

**Holy Innocents Church
Parish Religious Education Program
Parent Handbook
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PARENT HANDBOOK

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GDC: General Directory for Catechesis

CT: Catechesis Tredendae

NCD: National Catechetical Directory

Mission Statement

We, at the parish of Holy Innocents, look upon religion as the education of a total parish experience. This involves not just the child, but also parents, families, catechists and priests from our parish community of faith. We believe that religious education is getting to know Jesus and learning what is expected of one who chooses to follow Him in the Catholic tradition. Our program reflects an integral learning experience, doctrine, biblical studies, liturgy, community building and service, and other dimensions of vibrant church life. Through the light of Faith, we hope to develop in those entrusted to our care, a deeper relationship with God.

I. Programs

Our Religious education Program offers instructions to students in first through eighth grade. It offers an eight year course of study in which all Catholic children attending public school are expected to participate. The Religious Education Program offers an ongoing, continuing development of the Christian personality. This program is not a convenience for the reception of the three sacraments of Confirmation, Eucharist and Penance. Sacraments are not isolated events, but rather an integral part of Christian life. Our aim is to provide a loving and caring Christian atmosphere in which our parish youth can grow in sound Christ like attitudes and values.

A. Home Study / Family Catechesis

A family catechetical program is one in which the children of the family are instructed in the faith at home by their own parents according to the rules of the Archdiocese. This is not offered as an option, but rather as a necessity, where every other means of attending class has been exhausted.

“Family catechesis precedes, accompanies and enriches all forms of catechesis.”

GDC 226

Education in faith by parents, which should begin from the children’s tenderest age, is already being given when the members of a family help each other to grow in faith through the witness of their Christian lives, a witness that is often without words, but which perseveres throughout a day to day life, lived in accordance with the Gospel.
CT 68

A catechetical program may offer a family centered program as an option under the direction of the D/CRE *using the Archdiocesan Guidelines*.

B. Homework and Testing

The main objective of the Religious Education program is to foster the love of God and neighbor. However, there should be some assurance as to a level of knowledge and understanding of our Catholic faith, and its practices. Tests and quizzes are some of the assessment tools used. Please inform the D/CRE of any special needs so each child may be accommodated, according to their learning ability.

Progress reports will be available twice a year: at mid-year and at the end of the Program year.

If a child does not fulfill the grade level requirements according to the Archdiocesan Guidelines, a meeting will be arranged with the parents to discuss the situation. Advancement is not automatic.

C. Special Needs

Holy Innocents Religious Education strives to meet the spiritual needs of all persons. Please inform the D/CRE of any special needs and we will make efforts to accommodate them. At times, we may need the parent or family to assist us. Children will be placed in the most appropriate setting our resources will allow.

D. Reverence and Respect

Children meet and develop a relationship with Jesus by attending Mass and partaking in the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist – to their own ability. Class is connected to Mass when we talk about the weekly Liturgy or the Liturgy in general. Through attending Mass, the children should develop an understanding that the Church is a place where God dwells. Jesus is present in the Eucharist, reserved in the Tabernacle. Their actions while in the church should be guided by Reverence.

Respect, as Jesus taught us, is extended to friends, peers, classmates, adults and all those who are here to help the child expand their awareness of God in their lives while learning about Church teachings. Respect of the physical building is expected also.

E. Family Catechesis / G. I. F. T.

Cardinal Dolan is very excited about our Faith-filled, multigenerational Family Catechesis. At Holy Innocents, we refer to this event as **G. I. F. T. – Growing In Faith Together**. Each Family attends one G.I.F.T. event each year. All Family members – from the oldest to youngest are Welcomed and encouraged to attend. The Family experiences their Faith as a unit and as part of a greater Parish Family.

II. Safe Environment

The mission of the Archdiocese's "Safe Environment Program" is to insure the safety of children and young people who have been entrusted to our care in our parishes, schools, religious education classes, and other programs. Information about the Safe Environment Program in the Archdiocese of New York can be found at <http://archny.org/safe-environment-program>

Every Child participates in a Safe Environment presentation appropriate for their age and grade level.

All Employees and Volunteers will submit to a background check (periodically rechecked) and a Safe Environment Training Program.

III. Sacraments

Christian initiation is celebrated in Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. Through these visible actions a young person is incorporated into the church and shares its mission in the world. Full initiation into the Church occurs in stages.

Sacramental catechesis has traditionally been of two kinds: preparation for the initial celebration of the Sacraments and continued enrichment following their first reception. Requirements for the reception of First Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Confirmation are determined by Canon Law:

1. Age of reason
2. Proper knowledge of sacraments
3. Emotional and spiritual preparation
4. Approval by parent, pastor, catechist, D/CRE

In as much as the Sacraments require lifelong participation and study, at least two years of formal religious education are essential for the reception of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist.

