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***Template for
Parent Handbook
for Parish Religious Education Programs***



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Template for the Parent Handbook for Parish Religious Education Programs

2017 Revision of Parent Handbook

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To: Parish Directors and Coordinators of Religious Education

From: The Archdiocesan Catechetical Office

Re: The Use of the Template for the Religious Education Parent Handbook

The Template for the Parent Handbook has been developed to be a model for all Parish Religious Education Programs of the New York Archdiocese. The content of the Parent Handbook Template is based on the *Archdiocesan Handbook for Parish Religious Education Directors and Coordinators of Religious Education*. It is highly recommended that this template be followed as closely as possible because it represents the expertise of highly experienced Religious Education Leaders at the Archdiocesan and the Parish levels and because the choice and formulation of the content has been approved by the Archdiocesan Legal Department.

The purpose of a parent handbook is to inform parents of all the policies and the expectations of the parish Religious Education Program regarding their child's participation. The Template for the Parent Handbook begins with a detailed table of contents in order to provide an easy reference tool for the parents. There are no page numbers in the Template because the pages will change as you remove or insert sections.

The areas highlighted in yellow express the specific parish reality and therefore must be written by the Director/Coordinator of the local parish and inserted into the Handbook. Once inserted the yellow marking should be erased.

The Parish Director/Coordinator may remove those aspects of the Template that do not apply to the particular parish program and adjust the handbook content as needed but always subject to the Pastor's approval.

On the Catechetical Office Website, the Parent Handbook Template is a pdf. However, each Regional Catechetical Director has a copy of the Template in Word. This Word copy is for the use of the Parish Directors and Coordinators who must adapt the Template to the individual parish situations.

In the pages that follow you will find 3 documents:

- Parent Agreement to Abide by the Religious Education Program Parent Handbook (one page to be used to accompany the actual Parent Handbook),
- Guide for Parish Religious Education Program Calendar (one page which stands alone)
- Template for the Religious Education Program Parent Handbook

Parish Name
Parish Address

**Parent Agreement to Abide by
The Religious Education Program Parent Handbook**

Family Name _____

Children: Full name of Child Grade Level

Children:	Full name of Child	Grade Level
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____

I have read the Religious Education Program Parent Handbook and I and I agree to follow the Religious Education Program policies and procedures stated herein.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Parent/Guardian Name Printed: _____

Date: _____

Return this agreement by _____
_____ (Date)

To: _____
Name of Director of Religious Education
_____ Address of Parish Religious Education Program

Guide for

Parish Religious Education Program Calendar for 20__ - 20 __

- Program Session Dates:
dates of all sessions during the year
holidays,
make-up days for weather cancellations and any other unforeseen cancellations.
- Dates of Family Catechesis Sessions
- Dates for all Sacrament Preparatory Sessions and Parent Meetings:

sessions of Immediate preparation to receive Sacraments

required parent sessions for each Sacrament:
First Penance,
First Communion
Confirmation
- Dates for the Reception of each Sacrament:
First Penance,
First Communion
Confirmation
- Safe Environment Training Dates:
Dates when Safe Environment Training will be given to the children at each grade level
- Dates for Parent Meetings:

introductory meeting in the fall to introduce Catechists & orient parents to their child's curriculum for the year

parent conferences with Catechists in January and May when progress reports are given to parents

any other events or gatherings that the parents should attend
- Dates for registration for the following year

Parish Name
Religious Education Program
Address
Phone number
Email

Parish Religious Education Program

Parent Handbook

Director/Coordinator of Religious Education: Name

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Letter to Parents

Dear Parents,

Your role as Catholic parents¹ is surely one of the most sacred, challenging and wonderful vocations that the Lord entrusts to His people. You brought your child² to be baptized thus providing the opportunity to begin life as a disciple of Jesus in the Church. As your child grows, you continue to nurture that spiritual life. You enable your child to live joyously in the Love of God made tangible by your own goodness and love. In the intimacy of family relationships, you teach the Catholic faith to your child every day by what you say and do – a profound and irreplaceable witness.

