

HANDBOOK FOR THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM  
ST. THERESE & ST. FRANCES X. CABRINI PARISHES  
SHAVERTOWN, PA

Dear Families,

We know how busy family life can be and realize that religion class can seem like “one more thing” you have to cram into your busy schedule. It is our hope that you will come to see it as much more than that. Our pastoral staff and team of catechists are dedicated to making the time your children spend with us as interesting and inspiring as we can. It is our goal to teach the lessons of our faith by praying with them and involving them in activities that are rooted in Catholic values so your children can grow into the best versions of themselves.

None of this can be accomplished without the support from the family. What you do and say as Catholic parents and caregivers is far more important and will teach your child more than we can in the short time that we spend with them. Your example and your attitude toward their faith instruction speaks volumes. We ask you to review the policies in this handbook to ensure that our program operates as smoothly as possible for all families. We encourage you to ask your child about the lessons that are taught each week, and also attend Mass regularly with them. Your interest in their faith and moral development will teach them that these things matter, and it will make their time in religious education class all the more worthwhile.

We applaud you for choosing to raise your children in the Catholic faith, and we are humbled to walk with you on this journey. You have our constant prayer and support.

Yours in Christ,

*Rev. James J. Paisley*

*Kristin M. Osipower*

Rev. James J. Paisley, Pastor

Kristin M. Osipower, Director of Religious Education

## REGISTRATION

Parish-based religious education formally begins when a child enters first grade at a public or non-Catholic private school. Children enrolled at a Catholic school are not required to attend religious education classes; however, they will need to be in contact with the Office of Religious Education and fulfill corresponding requirements during sacramental years (grades 2, 7 and 8).

Registration materials are released in July and enrollment begins in August. Families can register their students by either mailing in all the required forms or by attending one of our in-person registration events. These opportunities are communicated via the mail, parish bulletin, parish website and social media.

### *Required Materials for Registration:*

The following materials are required to successfully register a student for religious education:

- A completed registration form (this form includes the class option of choice)
- A copy of the student's baptismal certificate *if it is not already on file.*
- A \$25 registration fee for each student

Classes are filled on a first-come, first-served basis with parish members of St. Therese's and St. Frances X. Cabrini are given top priority over non-parish students. If a class is filled, families will be asked to choose one of the other options.

### *Non-Parish Students*

St. Therese accepts students from other parishes provided that there is room available in a class. Families should submit a note of permission from their pastor.

### *Transfer Students*

Students who transfer into St. Therese's Religious Education Program after first grade may be asked to provide proof that they attended religious education classes at another parish or Catholic school in order to enroll them in the appropriate grade level.

### *Attending Class at another Parish*

The pastor and Director of Religious Education should be notified if a situation arises that a student needs to attend class at another parish for a year or more. Permission from the pastor may be required. Arrangements will need to be coordinated with the other parish if it involves the reception of any sacraments.

### *Missing a Year or More of Class*

A student who has missed a year or more of class may be asked to complete the missed year/s in order to progress in our program. Please consult the Director of Religious Education to determine an appropriate plan of action.

### *Students who did not receive their Sacraments*

Students in higher grade levels who have not received Baptism, Reconciliation and/or First Eucharist are asked to contact the Office of Religious Education for guidance. This may result in the addition of special classes to prepare them for the reception of those sacraments.

*Updated July 2023*

## CLASS OPTIONS

Please note that Grades 2, 7 and 8 are considered sacramental years and follow specific guidelines. Enrollment will be on a first come, first served basis. Class sizes may be limited due to space accommodation.

1. Traditional Weekly Class: Students meet on a weekly basis with their teacher/s from September through May at the John Paul II Center (former Gate of Heaven School). Class options are:  
Mondays from 4:45 - 6pm (Grades 1-6 only)  
Tuesdays from 5:30 - 6:45pm (Grades 1-8)  
Wednesdays from 6:45 - 8pm (Grades 7-8 only)
2. Family At-Home Program: This program allows students and their families to work and learn independently. Students will be accountable for periodic assessments from September through May. Two Saturday sessions are included in the schedule to complement the experience and provide an opportunity to gather as a community. (Grades 2, 7 and 8 are *not* eligible to attend).

## SACRAMENTAL YEARS (GRADES 2, 7 AND 8)

### *First Penance/First Holy Communion*

Students entering the second grade will spend the year preparing to receive their First Penance and First Holy Communion. The sacraments are usually scheduled for January and May respectively. Students in the second grade are required to attend traditional weekly classes to ensure that the students are properly prepared for the reception of the sacraments. Families will receive communication about the process, important dates, and specific requirements. A parent meeting is typically held in October of the second-grade year to review key items, and a family retreat is held in the spring. Attendance at these events is mandatory.

Catholic school students will complete their catechetical preparation at school but are expected to attend all practices and retreats at the parish.

