

**St. Stanislaus Parish**  
**Parish Religious Education Program (PREP)**  
**Parent & Participant Handbook**

215-855-9893

Parish website – [www.ststanislaus.com](http://www.ststanislaus.com)

**MISSION STATEMENT**

The St. Stanislaus Parish Religious Education Program (PREP) is a teaching ministry that witnesses to the children of our Parish who attend area public and private schools what it means to be a Catholic Christian in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

We believe that the family is the visible model of the Church and through its everyday events children learn the meaning of belonging, forgiving, and serving. The love within the family forms the basis for the child's understanding of who God is as Father, Son, and Spirit. It is the responsibility of the Parish community to build on that understanding so that all within the family may mature in a faith that is not only celebrated in the local Church but extends beyond to an understanding of the Universal Church and their place in it.

Religious Education is not a product to be consumed; it is a process in which to become involved. Religious education cannot be provided for families; it can only be created with them. The most effective religious education occurs within the family setting and our Parish Religious Education Program is here to support parents and guardians in their role as their children's primary religious educators.

It is our hope and prayer that together as parents, catechists, and assistants, we can continue to awaken and nourish the gift of faith each child is given at his/her Baptism.

**PARENTS and PREP TOGETHER**

Teachers in our PREP Program are called CATECHISTS. A catechist is “one who echoes the Word of God.” All of our Catechists and Classroom Assistants are volunteers who share their time and talents for the benefit of our Parish children. Please support them in this work with your prayers and cooperation.

Our Catechists supplement in a more formal way the faith education that occurs informally in your home. Parents of children in our religious education program can be supportive of our Catechists' efforts and our program in the following ways:

**★ Attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, and receive the Sacraments.**

- Read the Bible as a family.
- Teach your child to pray in their own words as well as to learn the traditional prayers of our faith.
- Show interest in what your child is doing in PREP class each week. Check his/her PREP folder for communication from the Catechist or Program Coordinator weekly.
- Help your child to be conscientious about completing any homework assignments that may be assigned.
- Join your child by participating in any service projects or workshops offered in his/her grade.

**The example you set is invaluable to our efforts in the classroom.**

## ACCESS AND INCLUSION

Our Parish Religious Education Program (PREP) provides classes for children of all abilities. Children with developmental, intellectual, sensory, physical or behavioral disabilities are welcome and encouraged to attend our PREP classes.

Each student who enters our program is required to be registered by his/her parent or legal guardian. A copy of our **new family** PREP registration form may be downloaded from our web site: [www.ststanislaus.com](http://www.ststanislaus.com). Go to the "Religious Education" tab. Please carefully complete the Medical/Learning Data section of the registration form so that we may work together to provide the best possible experience for your child in our PREP program. All information will be kept confidential and provided to the Catechists on a "need to know" basis, with your permission.

A **Baptismal Certificate** is required for children who have been baptized at other parishes.

Children **who have not received the Sacrament of Baptism in the Catholic Church or whose child has never been baptized** should contact the Program Coordinator to discuss an appropriate formation plan to welcome your child into the Catholic Church.

Re-registration for returning families takes place in April during regularly scheduled session times.

## FINANCIAL POLICY

Tuition is set each spring by the Parish financial committee for the upcoming session year.

Full payment of tuition is expected at the time of registration. Arrangements may be made for alternate payment plans by contacting the Program Coordinator.

No student will be denied acceptance into the program because of his/her family's inability to pay. A confidential inquiry may be made to the Pastor or the Program Coordinator.

## ATTENDANCE

A minimum of thirty (30) hours of religious instruction are required by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Office of Catholic Education. It is recommended by the Archdiocese that a child repeat a grade level if frequent absences occur. The faith formation received in the program is ongoing in that each session builds on the previous session; therefore, it is imperative for the children to attend on a regular basis. As directed by the Archdiocese, attendance records are kept for each child. If you move to another parish, and wish to enroll your child in their religious education program, we will be asked to verify your child's participation in our PREP Program.