We in the Parish Religious Education Program, have also been given a sacred role by the Lord – that of Catechist for your child. We welcome the opportunity to assist you in teaching your child to walk in the ways of faith. We pledge all the resources of our program to helping your child come to know and better understand the person of Jesus Christ who so loves him/her. We pledge to do all we can to help you instill Catholic beliefs and values so that your child may live in the joy of being Jesus' disciple.

Our experience has shown us that this is most effectively accomplished when the family and the parish work together. The *parents* place Jesus Christ and His teachings at the center of their family life --through Sunday Mass, family prayer, and daily life as disciples of Jesus. The *Religious Education Program* teaches the Catholic life which the child is living at home and experiencing in the Parish. The *Parish* supports and nurtures the parents and provides a "home-place" for the families who choose the Catholic way of life in a world that is increasingly lost without God and in need of the Truth that is Jesus.

May God bless us in the work of Catholic Education which we carry on together in His name.

Pastor

Director of Religious Education

¹ For the sake of brevity, the word "parent" will be used to indicate the child's primary caretaker, whether parent or guardian.

² For the sake of brevity, the word "child" will be used to indicate children and youth up to 8th grade.

Purpose and Overview of Parish Religious Education Program

The purpose of the Parish Religious Education Program is to assist parents in the sacred responsibility entrusted to them at their child's Baptism: to form and educate their children to become disciples of Jesus in the Catholic faith. An integral part of a true Catholic home life is the child's attendance at Mass every Sunday and on the Holy Days of Obligation³. The Religious Education Program helps the child to understand, ever more deeply, the meaning of the Mass which the family regularly attends.

The six fundamental tasks of catechesis⁴ which are entrusted to the Religious Education Program by the Catholic Church are:

- to promote the knowledge of the faith,
- to give moral formation,
- to provide liturgical education,
- to teach to pray,
- to educate for community life,
- to initiate into the missionary dimension.

The role of the Director⁵ of Religious Education and the Catechists is to provide intellectual enlightenment about the Catholic life which the child is already living at home and in the parish community, and to foster the child's faith development by accomplishing the fundamental tasks of catechesis in an age-appropriate way.

For every person, religious education nourishes our minds and spirits throughout our lives as we mature from childhood to adulthood into that image of Christ which God created us to become. First grade is not too soon to instill in our children the understanding that Confirmation is not the end of Religious Education. Rather it is the sacrament which brings about our spiritual maturation and opens us to life-long learning about the way of Life of Jesus' disciples in the Catholic Church.

³ There are 6 Holy Days of Obligation (days when, in addition to Sunday, Catholics are required to attend Mass):
Dec. 8 – the Immaculate Conception
Dec. 25 – Christmas
Jan. 1 – Mary the Mother of God
40 days after Easter – the Ascension
Aug. 15 – the Assumption
Nov. 1 – All Saints Day

⁴ Catechesis is a Greek word used by Christians from the earliest centuries of the Church. It means Religious Instruction and Formation in the faith.

⁵ For the sake of brevity, the title "Director" will be used to indicate both the Director and the Coordinator of Religious Education.

The Religious Education Program: an Eight-Year Sequential Program

The essential Religious Education Program is an eight-year sequence of formation beginning with grade level 1 and continuing through grade level 8. All Catholic children of the parish who are not attending Catholic schools are expected to follow this 8-year program.

The Religious Education Program consists in a minimum of 30 sessions, 90 minutes long, held between September and June plus 5 hours of family catechesis.

The Archdiocesan Curriculum Guidelines

The *Archdiocesan Guidelines for Catechesis for Grades 1 through 6 and Grades 7 and 8* ensure a uniform presentation of the faith for each grade level and outline the content of the catechesis each child is taught at every grade level. These Guidelines are to be found on the Catechetical Office website: NYFaithformation.org. (Click on *Resources* and then select *Catechetical Office Resources*.)

Pre-School and Kindergarten Religious Education or Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Enrollment in Kindergarten, and above all in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, is not required but is strongly encouraged.