Meetings are scheduled to help parents/students grow in their understanding and appreciation of these Sacraments. The required meetings will enable parents to participate in the sacramental preparation of their children.

A. Reconciliation

Jesus began his work on earth by calling people to repentance and faith: “Reform your lives and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:15). The sacrament of Reconciliation continues his work of forgiving and reconciling.

Parents should be involved in the preparation of children for this sacrament. Preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation starts at the second grade level. It is a joint effort of the Parents, the Catechists, and the Coordinator of Religious Education.

Catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to precede First Communion and must be kept distinct by a clear separation. The Sacrament of Reconciliation normally should be celebrated prior to the reception of First Communion. NCD 126

B. Eucharist (Holy Communion)

“For the administration of the most Holy Eucharist to children, it is required that they have sufficient knowledge and careful preparation so as to understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity, and can receive the Body of the Lord with faith and devotion.”

Canon 913

“It is primarily the duty of parents and of those who take their place, as it is the duty of the parish priest, to ensure that children have reached the age of reason are properly prepared.”

Canon 914

C. Confirmation

As a Sacrament of Initiation, Confirmation is intimately related to Baptism and the Eucharist. Confirmation renews and strengthens the Christian’s Baptismal call to bear witness to Christ before the world and work eagerly for the building up of his body.

NCD 118

As primary educators of their children, parents along with sponsors are to be intimately involved in the catechesis for Confirmation. Eight (8) years in Religious Study are essential. Also, Confirmation meetings will provide necessary information regarding the sponsors, the Confirmation name, and all requirements that need to be met.

Sponsor:

Each child to be confirmed should have an individual Sponsor. It is very fitting that the Sponsor at Confirmation be the same Sponsor one had at Baptism. Requirements for Sponsors are the same as those for Baptism. *Canons 893,874*

All sponsors must present a written statement from the Pastor of his/her parish affirming that he/she is qualified to be a Confirmation Sponsor. The Sponsor will be invited and encouraged to participate in some activities with the Confirmation Candidate.

Formation programs of Catechesis for Confirmation may include, but are not limited to:

a period of instruction

Service

Retreat experience (Required prior to the Sacrament)

Interview

Letter of Request

Patron Saint report

Mass of Introduction

Activities designed to assist the child, parent, Godparent and/or Sponsor to understand the Sacrament and their role

IV. Admissions, Procedures and Placement

A. Registration

Registration dates and times are published in the parish bulletin and on the parish web site – www.hiparish.org When a family is registering a child for the first time, we encourage them to register in the parish if they have not already done so.

Initial Registration

A parent must personally come to the Religious Education office, and bring a copy of the child's baptismal certificate. There often is a meeting for parents who have enrolled a child for the first time. Parents are always encouraged to meet their Child's Catechist.

Re-registration

Re-registrations is required for all grades. Method will be posted. If there is an opportunity for younger children to remain on the same day, it will be communicated prior to and during registration. It is necessary to complete the Student Information Record and Emergency Contact Form *annually*.

Transfers

Any child, transferring from another parish, must have their Permanent Record Card and a copy of their Baptismal Certificate, and certificates of any other Sacraments received, presented to the Religious Education office at the time of registration.

Registration Fees:

Are noted on the Registration Form.

B. Class Placement

Parish religious education programs are preparation for life; the students are expected to attend religious education *continuously* from level one through eighth grade.

In order to be eligible to receive First Communion a student must complete the First and Second Grades or two full years of the Religious Education Program.

Any child older than the first grade level who enters the program without previous formal religious education must complete the first and second grade curriculum to receive First Communion. The child will only be placed in the appropriate grade level after completing the curriculum of the grade(s) missed and demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the material.

Any child who drops out of the religious education program after receiving First Communion will, if reentering the program, re-enter at the grade level left.

C. Attendance and Absences

Students are expected to attend class *every* scheduled week, and be *on time*. If a student arrives late for class, he/she must report to the office before going to class.

The Religious Education office must be notified when a student is absent explaining the reason for the absence. The office will call the home whenever possible if a child has been marked absent and we have not heard from a parent.

After excessive lateness and/or absences and/or early dismissals, the D/CRE will contact the parents to discuss the situation and what needs to happen for successful completion of studies for that grade level. Our policy at Holy Innocents is that no more than four (4) absences are permitted in a given school year. After that, make-up classes are required. Also, any child arriving late, combined with absences may require a make-up class.