Students who did not complete first grade at a parish religious education program or Catholic school will be asked to complete the first-grade curriculum in addition to attending the second-grade classes. Contact the Director of Religious Education for more information.

### *Confirmation*

Preparation for Confirmation is a two-year process which begins in the seventh grade. This sacrament welcomes the students as adult members of the Catholic Church, so proper preparation is multi-faceted. In addition to their lessons, students are expected to attend Mass and complete community service to help form them into responsible and thoughtful Catholics.

Students are expected to attend traditional weekly classes to ensure that they are properly prepared for the sacrament. This also contributes to a feeling of community, which is highly valued in our faith. Catholic school students will complete their catechetical preparation at school but are expected to fulfill all requirements, including attending meetings, practices and retreats at the parish.

A parent meeting is typically held in the fall of the seventh-grade year to explain the process to families. Students can begin completing their requirements in seventh grade, and the completion of all requirements will be during eighth grade. Families will be given timely notification of all expectations and deadlines. The successful completion of each requirement is mandatory in order to be eligible to receive Confirmation.

Students who have missed multiple years of religious education, including seventh grade, will need to work with the Director of Religious Education to develop an appropriate plan to adequately prepare the student for the reception of Confirmation.

## ATTENDANCE POLICIES

Attendance records are maintained to provide order and confidence that the children are receiving the proper amount of instruction time as determined by the Diocese of Scranton. The current requirement for parish programs is to provide 30 hours of class time per year.

Please contact your student's teacher and/or the Director of Religious Education if you know that your child will be absent.

### *For students attending traditional weekly classes:*

Each student is allowed three unexcused absences per year. Absences that are accompanied by a doctor's note or proof of another verifiable life event (wedding, funeral, etc.) that causes a student to be absent may be excused.

Students who suffer from chronic conditions that may cause excessive absenteeism are asked to notify the Director of Religious Education.

Late arrivals/early dismissals: Every three late arrivals/early dismissals will equate to one absence. Late arrivals/early dismissals should not be in excess of 30 minutes. Students are asked to bring a note and hand it in at the beginning of class.

When a student reaches the three-absence limit, they will be contacted by the Director of Religious Education and/or the pastor to determine if a student should continue with the program that year.

Late arrivals/early dismissals: Students are allowed three late arrivals/early dismissals which will equate to one absence. Late arrivals/early dismissals should not be in excess of one hour. Students are asked to bring a note and hand it in at the beginning of class.

### *For students in the At-Home Program:*

Because of the nature of the program, students are expected to complete all assignments. Please contact the Director of Religious Education when it is known that an assignment will not be completed by its due date.

Saturday sessions are a mandatory component of the program, and each session is approximately 90 minutes. Both the student and a parent/guardian are expected to attend. Workbook checks may be required. Families should consult the Director of Religious Education if there is an unavoidable conflict.

### *Switching Classes*

Every effort is made to maintain consistency for the student and teacher during the religious education year. Switching classes only occurs in rare circumstances.

## **STUDENT SAFETY PROCEDURES**

The children's safety is our responsibility while they are at their religious education classes. The following procedures will help us ensure that your child is safe until we can securely return them to your care.

### *Drop-off/Pick-up at the St. John Paul II Center (former Gate of Heaven School)*

Drop off is at the school's main entrance at the backside of the building. Please enter via Spring St. Parents may also park their cars in the main lot (off of Spring St.) and walk their children to the door.

Students will be dismissed into the rear parking lot. *This lot will be blocked off to cars for dismissal.* Each grade will have a designated spot marked by orange cones. Parents are asked to park in the main lot (off of Spring St.) and walk over to pick up their child. Overflow parking can be found on the side of Gate of Heaven Church. We will not allow students to dismiss directly into the parking lot or to leave without a parent/caregiver present.

*\*\*Out of respect for parish activity at Gate of Heaven Church, we request that you do not use the parking spaces directly along the wall of the church. These spaces are reserved for Gate of Heaven clergy, staff, and parishioners.*

### *Building/Classroom Security*

All entrance doors to the St. John Paul II Center (former Gate of Heaven School) are locked ten minutes after class is scheduled to begin. Students who are late and parents/caregivers needing to pick up their child early are asked to call the phone number that is posted on the door for access to the building.

All classroom doors are locked from the outside once class begins. Students can exit the classroom from the inside.

### *Fire/Emergency Drills*

All appropriate fire/emergency information for safely exiting the building or sheltering in place will be reviewed with students early in the religious education year. Parents/caregivers are asked to remind their children of the importance of such drills and reinforce the necessity to listen and follow instructions.

### *Safe Environment Lesson*

Per diocesan guidelines, a safe environment lesson about appropriate behavior is given to students within the first few weeks of the religious education year. This lesson teaches them how to recognize and avoid situations that could lead to abuse and encourages communication between children and their parents. Each lesson is intended to be age-appropriate and in adherence with Catholic values. A note home to families is sent when this lesson is given. Please contact the Director of Religious Education with any concerns.