Family Catechesis

Each family in the Religious Education Program participates in a minimum of five hours of family catechesis offered between September and August. The Cardinal has directed all Religious Education Programs of the Archdiocese to offer this opportunity to its families in order to better assist and work with parents in forming their children in the Catholic faith.

Describe parish models being used

Religious Education for Children with Disabilities

Because of a disability, a child may require an individualized program of instruction. This may be done in a small group, in a one-on-one setting or as part of the regular Religious Education session but with a personal assistant. In consultation with the parent, the Director and Catechist will design an approach to Religious Education that addresses the child's needs.

Preparation for the Reception of the Sacraments

Preparation for the reception of the Sacraments (i.e. first reception of the Eucharist and of Penance (Reconciliation) and Confirmation) is an integral part of the 8-year parish Religious Education Program. Each year, the child is taught in age-appropriate ways more about the meaning and importance of the sacraments for his/her life.

In order to receive the Sacrament of Penance and First Communion, the child must have completed the first year of Religious Education and be currently enrolled in the second year.

Confirmation is received after the completion of the eighth year curriculum when the child has fulfilled all grade level requirements.

For each Sacrament, the parish program provides an immediate preparation which has a strong family/parent dimension and which helps the child prepare spiritually to receive the Sacrament. This immediate preparation is required to receive the Sacrament and it is done in sessions separate from, and in addition to, the regular Religious Education Program.

The immediate preparation program for each Sacrament consists in:

- at least 2 parent sessions particular to the Sacrament being received,
- a Day of Prayer for child and parent centered on the Sacrament being received,

Specify any further content for the immediate preparation program

e.g. as part of Confirmation preparation, a program of service in the parish or local community

The required parent meetings are listed in the Religious Education program calendar. In addition, rehearsals for the reception of the Sacrament will be scheduled

Preparation for Sacraments for Children Who Have Disabilities

The parish also offers sacramental preparation for children with disabilities. The parent should call the Religious Education office for more information and to register.

Responsibilities of Parents in regard to the Religious Education Program

Parents have the primary and sacred responsibility to form their children in the Catholic faith and they do so in the following ways:

- teaching their child to live a moral life according to the values and teachings of Jesus Christ and the teachings, laws and norms of the Catholic Church, realizing that the primary way parents teach this is by living it themselves;
- attending Mass each Sunday with their child, thus instilling in them the conviction that weekly Mass attendance is essential to being a Catholic;
- participating fully with their child in the parent preparation for the first reception of Penance, for First Communion, and for Confirmation.
- ensuring that their child receives the Sacrament of Penance at least once a year;
- preparing their child for participation in Religious Education by fostering an openness and positive attitude toward the religious education which the child will be receiving;
- fulfilling the requirements outlined in the Parent Handbook;
- ensuring that their child arrives on time for the Religious Education session each week;
- participating in their child's faith formation by making use of the parent/family materials materials and the *Archdiocesan Guidelines for Catechesis*;
- praying at home with the child, including the prayers to be memorized;
- assisting their child with assigned at-home activities as needed.
- Attending the 5 hours a year of family catechesis given by the Religious Education Program.

Responsibilities of the Child enrolled in the Parish Religious Education Program

The obligations of children enrolled in the Program are:

- living a moral life that reflects the values and teachings of Jesus Christ;
- participating in the Parish Mass each Sunday;
- receiving the Sacrament of Penance at least once a year;
- following the teachings, laws, and norms of the Catholic Church;
- attending the weekly Religious Education Sessions;
- arriving on time each week for the Religious Education Session;
- being well-prepared for each Religious Education session by having all assigned home projects completed satisfactorily;
- memorizing all required prayers;
- participating in class discussions and activities;
- being attentive and respectful during sessions;
- performing satisfactorily on assessments of the material taught in the sessions;
- fulfilling all requirements of the Religious Education Program including appropriate dress.

Registration and Placement

The Parish Religious Education program offers religious education to all Catholic children who do not receive it in their school and whose families are enrolled in the parish as parishioners. When space allows, the Director may also try to accommodate in the program children whose families are registered in another parish, with the permission of both Pastors.

There is no discrimination on the basis of race, gender, national origin, disability conditions or family background.