D. Cancellations / Closings

If sessions are canceled due to an emergency, listen to radio station WHUD or watch News Channel 12. Both have web sites and will post our closing. Also, WHUD has a voluntary sign-up and will text when they announce a closing. <http://whudstore.hipcricket.com/default.asp> When public schools do not open due to weather conditions, we will be closed also. If the public schools close or early dismiss during the day, watch for information as we may hold classes. Every effort is made to post a notice of closing on: the web site, 'Out of Office' for e-mails, update of the Burbio calendar, and if possible, the message on the Religious Education phone line.

E. Custodial Rights of Parents

The D/CRE should be informed in writing by the custodial parent of the rights of the non-custodial parent as these pertain to the child's participation in the program, as well as release from the program.

V. Dismissal from Building

At the end of the catechetical session children in 1st, 2nd, 3rd Grade are dismissed to the care of the parent or designated parent substitute. If a child is to be dismissed in the care of only certain people, it must be in writing.

If an individual student needs to be dismissed early, a written request or a phone call must be given to the D/CRE (not the Catechist or an Assistant) and presented prior to the scheduled class. This request should include:

- The name of the person picking up the child,
- The designated date and time,
- The reason,
- The signature of the parent.

The person removing the child from class must sign a release form in the office. Early dismissals, combined with late arrivals and absences may require a make-up class. If a parent needs to remove a child during class time, the parent should call the office, someone will find the child, bring them to the office and when the parent arrives, the parent will sign out the child. The parent and child should not be communicating while the child is in class or participating in an activity or event.

VI. Discipline and Dismissal of Student

The Religious Education sessions take place in an atmosphere of learning within a Christian setting. Each student is expected to be respectful of the Catechist, his/her fellow students, and parish property. The Catechist will handle normal discipline problems.

Students may be removed from the group session when:

- a) It is believed that the student would benefit significantly from an individual or smaller group situation;
- b) The student's behavior is seriously inhibiting the learning of others in the group;
- c) Temporary removal is used as a disciplinary measure for serious and persistent disruptive behavior.

When possible, the Religious Education Office will consult the Catechist, student and family before removing a student from class; however, the Religious Education Office reserves the right to make the final decision.

If, in an extreme case, the D/CRE finds it necessary to remove a student from the program entirely, the final decision must be approved by the Pastor.

VII. Cellphones and electronic devices

Cellphones should be used to let parents know a child has arrived in the building prior to class and/or they are ready to be picked up. When a session begins, all cell phones and electronic equipment should be disabled. If a child is using a device, it may be taken from them and returned to the parent.

During class time, all cellphones and electronic devices should be disabled and stored. They are not to be used during break, in the washrooms, or at any time. If a child is using a cell phone or electronic device, it may be taken away and at the Director/Coordinator's discretion it may be held until a Parent retrieves it.

If a parent needs to remove a child during class time, the parent should call the

office, someone will find the child, bring them to the office and when the parent arrives, the parent will sign out the child. The parent and child should not be communicating while the child is in class or participating in an activity or event.

VIII. Visitors

No unauthorized persons are allowed in the area where Catechetical sessions are taking place. Parents and visitors must go directly to the Religious Education Office or designated areas.

IX. Restrooms

Adults are to use restrooms in Social Hall when children are in the building before, during, and after class. No adult should be in the restroom with a child unless that child is their own and only with their own children. Restrooms are also a convenience. When classes are in session, the restrooms should not be a meeting place for children or a place to use cellphones or electronic devices.

X. Notices, Announcements, and Reminders

Beginning in September 2010, we started Going Green. In an attempt to reduce the amount of paper used, notices, announcements, and/or reminders of meetings, events, or things of interest to the parents, as possible, will be communicated through:

- Announced before Mass
- Bulletin
- Rel Ed Calendar
- E-mail
- WEB Site (when it is available)
- Posted notices in the Religious Education space
- Flyers to be brought home by the children
- At times – mailings through the U.S. Post Office

XI. Safe Environment Presentations

Every child will receive a Safe Environment Presentation appropriate for their grade level. Lesson plans for each presentation will be available to parents. Parents may choose an opt-out by signing a form that states they will provide the Safe Environment instruction, with their child, at home. Parents are always welcome to join their child at the Safe Environment presentation.

XII. Parish WEB site including Religious Education

The building/populating of the web site continues. Eventually Parishioners can expect to find information such as:

- Who We Are – overview of the Rel Ed Program at Holy Innocents
- Calendar of event and days sessions meet
- Sacramental information including forms
- Volunteer opportunities and forms
- Safe Environment Procedures and Policies

Coming events
Parent Handbook
Registration information including Forms
Grade Level requirements