



# RELIGIOUS EDUCATION HANDBOOK

**2021 – 2022**

*Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in  
them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be  
created. And You shall renew the face of the earth.*



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### DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Nicole Filipowski, M.T.S.

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Dear Parents,

Thank you for enrolling your children in Religious Education classes at St. Ambrose Parish. As parents, you are the primary educators of your children. We are excited to support you in the great mission to which you have been called of educating your children to become lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ!

Religious Education classes at St. Ambrose are designed to supplement the faith formation your children receive at home, not replace it. Therefore, it is important that you continue to teach your children at home, primarily by living out the Catholic faith we profess. To ensure your children get the most out of their Religious Education it is important for you to do three things.

First, take your children to Mass every Sunday and Confession at least monthly. These sacraments are privileged encounters with Our Lord through which we experience his great love and mercy. The Eucharist strengthens us on our journey of faith and unites us more closely with Christ. Reconciliation restores our friendship with Christ which becomes damaged by sin.

Second, pray daily with your children and for your children. Communication is the foundation of any relationship. Prayer is how we communicate with God. By praying with your children you help them foster their relationship with Our Lord. Prayer is also the primary means of obtaining grace for ourselves and those whom we teach.

Third, continue your own faith formation. Faith formation is a lifelong process. It doesn't end after Confirmation or when we graduate from high school. When your children see you learning about the faith they will be excited to learn about it too. The more you learn the more you'll be able to share with your children.

Please be sure to watch your email throughout the year for important Religious Education news and updates. Feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns about your children's Religious Education at [nfilipowski@stambroseva.org](mailto:nfilipowski@stambroseva.org) or 703-280-1122.

Sincerely,

*Nicole Filipowski*

Nicole Filipowski, M.T.S.  
Director of Religious Education

## **MISSION**

*The St. Ambrose Religious Education program strives to support parents in handing on the Catholic and Apostolic Faith to their children by offering a systematic presentation of the Faith in union with and in fidelity to the Holy Roman Catholic Church founded by Jesus Christ.*

## **RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS**

Religious education, or catechesis, is only part of any child's faith formation. In raising up children in the Faith, parents are primarily responsible for ensuring their children's regular participation in the sacramental life of the Church and for witnessing true Christian discipleship on a daily basis, especially in the home, the "domestic Church."

Regular participation in the sacramental life of the Church, and a lived experience of Christian discipleship within the home are essential for cultivating good soil in which the seeds of faith imparted during Religious Education may take root and grow. Without good soil in which to take root, these seeds of faith will become scorched and wither away (see Matthew 13:1-9).

Saint Pope John Paul II taught that, "Family catechesis therefore precedes, accompanies and enriches all other forms of catechesis. Furthermore, in places where anti-religious legislation endeavors even to prevent education in the faith, and in places where widespread unbelief or invasive secularism makes real religious growth practically impossible, 'the church of the home' remains the one place where children and young people can receive an authentic catechesis. Thus there cannot be too great an effort on the part of Christian parents to prepare for this ministry of being their own children's catechists and to carry it out with tireless zeal" (*Catechesi tradendae*, 68).

# CURRICULUM

## **Kindergarten**

*Word of Life*, Augustine Institute | Ignatius Press

## **Grades 1-8**

*Faith & Life*, Ignatius Press (online)

## **Grades 9-12**

*Spirit of Truth*, Sophia Institute Press

St. Ambrose Religious Education offers a systematic presentation of the truths of the Catholic faith for all grades. All textbooks have been found to be in conformity with the Catechism of the Catholic Church by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Students are issued one workbook per academic year.\* They should bring their workbook to every class. Replacement workbooks are available for the current list price plus shipping and handling. Parents should contact the Director of Religious Education if their child is in need of a replacement workbook.

*\*Students in grades 1-8 will not be issued hard copy workbooks.*

## **ASSESSMENTS & GRADING**

The Religious Education program at St. Ambrose adheres to the Standards of Learning set forth by the Diocese of Arlington which determine successful grade-completion and a student's ability to advance through the program. These standards are in place to ensure all students throughout the diocese receive a full, systematic presentation of the truths of the Catholic Faith from kindergarten through grade 12.

To assist students in learning and retaining the knowledge they receive in their classes, they will be assigned weekly homework. They will also take periodic quizzes and unit tests. Homework, quizzes, and tests will all be graded and included in each student's overall grade.