Registration Procedure

Every parent must register their child for the Religious Education program every year. The registration procedure is as follows:

- Register the child for Religious Education Program within time period specified by the parish.
- Complete *Child Information Record* and medical forms as needed and submit them to Director of Religious Education
- If the child is new to the parish, present the Baptismal Certificate; the Director will make a copy to be kept with the child's *Information Record* and return original to the parent.
- Speak with the Director about any special needs the child has which could affect the child's learning and well-being in the Religious Education sessions.
- Arrange with the Director of Religious Education the payment of the registration fee according to the parish registration fee chart and schedule and the needs of the family.

Insert Registration Fee chart here

Include the refund process if registration is cancelled

No child will be refused participation in the Religious Education program because of inability to pay the registration fee. Parents for whom the fee would cause a severe financial burden should contact the Director to discuss a reduction or a waiver. If a family cannot pay the fee in full at registration, a payment plan may be drawn up by the Director and the parent to be submitted to the Pastor.

A child's textbook is included in the registration fee. If lost or misplaced, a fee of \$ 25 will be charged for a new book. **NB. If this is not the practice of the program, change sentence to reflect the parish program practice regarding textbooks.**

Child's Placement in Religious Education Sessions

The final decision for each child's placement in the Religious Education Program sessions is made by the Director of Religious Education.

For any child who has physical, mental or emotional disabilities, the Director in consultation with the parent will determine a program of religious education to effectively address these needs.

Any child who leaves the Religious Education Program (e.g. after receiving First Communion) and subsequently returns, will upon re-entering the program, be required to complete the curriculum of the grade levels missed using an assessment based on the *Archdiocese Curriculum Guidelines*.

For a child who is in third grade or older and has not had formal religious education, the Director will determine the most appropriate and effective way for the child to be taught the content of the faith, using the *Archdiocesan Curriculum Guidelines* as the norm.

Repetition of Grade Level

Repetition of Grade Level means that the child must repeat the grade level or the year's curriculum. Great care should be taken in the home as well as in the program to help the child realize that repetition of the year's curriculum is not a punishment but rather a means to help the child be as successful as possible.

The reasons for repetition of grade level are as follows:

1. Excessive absence: after 3 absences the parent will receive an official notification of the child's absences and a request for a parent conference. If the absences continue beyond 5, this is grounds for retention. (See also section on "Absences.")
2. Poor performance: if the child does poorly when assessed on the content of the textbook and the *Archdiocesan Guidelines for Catechesis*, remedial work will be required and organized by the Director. If the remedial work is not sufficient to enable the child to grasp the content, repetition of the grade level may be the best solution.
3. Excessive lateness: after 3 occurrences of late arrival, the parent will receive an official notification and a request for a parent conference. If the late arrivals continue beyond 6 occurrences, this is grounds for repetition of grade level.

Transfer to Another Program

When a parent must withdraw a child from the program, the parent should immediately inform the Director. The Director will send a copy of the child's permanent record to the Religious Education Program to which the child is transferring.

Arrival, Lateness and Absences

Parents assume full responsibility for the transportation of their children to and from the parish site where Religious Education sessions take place.

Arrival

The Religious Education Sessions take place at the following times: **Insert times**

Supervision of the children will be provided beginning at **_____**.

No child should be on the parish premises before this time unless accompanied by an authorized adult.

On arriving for Religious Education, the parent brings the child directly to **_____**.

Walkers, Bicyclists (Skateboarders not permitted)

If a child's parent has specified at the time of registration or in a written notice to the Director that the child will arrive at the session unaccompanied by an adult, the child must report to the Catechist immediately upon arrival and sign in with name and time of arrival. If the child does not do so, the Catechist will notify the Director before the session begins and the Director will alert the parent immediately about the child's absence.

Even if the Religious Education Program provides a specified place for the child's bike, the program cannot be responsible for its safety. It is recommended that the child bring a lock.

Lateness

Punctuality is essential. Children who arrive late not only miss important information but also disrupt the entire Religious Education session. The child should arrive 15 to 10 minutes before the program begins.

