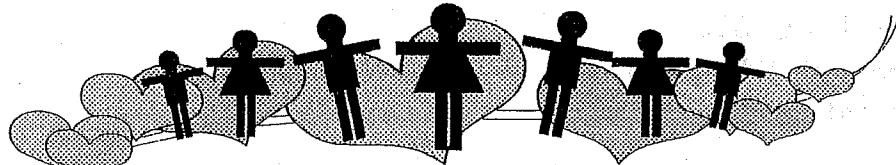


St. James the Greater

St. Thomas the Apostle



**Put my words
in your children's hearts**

Religious Education Program Handbook

The Parish Communities of
St. James the Greater & St. Thomas the Apostle

Msgr. James Gacquin Youth & Religious Education Center Office:
122 County Route 645 (Layton-Hainesville Rd.)
Sandyston, NJ 07826
Telephone: 973-948-7004
Fax: 973-948-7007

St. James the Greater & St. Thomas the Apostle Parish Office:
210 Route 206 North
Sandyston, NJ 07826
Telephone: 973-948-2296
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Pastoral Staff:

Rev. Wayne Varga, Pastor
Mr. Wayne vonDoehren, Deacon
Mrs. Patricia Hope, Pastoral Associate
Mrs. Mary Flexer, Coordinator of Religious Education

Support Staff:

Mrs. Rosemarie Briegel, Secretary
Mrs. Lori Coss, Housekeeping

Almighty God, you have given Saint James the Greater
and St. Thomas the Apostle to us as our patrons.
They left all to follow you and become your apostles.
Inspire us with their zeal and their courage.
May we, like St. James and St. Thomas,
always seek to hear the Lord's voice and follow Him.
Amen.

St. James the Greater ~ St. Thomas the Apostle Religious Education Program

Statement of Philosophy

The Religious Education Program at St. James the Greater and St. Thomas the Apostle believes that God, in His great love, graces our life with the gift of faith. We also believe that our faith is to be celebrated and treated as the sacred gift that it is.

Our endeavor is to work with parents in assisting them to fulfill their primary obligation of educating their children in the Catholic faith and to encourage the children to have an intimate relationship with Christ and a living faith marked by active participation in the life of the Church.

Since the family is the first place where faith is lived and learned, we are happy to assist you in the task of laying a solid foundation, encouraging spiritual growth, fostering discipleship, and guiding your children to develop a loving, life-long relationship with God. This can only be accomplished when each family places Jesus Christ and His teachings at the center of their lives through Saturday evening or Sunday Liturgy, family prayer, and the daily living of the Gospel values. This is a lifestyle that is to be witnessed every day by what we say and what we do at home, at work, at school, and at play. We can, however, only support and reinforce that which is practiced and lived at home.

We look forward to genuine cooperation with you in communicating Catholic Christian values to your children. The pastoral staff and the volunteer catechetical ministers are always available to both children and parents. Together, with the family, we form a partnership, in that we can draw from Sacred Scripture and Church teachings to support each other in the awesome responsibility and privilege of forming children and young teens to walk on the path of faith throughout their lifetime.

~ Living a Catholic Christian Life ~

Mass Attendance

An integral part of our Religious Education Program is that our students attend Mass on Saturday evenings or Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation and participate fully in the sacramental life of the Church. The learning and sharing in the class can be truly effective only when one meets the Lord sacramentally at the altar.

Children's Liturgy of the Word (CLOW)

CLOW is part of the 9:30AM Sunday Liturgy at St. Thomas the Apostle on the first and third Sundays of each month (September - April). After the Introductory Rites, the children proceed to their sacred space (the Father Lewis Center) for the Liturgy of the Word. There, they hear the Word of God proclaimed especially for them. The children then participate in the reflection after the readings, thereby making the readings their own by personalizing them to their own lives. At the conclusion of the Liturgy of the Word, the children return to the Church proper for the Liturgy of the Eucharist. We hope that all children will take advantage of this special opportunity to hear the Word of God proclaimed for them at their level and to celebrate God's Word with joy.