If your child is unable to attend a session for any reason, please contact us to report the absence at (215) 855-9893 or email [ststansprep@yahoo.com](mailto:ststansprep@yahoo.com). Please be sure to leave your child's name and grade level when leaving a message.

- After each absence, the student is required to bring a note from his/her parent or guardian stating why the student was absent.
- Extended absences due to illness require a doctor's note upon return to class. In addition, parents should be in regular contact with their child's Catechist in an effort to obtain assignments and keep their child's formation up-to-date when possible.

The **WEDNESDAY PREP** session is held weekly for all students.

- If a child misses more than 4 classes (**grades 1, 3, 4, & 5**) they will not be moved up to the next grade level *until the situation is discussed with the Program Coordinator, and all class work and exams and assessments are made up.*
- If your child is in a sacrament grade (2 and 6) an excessive number of absences (**more than 3**) is justifiable reason to delay a child's reception of the sacrament *if the work is not made up.*
- A letter will be sent home requesting that the parent acknowledge that the missed work has been made up when the absences exceed the allowable numbers noted above. If the number of absences exceeds six (6), the parent will need to meet with the Program Coordinator (unless other arrangements have been made in advance).

The **SUNDAY PREP** session is a blend of "in class" and "at home" catechesis. As a result of the "in class" sessions only comprising 50% of the required instruction time, the number of allowed absences is lower:

- If a child misses more than 3 classes (**grades 1, 3, 4, & 5**) they will not be moved up to the next grade level *until the situation is discussed with the Program Coordinator, and all class work and exams and assessments are made up.*
- If your child is in a sacrament grade (2 and 6) an excessive number of absences (**more than 2**) is justifiable reason to delay a child's reception of the sacrament *if the work is not made up.*
- A letter will be sent home requesting that the parent acknowledge that the missed work has been made up when the absences exceed the allowable numbers noted above. If the number of absences exceeds five (5), the parent will need to meet with the Program Coordinator (unless other arrangements have been made in advance).

When a child misses a class, the parent is responsible to see that the missed chapter in the textbook is covered at home and all written work is completed before the child returns to PREP.

Since material is presented in developmental sequence, children may not arbitrarily skip grade levels. If a child who is baptized enters the program with little, if any, formal religious education, or returns to the program after skipping several grade levels, he/she may not be placed in the same grade they are in at school. These special circumstances will require a family meeting with the Program Coordinator to determine the best placement for the child.

## ARRIVAL & DISMISSAL

Students should be dropped off in the back parking lot of Mater Dei Catholic School and enter through the designated doors. Please use caution when driving through the parking lot to ensure the safety of the students and parents who are walking to/from their cars and the building. A drop off car lane is provided at the back of the school on Wednesday evenings with a safe walking zone. You are encouraged to use the drop off car lane when bringing your child to class.

### Arrival:

Each student is expected to arrive in his/her classroom 5 to 10 minutes before the start of the PREP session so that sessions may begin promptly at the designated start time (6:45p.m. on Wednesday and 10:15a.m. on Sunday). The school will be locked during the session time. Students arriving more than five minutes late will be required to sign in on arrival and the arrival time will be noted. Chronic lateness may require a conference with a parent as it is disruptive to the class. Also, frequent late arrivals will accumulate and be deemed an absence,

depending on the times of late arrival. As an increased safety measure, (and per the recommendation of the Lansdale Police), parents should only be entering the building on an as needed basis on Wednesday evenings (e.g., to talk with your child's Catechist or the Program Coordinator or to make a tuition payment). **Parents must sign-in at the door with the Hall Monitor and then sign-out when leaving the building for the Wednesday PREP session.** The parent group for the Sunday session meets in an Upper Cahill classroom. Once class is in session, parents are not permitted on the first floor of the school until dismissal time.