*Updated July 2023*

## STUDENT BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS

Students are expected to behave in a manner consistent with Catholic values. This includes the way they interact with adults and other students, the language they use and the clothes they wear.

- Students are expected to address all adults in a proper manner.
- Students are expected to follow all rules that are designed to contribute to a safe and orderly atmosphere. Proper classroom behavior is expected.
- Students are encouraged to be friendly and welcoming towards all other students. Bullying will not be tolerated.
- Students should not use inappropriate language while in class and on school/church grounds.
- Students should be mindful of clothes that contain images or phrases that may be considered inappropriate.

Reasonable and appropriate disciplinary action will be taken if necessary. Families will be notified if inappropriate or disruptive behavior cannot be resolved.

### *Care of Property*

Students are expected to be respectful of St. Therese's and the St. John Paul II Center facilities. Mistreatment or misuse of the property will result in families being contacted, and the replacement of damaged items may be expected.

### *Care of Workbooks/Texts/Folders*

Students are provided a workbook and folder at the start of each school year. Students are expected to bring these items to each class unless specifically directed otherwise by the teacher. Materials that are damaged or lost may need to be replaced at the parents' expense.

Students in grades 7 and 8 are given a Bible to aid them in their preparation for Confirmation. The Bibles will be kept in class and given to the students at the completion of eighth grade. Because of the sacred nature of the Bible, defamation will not be tolerated. Students may highlight or take appropriate notes under the guidance of their teacher.

### *Homework/Make-up Work*

Any homework or make-up work assigned by the teacher and/or the Director of Religious Education is expected to be completed in a timely fashion. Assignments of this manner will only be given if it helps the student stay on track for successful completion of the grade level or enhances the lesson given in class.

## COMMUNICATION

The Office of Religious Education strives to keep families informed of all activities throughout the year. This may come in the form of mail, email, notes from class and text messages. Families are encouraged to make sure that the parish has updated contact information. Please check your child's folder often.

Teachers are given the discretion as to how they communicate with their families. This will be established between the teacher and the class early in the religious education year. Parents and

guardians who wish to consult with an individual teacher must do so outside the regular class time. Please contact the Director of Religious Education with any concerns or if you are having trouble communicating with a teacher.

## MISCELLANEOUS PROGRAM INFORMATION

### *Weather-Related Closings/Cancellations*

Our Religious Education Program makes independent decisions about weather-related closings/cancellations. Because most classes are held in the evening, families are advised to not assume our decision based on that of local school districts.

We will attempt to notify you as soon as possible if class needs to be canceled due to the weather. Because many of our catechists work during the day, they may not be able to contact you directly. Families are asked to call the cancellation line (570-696-1144 ext. 13), check the parish website ([www.stthereses-shavertown.com](http://www.stthereses-shavertown.com)) or Facebook page for cancellation announcements.

### *Individual Class Cancellations*

If a substitute teacher cannot be secured when a catechist cannot teach his/her class, an individual class may be canceled for the evening. Only that class is canceled, and siblings in other grades are still expected to attend their classes. This decision will be communicated as promptly as possible via phone call/email. Parents who do not receive the message and bring their child to class may be requested to return and pick up the student.

### *Program Modifications/Adjustments*

St. Therese's will act in accordance with local and diocesan guidance in situations that affect our students' health and/or safety. Modifications/adjustments to our program will be made accordingly with every effort being made to provide a quality faith education. Families who experience hardship in these circumstances are asked to directly contact the Director of Religious Education.

### *Sacrament of Reconciliation*

The sacrament of Reconciliation will be made available during class time once per year for students in grades 3-8. Students in the At-Home Program will be contacted to plan for attendance.

### *Volunteering for the Program*

Our faith is sustained by the willingness of others to give witness to it and share it with others. The religious education program is dependent on such people to step into the role of catechist and teach the youth of our parish. Opportunities include teacher, teacher's aide and support staff. No theological or educational experience is necessary, and guidance is provided. Please contact the Director of Religious Education for more information if you are interested in volunteering in the program.

## IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

### *PASTOR*

Rev. James J. Paisley

64 Davis St.

Shavertown, PA 18708

570-696-1144

[jpaisley@stthereses-shavertown.com](mailto:jpaisley@stthereses-shavertown.com)

### *DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION*

Kristin Osipower

64 Davis St.

Shavertown, PA 18708

570-696-1144

[kosipower@stthereses-shavertown.com](mailto:kosipower@stthereses-shavertown.com)

St. John Paul II Center (former Gate of Heaven School)

40 Machell Ave.

Dallas, PA 18612

*Please contact St. Therese's for information/concerns related to the Religious Education program.*