If the child arrives late, he/she reports to the Religious Education office and from there will be brought to the session.

If the child arrives late for the Religious Education session more than 3 times during the year, this will result in required attendance at additional sessions to make-up material missed. If the child arrives late more than 6 times in the year, this can result in repeating the year. These make-up sessions will be determined by the Director.

Absences

The child's regular attendance at the Religious Education sessions is very important to his/her whole life. These 30 sessions should take priority over all other after-school or weekend programs and activities.

- Three absences will necessitate a conference between the Director and the parent.
- Four absences will result in the child having to make up the sessions. The number of make-up sessions will be determined by the Director and will be based on the number necessary for the child to be adequately taught the content of the textbook and the *Archdiocesan Guidelines* for his/her grade level.
- Six absences may result in the repetition of the grade level.
- In the case of a long-term illness confirmed by a doctor's report, the Director and parent should make arrangements for religious education at home

Notification Procedure for Absence

When a child is to be absent from a program session, the parent must give the Director notification before the Religious Education Program begins. This should be done preferably in writing but a phone call is acceptable.

If the parent has been unable to send a written communication before the absence, it must be given to the Religious Education Office no later than the following week. It must specify the date and reason for the absence and be signed by the parent.

If the child is absent and the Director has not received previous notification, the Director will alert the parent by a telephone call as soon as attendance is taken. If the parent cannot be reached by phone, an email and/or text message will be sent. If the parent does not respond immediately, the Director will call the person designated as parent substitute on the *Child Information Record* submitted at Registration.

Dismissal of an Individual before the End of the Day's Session

If your child needs to be dismissed early, the request for this early dismissal should be given to the Director in writing by the parent prior to the scheduled session. 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 parent must come to the Religious Education office to pick up and sign out the child. The Director or appropriate adult will go to the session and walk the child out to meet the parent. For security reasons, the parent may not go directly to the session area.

Dismissal

At the end of the Religious Education session every child is released to the care of their parent or parent substitute. The parent substitute must be the person designated in writing at registration on the *Child Information Record*. If someone other than the parent or parent substitute is to pick up the child on a given day, this change should be given in writing to the Director prior to the session in question.

- A child will not be released to anyone under age 18.
- A child will not be released to someone who appears to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- The staff of the Religious Education Program are not allowed to drive or walk children home.
- The Director 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 to the child's release from the program. A copy of the appropriate section of the custody papers should be attached to the written statement.

The method of dismissal is as follows: **Specify**

No child may remain on the parish premises after the Religious Education Program ends because supervision is not provided. The parent must instruct the child to report to the Director in the unforeseen event of not being picked up on time.

Walkers, Bicyclists

If a child's parent has specified at the time of registration or in a written notice to the Director that the child will leave the session unaccompanied by an adult, the child must sign out with the Catechist, noting the time of departure.

Those using Bicycles will be dismissed last. They may not ride the bicycles on the grounds of the Religious Education Program but must walk them off the grounds before mounting. The child must wear a helmet. Motorized bicycles are not permitted.

Early Dismissal of the Program

The Religious Education Program will not have an early dismissal unless it is necessitated by an emergency. Parents will be notified of the emergency closure of the program. (See section on *Communication with Parents: Emergency Cancellations of Program*)

Communication with Parents

Emergency Cancellations of Program

Specify in detail how parents will be notified of emergency cancellations of program:
due to such emergencies as dangerous weather.

If the Religious Education Program follows the local school public school system's closures for weather emergencies, this should be clearly stated.

e.g. All cancellations of program will be broadcast on (specify radio station)
e.g. In addition the cancellation announcement will be on the Religious Education phone and website.

In an emergency situation, the children will be taken to the following supervised "safe place" where parents can pick them up: Specify the place and procedure for emergency dismissals

Parents should have in place an emergency plan for those times when Religious Education must be cancelled due to weather.

Postponements and Rescheduled Events

Specify how parents will be notified of events cancelled or rescheduled such as parent or family meetings, sacrament rehearsals.