Students must receive an overall grade of 70% or higher in order to advance to the next grade level. Students preparing for First Penance, First Holy Communion or Confirmation whose grade falls below 70% must meet with the Director of Religious Education and/or Pastor, along with their parents, in order to determine their preparedness to receive the Sacraments.

### **PRAYERS TO MEMORIZE**

Students are expected to master the prayers at their grade level, in addition to knowing the prayers from previous years. This can only be done through repetition. Praying together regularly at home will help students learn these prayers.

The prayers for each grade level are as follows:

K	The Sign of the Cross, Glory Be, and Guardian Angel Prayer
1 <sup>st</sup>	The Our Father, Hail Mary and Grace Before Meals
2 <sup>nd</sup>	The Act of Contrition
3 <sup>rd</sup>	The St. Michael Prayer
4 <sup>th</sup>	The Act of Faith, Act of Hope, and Act of Charity
5 <sup>th</sup>	The Apostles' Creed, Fatima Prayer, and Hail Holy Queen
6 <sup>th</sup>	The Divine Mercy Chaplet
7 <sup>th</sup>	The Angelus and Memorare
8 <sup>th</sup>	The Come Holy Spirit Prayer

### **SAFE ENVIRONMENT TRAINING FOR STUDENTS: CIRCLE OF GRACE**

The Diocese of Arlington and St. Ambrose Catholic Church are committed to providing a safe environment to all children entrusted to our care and assisting each child to grow in grace and wisdom. Therefore, all students enrolled in Religious Education at St. Ambrose are offered safe environment training using the *Circle of Grace* program.

*Circle of Grace* aims to help students understand the sacredness of who they are and how to seek help when needed through their relationships with trusted adults. *Circle of Grace* is NOT a sex education program.

More information will be given to parents after the start of the school year, before the training begins. Although it is not recommended, parents may choose to not have their children participate in this training. In that case, they are asked to sign an opt-out form.

## **POLICIES & PROCEDURES**

### **ATTENDANCE**

Excellent attendance is expected of all students enrolled in Religious Education at St. Ambrose. Students are permitted no more than five absences per academic year, excused or unexcused. Illness and significant family events such as weddings are acceptable reasons for missing class, though they do count toward the five permitted absences. Sporting practices or events, sleepovers and camping trips are not acceptable reasons for missing class. Students who miss more than the permitted number of

classes must meet with the Director of Religious Education and/or Pastor, along with their parents, to determine the student's eligibility to advance to the next grade of Religious Education.

Parents should notify their child's catechist, and the Director of Religious Education, in advance when their child will be absent from class. If there are extenuating circumstances which prevent a student's full participation in Religious Education, parents should contact the Director of Religious Education.

**If your child is sick, has symptoms of Covid-19 or has been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for Covid-19, please do NOT send them to class!**

### CLASS SCHEDULE

Classes for grades K - 2 are held on Wednesdays from 4:45 pm – 6:00 pm in St. Ambrose School from September through May.

Classes for grades 3 - 12 are held on Wednesdays from 7:00 pm – 8:15 pm in St. Ambrose School from September through May.

### CODE OF CONDUCT

Student conduct should reflect Christian attitudes and virtues. It is an injustice to the other students if a catechist must spend class time disciplining an unruly student.

### **Expectations of Students**

- Students are to act respectfully toward all adults and address them by their last name.
- Toys, games, cell phones and other potentially disruptive items are not permitted in class. If they are brought to class, catechists will keep them in a designated space where students can pick them up afterward.
- Students may not bring food or drink to class, including chewing gum. Water bottles are permitted and encouraged. Snacks may be provided at the catechist's discretion.
- Students may not walk or run around the classroom, throw objects, speak out of turn, or make fun of or bully other students.
- Students must sit up and pay attention throughout the entire class. They may not keep their eyes closed or lay their head down on their desk.
- Students may not write on chalk or dry-erase boards unless it is for the purpose of the lesson, and permitted by the catechist.
- Students must follow the classroom rules and routine set forth by their catechist.
- Students in grades 1 and above are not permitted to use the drinking fountain or restroom during class. This should be done before class.



### **Expectations of Catechists**

- Catechists are to establish classroom rules and a routine at the beginning of the school year and present them to their students on the first day of class.
- Catechists are to treat all students with respect and foster a positive and encouraging learning environment.
- Catechists are to be fair and consistent in their expectations and discipline of students.

### **Steps to Be taken to Address Disruptive Behavior**

Disruptive behavior will be addressed according to the steps below, using as few steps as necessary to resolve the issue.