### **Dismissal:**

#### **WEDNESDAY PREP Session:**

A parent or guardian is required to pick up his/her child (children) in the gymnasium of Mater Dei Catholic school at the end of the PREP session. Grades K, 1 & 2 will meet at the tables in the cafeteria area and the person responsible for picking up the child will need to sign him/her out before leaving. Grades 3 through 8 will be dismissed from the gym floor area. This helps to ensure that the children are only released to those individuals designated by the parent/guardian at the start of the PREP year on the Student Release Form. Only the gym entrance should be used when entering and exiting the school at pickup time. These procedures are in place for the safety of the children. **If your child needs to be excused prior to the end of a particular PREP session, (e.g. doctor appointment) please send in a written note to be given to the child's teacher. Your child will meet you at the center double doors at the requested time.**

#### **SUNDAY PREP Session:**

Parents or guardians will pick up their children at their classrooms. Please provide any notes regarding early departure to the Catechist on arrival.

## **NON-CUSTODIAL PARENTS**

It is the responsibility of both parents to provide the Parish with the latest, most up to date Custodial Order or Custody Agreement. If either the Custody Order or Custody Agreement changes during the course of the year, it remains the responsibility of both parents to provide that document to the Parish immediately.

Our program abides by the provisions of the Buckley Amendment with respect to the rights of non-custodial parents. In the absence of a court order to the contrary, if requested, our program will provide the non-custodial parent with access to the records and other program related information regarding the child. If there is a court order specifying that there is to be no information given, it is the responsibility of the custodial parent to provide the Program Coordinator with an official and latest copy of the court order.

If a court prohibits our releasing a child into the custody of a non-custodial parent, it is the responsibility of the custodial parent to provide the Program Coordinator with an official copy of the court order or custody section of the divorce decree.

## **CONDUCT**

The Parish Religious Education Program offered by St. Stanislaus Parish is designed to **assist** parents with the faith formation of their children, as well as foster values and behavior that are in accord with the teachings of the Catholic Church. The program has **NO TOLERANCE** for behaviors that are contrary to Catholic faith and morals, including but not limited to ongoing acts of obstinacy, improper language, fighting, physical, emotional or psychological intimidation, vandalism, demeaning behavior such as name-calling, obscene language or

gestures, and harassment. Such behaviors violate the central teaching of our faith and will not be tolerated in any form. These categories do not cover every possible situation.

Conduct by children or parents/guardians, or anyone acting on their behalf, incompatible with the educational and religious mission of the Parish is grounds for disciplinary action, including but not limited to immediate dismissal of the student, as well as reporting the incident to the appropriate legal authorities where appropriate.

In addition, in the case of threats of violence or harassment, in any form, including oral, written, or electronic, by a child against any member of the PREP community, the child, if suspended but not dismissed, may be required to have psychological or psychiatric clearance before returning to the Program.

## DISCIPLINARY POLICY

In the event a participant engages in any of the above listed behaviors or any other inappropriate conduct, and has failed to respond to a Catechist's attempts to stop or correct the behavior, the following actions *may be taken at the discretion of the Pastor or Program Coordinator*:

- **First Incident:** The Catechist will bring the situation to the attention of the Program Coordinator. Possible corrective actions will be discussed, including a meeting of the student with the Program Coordinator.
- **Second Incident:** The student will be removed from the session and the parent or guardian will be notified by phone by the Program Coordinator. The Program Coordinator will schedule a conference with the parents/guardians and student to discuss the matter.
- **Third Incident:** The student will be removed from the session and be suspended from the program for a period of one session. The parents/guardians will be immediately notified by the Program Coordinator and will be required to pick up their child. Prior to returning to the program, the Program Coordinator will schedule a conference with the parents, student and Catechist to further discuss the matter. Future incidences of the same nature could result in dismissal from the in class Program, with possible consideration for the Home School Program.

However, St. Stanislaus Parish reserves the right to supersede the forgoing courses of action depending on the particular circumstances of a given situation.