Written Communication to Parents

All individual written communications to parents will come from the Director in the following manner:
Specify how bulletins, general letters, program information, newsletters, will be sent to parents.
e.g. flocknotes, email, letters mailed

Rights of Non-custodial Parent

The Director should be informed in writing by the custodial parent of the rights of the non-custodial parent to receive duplicate sets of progress reports, invitations to religious education events, notices, calendars, etc. as these pertain to the child's participation in the program. A copy of the appropriate section of the custody papers should be attached to the written statement.

Individual Meetings with Catechists

All communication between parent and Catechist regarding the faith formation or behavior of a child should be approved and arranged by the Director. Parents should not phone the Catechist.

A Catechist may keep a child after the program session for reasons such as additional instruction, misbehavior, excessive absence or lateness but this can only take place with the permission of the parent and it must be organized by the Director.

Use of Social Networking Sites by Religious Education Program

Regarding the use of Social Networking Sites and all other electronic communication, the parish Religious Education Program follows the directives published by the Archdiocesan Safe-Environment Office (Nyfaithformation.org – Safe Environment Resources – Facebook and Child Protection). These include the following:

- There may be no private direct communication with a minor. All communications must be through parents.
- There may be no photographs or videos of minors posted without the written permission of the parent.
- There may be no photographs or videos of religious education personnel posted without the individual's written permission.
- With regard to a group photo or video, written permission must be given for every person in the photo/video.
- There may be no contact information, or other personal information, of a minor or of religious education personnel posted without the written permission of the parent or Catechist/Director.

The written permission for all the above must be given directly to the Religious Education Director.

Cell Phones

The use of cell phones and other electronic devices by the child is not permitted during the Religious Education session unless this is directed by the Catechist as part of the educational process. Cell phones brought into the place of the Religious Education session should be turned off. Children in need of contacting a parent must ask the Catechist's permission to go to the Religious Education Office to place the call.

Home Actions Essential to the Religious Education Program

At-Home Activities

At-home activities reinforce learning and provide opportunities for independent study and creative thinking. They are an effective way for the child to internalize the religious education he/she has received so that it becomes “faith formation.” The parents can help their children by arranging a quiet, comfortable place for them to complete these assignments and by encouraging and helping the child as needed.

The parent is strongly urged to participate in the online parent dimension of the child’s religious formation which is provided by the textbook company and follows the child’s lessons.

If at-home activities may be assigned in some sessions, this should be stated in the Parent Handbook as follows: The parent is expected to ensure that the child completes each at-home assignment and brings it to the Religious Education session.

Prayer at Home with the Child

The parent is the primary educator in the faith for of the child and one of the most important ways to fulfill this responsibility is by praying with the child every day. Some important prayer practices to be done in the Catholic home are:

- grace before meals,
- prayers at the child’s bedtime,
- blessing the child in the morning before he/she leaves for school by tracing the cross on the forehead and saying with the child the prayer to his/her guardian angel,
- the family rosary prayed together regularly,
- pictures and statues of Jesus and Mary in the home,
- a family bible kept in a place of honor, with a passage or story read from it regularly,
- recitation with the child of traditional Catholic prayers,

Mass Attendance and the Sacramental Life

Children learn to live as Catholics above all by experiencing their parents living as Catholics. Regular weekly attendance at Sunday Mass is essential to being a practicing Catholic. Therefore, doing this together as a family is one of the most powerful ways in which the parent can form the child in the faith. Catholic living also includes regular reception of the Sacrament of Penance and the parent should insure that the child does so from an early age..

The Religious Education Program explains to the children the meaning of the Catholic life of faith that they are living at home and experiencing in the parish community.

Components of the Religious Education Program

Assessment

Assessment of the faith formation taking place in the child is done in order to facilitate further growth. However, It is important to be aware that the child's faith, love for the Lord, moral living and commitment to the Church is not being assessed. What is being assessed is the child's grasp of the knowledge that has been taught in the Religious Education Program.

Each child is expected to master the contents of the textbook and the *Archdiocesan Guidelines for Catechesis* at the grade level in which he/she is enrolled. The child will be given regular assessments based on the textbook lessons and on the *Archdiocesan Curriculum Guidelines*. The results of the assessments will be given to the parent. .