Role of the Parents

The parents have the primary and sacred responsibility to educate their children in the Catholic faith. It is vital to the child's growth and development in the Catholic faith that the parents live the life of faith at home. The effectiveness of the parish program depends upon this. It is evident that the values of the parents become the values of the children. Children may receive "mixed messages" when what is taught in their religious education class is not experienced by the child in their home.

The Coordinator should be informed by the custodial parent of the rights of the non-custodial parent as these may pertain to the child's active participation in the parish program.

Role of the Students

Regular attendance at Mass and lovingly receiving Holy Eucharist, frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and living a life that reflects the values and teachings of Jesus Christ all contribute to the student's spirituality.

The religious commitment for children in our program includes:

- ❖ Joyful participation in the Eucharistic Celebration of the Mass on all Saturday evenings or Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.
- ❖ Experiencing the Lord's mercy and forgiveness by receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation often.
- ❖ Following the guidelines that teach us to love God and neighbor as expressed in the Ten Commandments, The Beatitudes, The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, and the Laws of the Church.

The academic commitment for children in our program includes:

- ❖ Weekly attendance at Religious Education classes.
- ❖ Arriving at class on time and with textbook, folder, pen or pencil, notebook and Bible (if needed).
- ❖ Proper preparation for class instruction, including completion of homework or other assignments.
- ❖ Participation in class discussions and activities.
- ❖ Doing the very best work possible.

The Role of the CRE and the Catechists

The Coordinator of Religious Education is delegated by the Pastor to be responsible for the development, implementation, and administration of the parish catechetical program in accordance with the Guidelines of the Diocese of Paterson.

The primary mission of the catechist is to echo God's Word and communicate His love to those entrusted to their care by proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ. They achieve this by helping students grow in their personal faith and spirituality, initiate them into the faith community and its life, worship, symbols, and practices, and pass on the teachings and values of the Catholic Church. Catechists are also expected to attend formation sessions leading toward certification and personal fulfillment.

~ Programs ~

Parish-based Catechesis

To the best of our God-given ability, we will provide a safe environment and establish a Christian atmosphere conducive for the religious education of our children. We will provide a program involving weekly classes, grade-level retreat opportunities, a summer Vacation Bible School program, and the preparation and reception of the sacraments. We also encourage active participation in traditional activities such as the Praying of the Rosary, the Christmas Pageant, Advent and Lenten Services, the Stations of the Cross, and May Crowning.

Curriculum

The curriculum used in our program is Loyola Press' *Christ Our Life* series, which provides catechesis in Sacred Scripture, Commandments, Sacraments, Liturgy, Prayers, and Creed. Throughout each lesson, children and parents can more easily relate Catholic doctrine and beliefs, Sacred Tradition, and their faith to their everyday lives.

Retreats

All children in grade 2 through 8 are offered the opportunity of a retreat experience. These daytime retreats usually take place at the Sacred Heart Center in Newton under the direction of the Salesian Sisters. It is expected that all students actively participate in their yearly retreat.

Vacation Bible School

A Catholic VBS is offered to children who are four-year old pre-schoolers through sixth graders. Through Scripture, games, crafts, and snacks, the children come to learn and experience the love of God outside of the classroom setting. This program usually takes place the last week of June.

Sacramental Preparation

Christian Initiation is celebrated in Baptism, Holy Eucharist, and Confirmation. Through these sacraments and their visible actions, young Catholics are incorporated into the Church and share its mission in the world.

❖ Reconciliation and First Holy Eucharist

Parents are required to attend the orientation and formation sessions during the preparation period to help prepare and familiarize them with the program. This shows your active commitment and also helps to answer any questions concerning the theology or celebration of the sacraments. Children will have attended and successfully completed two years of preparation to receive these sacraments. All children will be required to attend both the Reconciliation and First Eucharist Retreats. Weekly participation at Mass is also essential for the child's readiness for the sacraments.