## CONTRABAND

**BRINGING CONTRABAND TO PROGRAM SESSIONS IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED AND WILL BE CONFISCATED AND RETURNED TO PARENTS ONLY!** Depending on the contraband confiscated, the proper legal authorities could be notified.

- Items considered contraband include, but are not limited to weapons, drugs, alcohol and tobacco products.
- It is unlawful for minors to be in possession of these items. Participants found to be in the possession of such products may be immediately suspended from the Program.

## SEARCH & SEIZURE

It is the policy of St. Stanislaus's PREP Program to respect the privacy of its participants. However, in the event that a student is suspected of having weapons or drugs in his/her possession or is believed to be a threat to himself/herself or others, the coordinator will be notified immediately. The coordinator will conduct a search with an adult staff member as a witness. Refusal on the part of the student to cooperate will result in the parents/guardians being contacted and asked to assist with the search. Parental refusal to cooperate may result in the student's immediate dismissal from the Program.

## CELL PHONES & OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES

We realize that cell phones have become a necessary tool in keeping communications open between parents and children. However, it is the policy of this program that such devices may not be brought to catechetical sessions. If it is necessary for a student to bring a cell phone to the program, the student must keep the device turned off during the session and put it away in a backpack, purse or pocket. If the student is found to be using the phone during class, the Catechist has the right to hold the phone at his/her desk until the end of the session. All other electronic devices (e.g., ipods, ipads, etc.) should be left at home. The St. Stanislaus Parish PREP Program is not responsible for any of these devices that are brought into the building.

## PROTECTION OF YOUTH

Protecting God's Children - All priests and deacons, as well as Parish staff and volunteers who have regular contact with children must obtain the necessary clearances from the State of Pennsylvania and FBI fingerprints, if applicable, and attend Safe Environment training seminars provided by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. This training provides a greater understanding to the adults in our Church on how they can be protectors of children and models of appropriate behavior and relationships. It teaches them to be advocates for those who are most vulnerable. More information on the requirements for volunteers may be found at:

<http://childyouthprotection.org/index.php/staff-volunteers/information-for-volunteers>.

In its effort to support parents in their responsibility to educate their children concerning personal safety, the Archdiocese provides grade appropriate personal safety lesson plans to all Parish Directors and Coordinators of Religious Education. St. Stanislaus's Parish PREP program will incorporate these lessons into the curriculum each year. Parents can check the general PREP calendar to see when these personal safety lessons will be taught to their child/children. Copies of these lesson plans are available in the PREP office or on the Archdiocesan website for parents to review in advance.

## INCLEMENT WEATHER CANCELLATIONS

When we have inclement weather that is deemed unsafe for traveling, we will use the following procedures for the cancellation of PREP classes for the **WEDNESDAY PREP** Session:

**\*If North Penn School District or Mater Dei Catholic School cancels classes or their evening activities due to the weather, we will also cancel class. The cancellation will also be posted on the Parish website and an email will be sent to all families. We will also leave a recorded message on the PREP voicemail (215-855-9893).**

If there is an emergency closing outside of the winter season, (and North Penn's classes and activities are NOT cancelled) a phone chain has been set up with the Catechists so that all families are notified via telephone. We will make every attempt to notify you as soon as such closing is decided.

For the **SUNDAY PREP** Session, the Program Coordinator will send an email to all families by 8:00 a.m. if the weather conditions require us to cancel class. A recorded message will also be left on the PREP voicemail and the closing will be posted on the Parish website.

## CURRICULUM

St. Stanislaus's Parish Religious Education Program follows the Scope & Sequence guidelines for religious education that are published by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. All teaching materials are selected from the list of textbooks that have been approved by the United States Bishops.