If the individual child needs additional help in learning and better understanding the concepts assessed, the Director will consult with the parents and the Catechist before deciding how this should be provided.

Progress Reports

Progress reports reflect the child performance in the religious education setting, that is:

- attendance at sessions,
- participation in the sessions,
- behavior and attitude during the sessions,
- quality of at-home assignments,
- memorization,
- grasp of the content taught.

Catechists prepare a progress report for each child twice yearly: in January and in May. These reports are given directly to the parent at a parent conference which has as its purpose to discuss the child's growing knowledge and understanding of the faith.

N.B. If the Progress Reports are given to the parent in a different manner from the parent conferences specified here, replace the sentence above with a statement on how the parent will be given the Progress Reports

Permanent Record

A *Permanent Record* is kept in the Religious Education file for each child. It records the child's successful completion of each grade level. If a child must transfer to another Religious Education program, a copy of this *Permanent Record* is sent to the Director of the new Program.

Dress Code

Children are required to wear modest clothing which reflects the dignity of the Religious Education Program in which they are participating. The exercise of good taste and proper, reasonable judgment on the part of the parent in overseeing the child's choice of clothing, in itself, provides effective formation for the child.

Specify here any additional dress code requirements seen as necessary such as:

Not to be worn: tank tops, halter tops, short skirts or shorts, bare midrifts, blouses with spaghetti straps, pajama-like pants (flannels). clothing that is torn, worn below the waist, clothing that bears obscene or inappropriate messages, high heeled shoes, shoes with cleats, flip-flops.

With the approval of the Pastor, the Director has the final authority to determine the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the clothing worn. If a child violates the policy, the child is removed from the session and the parent is immediately called. The parent must bring alternative clothes for the child to change into so that he/she may return to the Religious Education session.

Food

No food is allowed during the Religious Education Program for the following reasons:

- some children have medical restrictions or allergies to certain foods or ingredients;
- the 30 sessions a year is already a very limited time allotment for the important work of imparting the faith to the children.

If a child has snacks after school and before the session begins, these must be eaten before the child arrives at the program.

Parties are not held during the Religious Education sessions.

Note to the Director in the preparation of the Parent Handbook:

If a Director wants to have a celebration with food (e.g. for Christmas, the feast of the Three Kings, the end of the year) this can be done outside of the regular program time such as after the program ends or on a day separated from the session days. The parents must be given a clear choice as to whether or not they will bring their child to this event.

If the parish serves food to children in need of nourishment, this can be done before or after the 90-minute session, in a place separate from the rooms where the sessions are held. Any child participating in this food service must have the written permission of the parent or at least the parent must be notified that the food is being provided to the child.

Behavior Management

Catechists use behavior management (or “discipline”) appropriate to an educational environment as a necessary means for the Religious Education Program to accomplish its goals. The purpose of behavior management is to help the children develop self-control, self-respect, respect for others, and reverence for the Word of God which is being explained to them in these sessions.

Several infractions of rules of conduct will result in a call by the Director to the child’s parent in which the Director will describe the situation and work out a solution with the parent. If the infractions continue, the Director will organize a conference with the parent, the Catechist, the Director and the Pastor.

The Religious Education Program reserves to the Director, under the authority of the Pastor, the right to remove a child from the group session, either temporarily or permanently:

- if the child’s behavior is seriously inhibiting the learning of others in the group;
- if the child’s behavior is seriously inhibiting the safety or well-being of others in the group;
- if temporary removal is used as a disciplinary measure for serious and persistent disruptive behavior.

Bullying and Cyber-bullying

Bullying includes but is not limited to: threatening physical harm, verbal abuse, intimidation, cyber-bullying. The Archdiocesan policy against bullying is followed. This policy states:

A safe and civil environment is necessary for children to learn and achieve Christian value. Harassment, intimidation, bullying, cyber-bullying (using technology to bully such as but not limited to: posting an inappropriate picture of a child on the Internet) and other violent behaviors will not be tolerated in a Religious Education Program environment. Any child who engages in this behavior may be asked to leave the religious education environment if this is seen to be in the best interest of the rest of the religious education community.