❖ Confirmation

Parents are required to attend the orientation and formation sessions during the preparation period to help prepare and familiarize them with the program. This shows your active commitment and also helps to answer any questions concerning the theology or celebration of the sacraments. To be eligible to enter the program, candidates will have attended and successfully completed grades 1 through 8. Candidates will have attended and successfully completed two years of preparation to receive this sacrament. Weekly participation at Mass is also essential for the candidate's readiness for the sacrament.

Diocesan guidelines for each of the sacraments are available in the Religious Education/Youth Ministry Office. Baptismal certificates and if necessary, proof of prior religious education, must be on file before the reception of any sacraments and must be included with all new registrations.

~ Admission and Registration ~

Enrollment

Our religious education program offers instruction to children in grade 1 through grade 10. To enroll children in the program, families must be registered and participating members of St. James the Greater or St. Thomas the Apostle parishes. Registration takes place over the summer months. All returning families are mailed re-registration information and new families are invited to contact the Religious Education office through bulletin announcements.

Tuition and Fees

Tuition fees are used for textbooks, supplies, catechist formation, hospitality, and resource materials. The balance of the religious education budget is subsidized by the parishes.

A registration fee of \$50.00 per child or \$125.00 per family of three or more children is charged to help defray the cost of the program. There is a separate fee charged for retreats. Parents are notified in advance of this fee.

Finances should never come in the way of participation. If tuition or retreat costs should prove to be a burden, please call the Religious Education Office so that confidential arrangements may be made to provide assistance.

Catechists are not charged a registration fee for their children to attend the parish program.

~ Administrative ~

Class Schedules

All classes will be held in the Religious Education/Youth Center at 122 Route 645 (Layton-Hainesville Road) in Sandyston Township. Religious Education classes are held from September through April. In cases of inclement weather, classes may be re-scheduled at the discretion of the Pastor and CRE. All families will receive a calendar of class schedules. The following is a list of class days and times:

- ❖ *Grades 1, 4, and 5 will meet on Mondays from 3:45PM until 5:00PM.*
- ❖ *Grades 2 and 3 will meet on Wednesdays from 3:45PM until 5:00PM.*
- ❖ *Grades 6, 7, and 8 will meet on two Sundays from 9:30AM Mass - 12:30PM.*
- ❖ *Grades 9 and 10 will meet on two Sundays from 6:30PM until 8:00PM.*

Textbooks - Bibles - Folders

The Religious Education Program provides textbooks and folders to all students enrolled in grades 1 through 10 (sixth graders are also provided with Bibles for use in grades 6 through 10). This is done with the hope that this investment will be properly safeguarded. Textbooks and folders will be distributed by the classroom catechist on the first day of classes. These textbooks and folders are to be brought home and back to class weekly. If a textbook is lost or damaged, a new one must be purchased immediately.

Homework

Homework reinforces classroom learning and can provide opportunities for both independent study and family discussion. Parents can assist their children with homework by arranging a prayerful and comfortable place for children to complete their assignments. Parents are also encouraged to refer to the section at the end of each chapter in the textbook which offers suggestions for family activities pertaining to each lesson.

Testing

Students are expected to review lessons at home on a regular basis every week. A certain amount of knowledge will be expected to be retained by each student involved in our program, therefore testing will take place. The main objective of testing is to monitor student growth and the effectiveness of our parish program. Students will be tested both orally and with written tests. If a child is having difficulty fulfilling grade level requirements, a meeting will be arranged with the CRE, the catechist, and the parents to discuss the situation.

Progress Reports

Religious formation of a child takes place in the home, in church, and in the class setting. Progress Reports for the program only reflect classroom performance (participation and testing) and homework. They will be issued at mid-term and at year-end to indicate the strengths and weaknesses that the student is demonstrating.