**HOMEWORK** Catechists will assign homework at their discretion to extend the lesson to help the students grasp the materials covered in class. The homework should take no more than 15 minutes per week. *For the Sunday PREP Session, the work assigned for the "off weeks" is not deemed to be Homework, but is the "home school lesson", in lieu of a full class session, and should take approximately 75 minutes to complete for each student.*

**EXAMS** Students will take exams as appropriate for each grade level to assist the Catechists in assessing the students' knowledge of the faith for the Progress Reports. Sufficient notice will be sent home by the Catechist to allow ample time for the student to prepare for the exams. Mid-Year and Year-End Assessments, as provided by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, will also be required for students in grades 1 through 6. The Assessment grades will be noted on the Progress Reports.

**PROGRESS REPORTS** A Progress Report, prepared by the Catechists and reviewed by the Program Coordinator, will be distributed three times a year for the Wednesday PREP Session and twice a year for the Sunday PREP Session. Parents are to sign and return the Progress Reports for all but the final marking period.

## COMMUNICATION

Parents are provided with a yearly calendar at the beginning of the program year. ***The calendar is subject to change during the course of the year.*** Parents will be notified of any changes as soon as they are known and an updated calendar will be distributed. The calendar is also posted on the Parish website.

The majority of communication will be done via email. If you do not have an email address, we will provide you with a hard copy of the email correspondence.

The Program Coordinator may be contacted as follows: (215) 855-9893; [ststanslr@comcast.net](mailto:ststanslr@comcast.net). Direct communication with your child's Catechist is also an important component of the catechetical process. Parents are encouraged to meet with their child's Catechist to discuss any concerns or share any information that will enhance the learning experience for your child.

## SACRAMENT PREPARATION

Preparation for the reception of a sacrament is a time of prayerful reflection and discernment. A participant's desire to receive the sacrament is reflected in his or her positive attitude toward the preparation process. Thus proper attendance and behavior during PREP, in Mass and at meetings are expected. Archdiocesan policy requires that a child receive the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation) in the parish in which their family is registered. Exceptions can be made with special permission from the Pastor.

Parents are expected to follow St. Stanislaus's Parish policy with regard to the sacramental preparation and celebration with their children.

- Registration in the parish is required.
- Since sacramental catechesis requires more than classroom participation, it is important that families participate at Sunday Mass.

## RECONCILIATION AND FIRST EUCHARIST

A minimum of two years of preparation in a formal religious education program are required for the reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist. Guidelines put forth by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia concerning baptized children receiving sacraments for the first time specifies that the Sacrament of Reconciliation be received prior to First Eucharist. At St. Stanislaus Parish the reception of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and First Eucharist are scheduled to occur in the second grade, but may occur at any age beyond second grade.

The expectations for **children** preparing for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and First Eucharist are that the child:

- Be baptized
- Be participating **weekly** at Mass
- Have completed at least two consecutive years of formal religious instruction (including the preparation year in second grade)
- Have a satisfactory class attendance record
- Have an age appropriate appreciation and understanding of the sacraments they are to receive

The expectations for **parents or guardians** who choose to have their children celebrate these sacraments are:

- Be registered in the parish
- Participate **weekly** at Mass
- Support the teachings of the Church
- Be involved in the child's preparation through attendance at meetings and other activities that surround the preparation for these sacraments
- Actively supervise the child's preparation through homework assignments, retreat day, and practicing for reception of the sacrament

## CONFIRMATION

At St. Stanislaus Parish, candidates will generally be confirmed in the spring of 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Preparation begins at the end of 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

It is the expectation that a **Confirmation Candidate** will:

- Be Baptized
- Participate **weekly** at Sunday Mass
- Have a satisfactory class attendance record
- Complete the Confirmation formation program, as provided in the "Red Folder" at the meeting in late May at the end of 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

It is expected that the **parents or guardians** of the Confirmation Candidate will:

- Be registered with the parish
- Participate **weekly** at Sunday Mass
- Support the teachings of the Catholic Church
- Be involved in the preparation of their child for the sacrament by attending scheduled meetings, encouraging their child to come to class prepared, fostering a sense of the importance of this sacrament in their home during this preparation period, and guiding the candidate in the selection of a saint's name and a sponsor.