Vandalism

Vandalism, i.e. willfully damaging or destroying property, will not be tolerated. Vandalism must be paid for by the parent of the child who did it.

Accidental damage should be immediately reported to the Director.

Unacceptable Behavior

The following types of behavior are not allowed during the Religious Education Program.

Infractions which call for discipline by the Catechist are:

- acting in a disrespectful manner toward the Catechist, other adults or children in the program,
- speaking and interacting with other children inappropriately during the session,
- leaving a session without permission,
- using a cell phone during the session when not authorized by the Catechist,
- doing something other than the work of the session,
- violating the dress code,
- eating in the Religious Education session.

Persistence in any of these behaviors after several corrective measures have been taken will place this behavior in the category below.

Infractions which call for immediate action by the Director and Pastor are:

- possession of and /or trafficking in alcohol or other drugs,
- leaving the Religious Education premises when child is supposed to be attending the session,
- willful defiance of authority,
- possession of weapons, such as knives, guns, or look-alikes,
- physical assault/fighting, threatening bodily harm
- harassment and intimidation of other children,
- vandalism, arson,
- theft, extortion
- cheating,
- abusive or vulgar language,
- defacing or damaging of parish property, vandalism, arson
- bullying/cyber-bullying.

Persistence in any of these behaviors after corrective measures have been taken can result in the removal of the child from the Religious Education group sessions, either temporarily or permanently, depending on the recommendation of the Director and the decision of the Pastor.

Medication and Medical Emergency

Medication

No medication of any kind (whether prescription or over-the-counter) will be administered to, or taken by, any child during the Religious Education Program.

In the event that a child has a condition for which emergency medication may be necessary, the parent must provide a written request and directives to the Religious Education Director.

Any emergency medication/medical device to be administered during the program according to the above directives must be brought by the parent to the Religious Education Office and should be administered there.

Medical Condition of Child

The parent should inform the Director about any child who has special medication needs, a medical condition which could flare up in the session, or a medical condition which could affect the teaching/learning environment (e.g. allergies, asthma, auditory or visual impairment, possibility of seizures, learning disability, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, need for the epi-pen). This information is strictly confidential and will be used with the utmost discretion. The Director will ensure that the Catechist is informed.

A course of action in case of a flare-up is determined by the parent at the time of registration and put in writing.

The *Child Information Record*, completed by the parent at registration, contains the names and contact information for the people who must be contacted in case of emergency.

Medical Emergency Information

In the case of any medical emergency, 911 will immediately be called without exception.

A *Child Information Record* along with appropriate Medical Forms is filled out by the parent and kept on file in the Parish Religious Education Office. The parent must be careful to keep the information in these forms current. Any changes to the forms are made in writing and signed by the parent.

Safe Environment

Archdiocesan Children Protection Policy

The Archdiocese of New York and (Name of Parish) are committed to ensuring the personal safety of all children in the Religious Education Program. Therefore the parish and its Religious Education Program follow all the policies, directives and requirements of the Archdiocesan Safe Environment Office. These policies and programs are to be found on the Safe Environment web page which can be accessed through the Archdiocesan web site (*Archny.org*) and the Catechetical Office web site (*nyfaithformation.org*)

Safe Environment Training and Possibility for Parent Opt-Out

Each year, the Religious Education Program provides to each child the curriculum entitled *Right, Safe and Good Relationships* following the lesson plans provided by the Archdiocesan Safe Environment Office. (See Safe Environment Web site: Children's Curriculum.) The dates for this training can be found on the *Religious Education Program Calendar*. Parents have the option to exempt their child from any session of the Safe Environment Training. If the Parent chooses to do so, they must complete and sign the *Parent Opt-Out Form* which they secure from the Religious Education Office.

If Safe Environment training is done in another way, describe.

Visits to Religious Education Program by Unauthorized Persons

For security reasons, no unauthorized persons are allowed in the area where the Religious Education sessions are taking place. Even parents and other family members may only go to the Religious Education office or designated reception area until the program sessions are completed and the children are dismissed to the care of their parents.