Advancement Criteria

Students who do not satisfactorily complete the course of study at each grade level or do not attend the required number of catechetical sessions may be retained and required to repeat the grade level. This situation will be at the discretion of the Pastor and CRE. In certain cases, make-up classes may be scheduled or additional homework assigned as a means of avoiding the retention of the student.

~ Attendance ~

Absenteeism

Your child's regular attendance at Religious Education classes is very important. These classes should take priority over all other programs and activities. Absence from five (grade 1 through 5) or three (grades 6 through 10) or more classes may result in a student repeating the grade level and/or not being properly prepared for the reception of sacraments. Parents are required to call the Religious Education Office if their child is to be absent prior to the class.

Our attendance policy is set so that every child receives the full benefit of the parish program. The learning experience is by far, richer and more fulfilling when attendance is regular and consistent. Excellent attendance is expected on all grade levels and attendance records will be kept on a weekly basis.

Arrival/Dismissal Procedure

Punctuality is very important, both for the children and the catechists. Children should enter the building through the lower level and exit from the same.

Supervision

It is essential that all students be supervised when they are in the Religious Education/Youth Center, therefore catechists will be present 10 minutes before class begins and remain until all of their students are dismissed to their parents. Children should arrive at the building for sessions no earlier than 10 minutes before the class is scheduled to begin. Students should leave the parish premises directly after classes are dismissed, therefore, parents should arrive on time for dismissal. Students not enrolled in our program are not permitted on the grounds during class time.

Transportation

Parents assume responsibility for supervision and transportation for their children to and from Religious Education classes.

~ Catholic Christian Conduct ~

Student Behavior

We only ask one thing of the children and young teens enrolled in our program, as Jesus asks each of us, "Love one another as I love you" (John 15:12). We will remind them that in order to do this, they will be respectful to their catechists and aides, their classmates, and their surroundings. It is expected that the atmosphere at the parish Religious Education/Youth Center would be a Christian one, based on a combination of common courtesy and safety considerations.

Students are not permitted to bring cell phones, beepers, i-pods, etc. with them to class. If needed for an emergency situation, they may be kept in the CRE's Office until class is dismissed. Students who are found using these electronic items during class will have them taken immediately.

Discipline

Due to the very short amount of time that we have with them each week, we are not able to deal with any discipline problems that are not becoming to a Catholic Christian student. If a disciplinary problem should arise, the catechist will attempt to handle the situation. If necessary, the Coordinator of Religious Education and/or Pastor will step in as well. The student will then be asked to telephone their parents to come and take them home. Students will also be sent home if they do not have their needed materials (book, bible, etc.) for class. Should any of these discipline issues be recurring, the parent will be required to attend the class with their child or remove their child from the parish program.

In addition, if at any time it is believed that a child/teen is a danger to him/herself or to others, they will be removed from the parish program immediately.

~ Communication ~

Calendar

All families and catechists will be given a monthly calendar of class schedules. Parent sessions, Retreats, Sacramental Program events, and other activities will be distributed to students as they become available.

Folders

All homework assignments, letters to parents, and parish flyers will go home in your child's folder. Please check the folder weekly.

Cancellation of Classes

Due to inclement weather or other reasons, all cancellations for classes or events will be placed on the Religious Education/Youth Center telephone number (973-948-7004) and announced on WTSX (96.7FM), WSUS (102.3FM), and WNNJ (103.7FM).

Parent/Catechist Conferences

Parents are asked to introduce themselves to their child's catechist and aide early in the school year. You are also invited to contact the CRE or the catechist with any questions or concerns you may have at any time throughout the year.

Parental Involvement

Parents are always welcome at the Religious Education/Youth Center and are encouraged to sit in on their child's classes, assist with activities and events, or spend time with other parents while waiting for their children. We gladly welcome your gifts and talents.

