the Parish priest.

Tardiness

Tardiness, although the child is ultimately in attendance, is disruptive to class continuity and distracting for both the educator and students who have already begun the week's lesson. Students who arrive after the start of class are considered tardy. Excessive tardiness will be brought to the parents' attention and cannot be allowed to continue.

Code of Conduct - Discipline

The Religious Education Program is one of Catholic studies and faith development. It is expected that parents, students, administrators, educators and staff cooperate in the development process.

Students are expected to:

- ◆ bring their assigned books and required materials to each class session;
- ◆ arrive on time for class;
- ◆ attend each full class session;
- ◆ respect the authority of the catechists and other religious education personnel;
- ◆ respect the thoughts and feelings of other students in each class;
- ◆ actively take part in class discussion and activities;
- ◆ refrain from chewing gum or eating during class;
- ◆ the use of cell phones/ electronic devices will not be allowed in class.

Any student who disrupts a class and fails to respond to the catechist's directives may be asked to leave the class. (See Discipline Procedures)

Discipline Procedures

Our goal is to maintain an atmosphere in which students can form a learning community and hear the Gospel message. To ensure such an atmosphere, the following disciplinary procedures have been established:

- 1) When minor infractions or behavior problems occur, the catechist will attempt to correct the situation directly with the student.
- 2) If the student is unable to maintain control of his/her behavior in class, the child will be brought to the director, who will contact the parents. They will be expected to pick the child up.
- 3) If a student is asked to leave class a second time during the year, the parents will be called and asked to take the student home. When this occurs, a conference will be scheduled involving the parents, child, catechist and director. The student will not be permitted to return to class until the problem has been resolved and an agreement reached about how the child will behave and make up missed work.
- 4) In extreme cases, a student may be dismissed from the program if he/she fails to make a sincere effort to improve.