1. The catechist will speak to the student in class.
2. The catechist will notify the parents, or legal guardians, and Director of Religious Education of the situation. Parents, or legal guardians, should speak with their child about their behavior.
3. A parent, or legal guardian, and the student will meet with the Director of Religious Education and catechist to resolve the situation.
4. The parent will attend class with their child.

### **COMMUNICATION**

The Religious Education Office communicates with parents primarily through email. Please be sure to check your email regularly for important updates. Parents, or legal guardians, that do not have regular access to email should let the Religious Education Office know so that alternate arrangements can be made.

In the event that a student emails their catechist, or the Director of Religious Education, directly, their parent, or legal guardian, must be copied on the email. This ensures their safety.

### **DRESS CODE**

Students, volunteers and visitors are expected to dress in a manner that respects their dignity as children of God who are made in His image and likeness. Their dress should also be conducive to a successful learning environment for all. Therefore, the following guidelines must be adhered to by all students, volunteers and visitors – male and female alike. Violations will be handled in a private and respectful manner. Repeat violations may warrant dismissal from the program.

- Clothing must cover all private areas as well as shoulders and midriffs. No tank tops, halter tops or spaghetti straps are permitted. Skirts and shorts must fall

past the middle finger when arms are held straight down at the side. Pants must be worn at the waist.

- Tight-fitting clothing (i.e. leggings), athletic wear, pajamas, and clothes with rips or holes are not permitted.
- Clothing and accessories that depict drugs, drug paraphernalia, alcohol, tobacco, profanity, violence, weapons, illegal conduct, threats, gang symbols, vulgarity, discrimination, obscene language or images, or studs are not permitted.
- All head coverings must be removed upon entering the school building, unless required for religious or medical reasons.

### **DROP-OFF & PICK-UP**

All students should arrive at least five minutes early for class. Classes begin promptly at 4:45 pm or 7:00 pm respectively.

Students must be picked up promptly at 6:00 pm or 8:15 pm respectively.

Parents should notify their child's catechist, and the Director of Religious Education, if they need to be dismissed early from class for any reason.

### **HOMESCHOOLING**

St. Ambrose Parish respects parents' right to homeschool their children. Parents that are interested in homeschooling their children for Religious Education should notify the Religious Education Office and maintain contact with the Director of Religious Education regarding diocesan policies and guidelines, especially those pertaining to Sacramental preparation.

### **IEPs/LEARNING DISABILITIES**

The Religious Education Office, as well as each student's catechist, should be made aware of any IEPs or learning disabilities. This enables St. Ambrose to provide a successful learning environment for all students and to support the individual needs of students in our program.

All IEPs must be noted at the time of registration and a copy of the IEP must be on file with the Religious Education Office prior to the first day of class. Should a student obtain an IEP during the course of the academic year, the Religious Education Office should be notified and a copy should be provided to be kept on file.

### **INCLEMENT WEATHER**

In the event of inclement weather, St. Ambrose Religious Education follows Fairfax County Public Schools regarding closures and delays. An email and/or text will be sent to parents, notifying them of any cancellations or delays, if conditions allow.

If parents deem it unsafe for their child to attend class due to inclement weather, they should notify the Director of Religious Education via email, as well as their children's catechists, that their children will be absent.

### **PHOTO/VIDEO POLICY**

No student will be photographed or video recorded without express written consent of their parents or legal guardians. Photos and videos taken may be used in the promotion of St. Ambrose Religious Education, or other parish programs and events, both online and in printed publications. Names of students will not be posted, or otherwise included, without additional permission.

Consent for photographs or videos to be taken of students is part of the annual registration process.

### **TARDINESS**

Students enrolled in St. Ambrose Religious Education are expected to arrive on time to class each week. Tardiness is disruptive to the class and disrespectful of other students and catechists who arrive on time. Students who arrive more than five minutes late for class must check in at the front office before going to their class.

Three tardy marks equal one absence. (*See Attendance*).

### **REGISTRATION**

All students enrolled in Religious Education at St. Ambrose Catholic Church must be registered members of the parish, or provide a letter of permission from their pastor granting permission for them to be enrolled in Religious Education at St. Ambrose. Registration of non-parishioners is subject to approval by the Director of Religious Education and/or Pastor.