The Confirmation **Sponsor** is to help the candidate throughout his/her life to fulfill the baptismal promises. **Sponsors** at Confirmation represent the believing Christian Community. The Code of Canon Law states they must lead, "a life in harmony with faith and the role to be undertaken, and will help the baptized to lead a Christian life in harmony with Baptism, and to fulfill faithfully the obligations connected with it." They are to support the confirmed person in their daily witness to Christ. The selection of a Sponsor for the Sacrament of Confirmation should be done with careful thought and consideration. The Church's law for this Sacrament requires that a sponsor be:

- A Baptized Catholic
- A Confirmed Catholic
- A Practicing Catholic
- Age 16 or older. (This person needs to be sufficiently mature for the responsibility being assumed. An older brother or sister may be a sponsor, provided he/she is mature in his/her personal spiritual development.)
- Married in the Catholic Church, if married

A father or mother of the child to be confirmed **cannot** be his/her sponsor.

A "practicing" Catholic means they are registered as a member of a parish and attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, and receive the Sacraments on a regular basis. The priest of the parish where the sponsor is registered is bound in conscience and in Canon Law to refuse to give a sponsor certificate to anyone lacking these requirements. Please consider the above requirements before asking someone to serve in this capacity. If any clarification is needed, please speak to the Pastor. Please do not put the priest in an awkward position by choosing an individual who does not meet these requirements.

**Sponsor certificates are required of all sponsors.**

### **SPECIAL SACRAMENTS SITUATIONS**

**Students in third grade and above who are baptized in the Catholic Church**, but have who not yet received the Sacraments of Reconciliation and/or First Eucharist, may enter a special Sacrament preparation program. This program emphasizes family involvement. It helps parents or guardians to prepare their child for these sacraments. Please contact the Program Coordinator for more details.

**Students 7 and older who have been baptized in another Christian faith** are welcome to participate in our PREP program so as to prepare to come into Full Communion with the Catholic Church. **Students 7 and older who have never been baptized** in any Christian faith are welcome to prepare for reception into the Catholic Church through the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (with modifications for children). Please contact the Program Coordinator to discuss and develop a sacrament preparation plan if either of these scenarios represent your personal situation.

## HOME-BASED CATECHESIS

The U.S. Bishop's *National Directory for Catechesis* (the "NDC") states:

*"As the primary educators of their children, parents have the right and the duty to choose the kind of educational environment that they determine best suits their children's educational needs."*

It is also important to keep in mind that as "Church", we are a community of believers and ongoing involvement in parish life is an important element in faith formation and practice. Home schooled children are encouraged and welcomed to participate in group programs within PREP and the parish so that they are not isolated from the community. Again, the Bishops note:

*"All parents have an obligation to involve their children in the life and mission of the church. Since their children are being initiated into the life of the Church, which is fundamentally realized in the local parish, parents who provide catechesis for their children in their homes should participate fully in the life of the local parish. They should celebrate the Sunday Eucharist in the local parish, involve themselves in its charitable works, and attend appropriate training and formation sessions the parish or diocese provides."*

That being said, we **strongly** encourage that the children participate in PREP rather than be home schooled in those years when they are to receive a sacrament (typically 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and 6<sup>th</sup> grade). First Communion is a communal sacrament in which we are all sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ. Confirmation prepares the students for full membership in the Church, which involves participation in the parish community.

The NDC also states, *"If Catholic parents choose to provide catechesis for the children in their home, that catechesis must be both complete and authentic...home-based catechesis of children is a cooperative effort between the children, their parents, parish leadership, and the diocesan bishop. Parents who choose to be...their catechists must adhere to all guidelines for catechists as outlined by the diocesan bishop."*

Families interested in home-based catechesis should contact the Program Coordinator for additional information.

## FINAL NOTE

The Program Coordinator reserves the right to amend this handbook. In the event of any such amendment, parents will be given prompt notification of the changes made.