~ Safety ~

Medical Condition of a Student

The parent must inform the CRE about their child who has a special medical condition which could occur during the scheduled class time or which could affect the teaching/learning environment (e.g. allergies, asthma, auditory or visual impairment, learning disability, hyperactivity, ADD, etc.). This information should be included on the registration form in the provided space and this confidential information is shared with the catechist and aide by the CRE.

Medication

No medication of any kind (including both prescription and over-the-counter) should be administered to, or taken by, the student during the scheduled session. If any exception must be made, the parent must be present to administer the medication.

Medical Emergency Procedure

If a relatively minor accident occurs to a student while attending the program, the catechist or aide will bring the student to the office, where the First Aid Kit is kept. The CRE will attend to the student and attempt to contact their parents and/or emergency contact.

In the case of serious accident or illness occurs to a student while attending the program, the catechist or aide will immediately contact the CRE. The CRE will attend to the student and attempt to contact their parents and/or emergency contact. If need be, 911 will also be called immediately. All reports will be sent to the Diocesan Insurance Office.

Fire Drills

Fire drill will take place early in the school year and again in the new year as to make the procedure known to all catechists, aides, and students.

Visitors

Visitors are not permitted in the building during class time. In case of a necessity, visitors should report to the office of the CRE.

~ General Information ~

Telephone Use

The office telephone is a business phone and is not to be used by students, except in an emergency.

Lost and Found

All clothing, money, jewelry, or other articles of value that are turned in, may be claimed in the CRE's office.

Unscheduled Early Dismissal

At the end of the catechetical session, all children and teens are to be dismissed to their parents. If someone other than the parent is to pick up the student, this change must be given in writing to the CRE prior to the dismissal.

If a student needs to be dismissed early, the request should be given to the CRE prior to the dismissal.

Parking Lot

We love our children and teens. Please drive slowly and carefully in the parking lot.

~ The Precepts of the Church ~

- ❖ Celebrate Christ's Resurrection every Sunday and on Holy days of Obligation by participating in Mass and avoiding unnecessary work.
- ❖ Lead a sacramental life. Receive Holy Eucharist frequently and Reconciliation regularly. We must receive Holy Eucharist at least once a year - during the Easter season, and confess within a year, if we have committed serious or mortal sin.
- ❖ Study Catholic teaching throughout life, especially in preparing for sacraments.
- ❖ Observe the Marriage Laws of the Catholic Church and give religious training to one's children.
- ❖ Strengthen and support the Church: one's own parish, the worldwide Church, and the Holy Father.
- ❖ Do penance, including abstaining from food on appointed days.
- ❖ Join in the missionary work of the Church.

~ Holy Days of Obligation ~

- ❖ Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God (January 1)
- ❖ Ascension of the Lord (40 Days after Easter)
- ❖ Assumption of Mary (August 15)
- ❖ All Saints Day (November 1)
- ❖ Immaculate Conception (December 8)
- ❖ Nativity of the Lord (December 25)

~ Parents Covenant ~

After the priest baptized your child, he offered this prayer
for you as fathers and mothers,

"God is the giver of all life, human and divine. May he bless the father of this child.
He and his wife will be the first teachers of their child in the ways of faith. May
they be also the best of teachers, bearing witness to the faith by what they say
and do, in Christ, Jesus our Lord."

(taken from the Rite of Baptism of the Roman Catholic Church)

As the first and best teacher of my child in the practice of their faith,
I/we promise to:

- observe the Lord's Day and Holy Days by celebrating the Eucharist with them each week.
- model the Christian life to them by prayer, worship and witness to Jesus Christ in my daily life.
- encourage and provide the means for their regular attendance at all religious education classes, retreats, and events.
- support the ministry of the parish catechists by reviewing the lesson and overseeing the completion of any assignments given to them.
- agree to the terms of the Religious Education Program Handbook.
(Please retain this handbook. Yearly changes will be added, if necessary.)

(Please return this portion)

Family Name: _____

Comments: _____

Parent Signature

Date

Parent Signature

Date

Please return this form to your child's catechist immediately.