Parents, or legal guardians, must complete and submit a new registration form at the beginning of each academic year. When a student is enrolled in Religious Education at St. Ambrose for the first time, a copy of their Baptismal Certificate must be provided to be kept in their records. This copy will suffice as proof of Baptism for the reception of First Penance, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation. Students who transfer from

another parish religious education program must provide record of their last grade completed, attendance, grades (if applicable), and any Sacraments received.

If a student transfers to another parish religious education program, a copy of their record will be provided upon request, including attendance, grades and any Sacraments received.

If a student has an IEP, a copy must be provided to the Religious Education Office prior to the first day of class to be kept on file.

### **VISITORS**

No visitors, including parents, are permitted to assist with or attend Religious Education classes without approval of the Director of Religious Education. Permission to do so should be obtained at least one business day prior to class.

All visitors, with the rare exception of a parent sitting in on their child's class, must be compliant with the Diocese of Arlington child protection requirements, to include a background check and Virtus seminar.

All visitors, including parents, must sign in at the front office prior to class.

## **SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION**

### **FIRST PENANCE & FIRST HOLY COMMUNION**

Preparation for First Penance and First Holy Communion takes approximately two years and typically begins in first grade. Students who begin their religious instruction in their second grade year will be enrolled in the Grade 1 class. Parents are required to attend a parent meeting during their child's second year of preparation.

Students preparing for First Penance and First Holy Communion must maintain an overall grade of 70% or higher. Students whose Grade 2 mid-term grade falls below this threshold must meet with the Director of Religious Education and/or Pastor, along with their parents, to determine their preparedness to receive the Sacraments.

### **Important Dates for First Penance & First Holy Communion 2021-2022**

- Parent Meeting – Thursday, January 13 at 7:00 pm
- First Penance – Wednesday, February 23 at 7:00 pm
- First Communion Retreat – Saturday, April 30 from 9:00 am to 12:30 pm
- First Communion Rehearsal – Thursday, May 12 at 7:00 pm
- First Communion Mass – Saturday, May 14 at 11:00 am

For students in third grade and above who have not yet received these Sacraments, parents should contact the Director of Religious Education about the Rite of Christian Initiation for Children (RCIC).

### **CONFIRMATION**

Preparation for Confirmation takes approximately two years and typically begins in seventh grade. Students who have missed a year or more of classes since their First Holy Communion must enroll at the grade level that corresponds with their knowledge of faith per the Standards of Learning (*See Assessments & Grading*). Parents are required to attend a parent meeting at the beginning of their child's first year of preparation.

Students preparing for Confirmation must maintain an overall grade of 70% or higher. Students whose Grade 7 final grade falls below this threshold must meet with the Director of Religious Education and/or Pastor, along with their parents, to determine their preparedness to receive the Sacrament.

In addition to the regular homework, quizzes and tests, students preparing for Confirmation are required to complete the following:

- 20 Service Hours and Essay
- Saint Report
- Letter to the Pastor Requesting the Sacrament of Confirmation
- Confirmation Interview

Details will be provided at the parent meeting.

### **Important Dates for Confirmation 2021**

- Interviews – October 12 to 14 from 3:30 pm – 6:00 pm
- Confirmation Retreat – Saturday, October 23 from 8:30 am to 4:00 pm
- Confirmation Rehearsal – Wednesday, November 3 at 7:00 pm
- Confirmation Mass – Thursday, November 4 at 7:00 pm

### **Important Dates for Confirmation 2022**

- Parent Meeting – Thursday, September 23 at 7:00 pm
- Interviews, Retreat, Rehearsal and Mass are TBD.

For students in ninth grade and above who have not yet received Confirmation, parents should contact the Director of Religious Education about the Rite of Christian Initiation for Children (RCIC).

## **TUITION & FEES FOR 2021 - 2022**

### **Tuition Rates**

One Child: \$150

Two Children: \$225

Three or More Children: \$250

### **Sacramental Fees**

First Holy Communion: \$50 (2<sup>nd</sup> graders)

Confirmation: \$75 (8<sup>th</sup> graders)

### **Out of Parish Fee**

Non-St. Ambrose Parishioners: \$50

**Early Registration Discount** – *Must register before July 1, 2021.*

\$50 discount per family.

No child will ever be prevented from enrolling in Religious Education at St. Ambrose because of an inability to pay. Parents facing financial hardship should contact the Director of Religious Education.

If you must withdraw your children from the program before the first day of class, a refund will be issued upon request minus a \$50 administrative fee. No refunds will be issued once classes have begun.