

OUR LADY OF MOUNT VIRGIN
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM
PARENT HANDBOOK

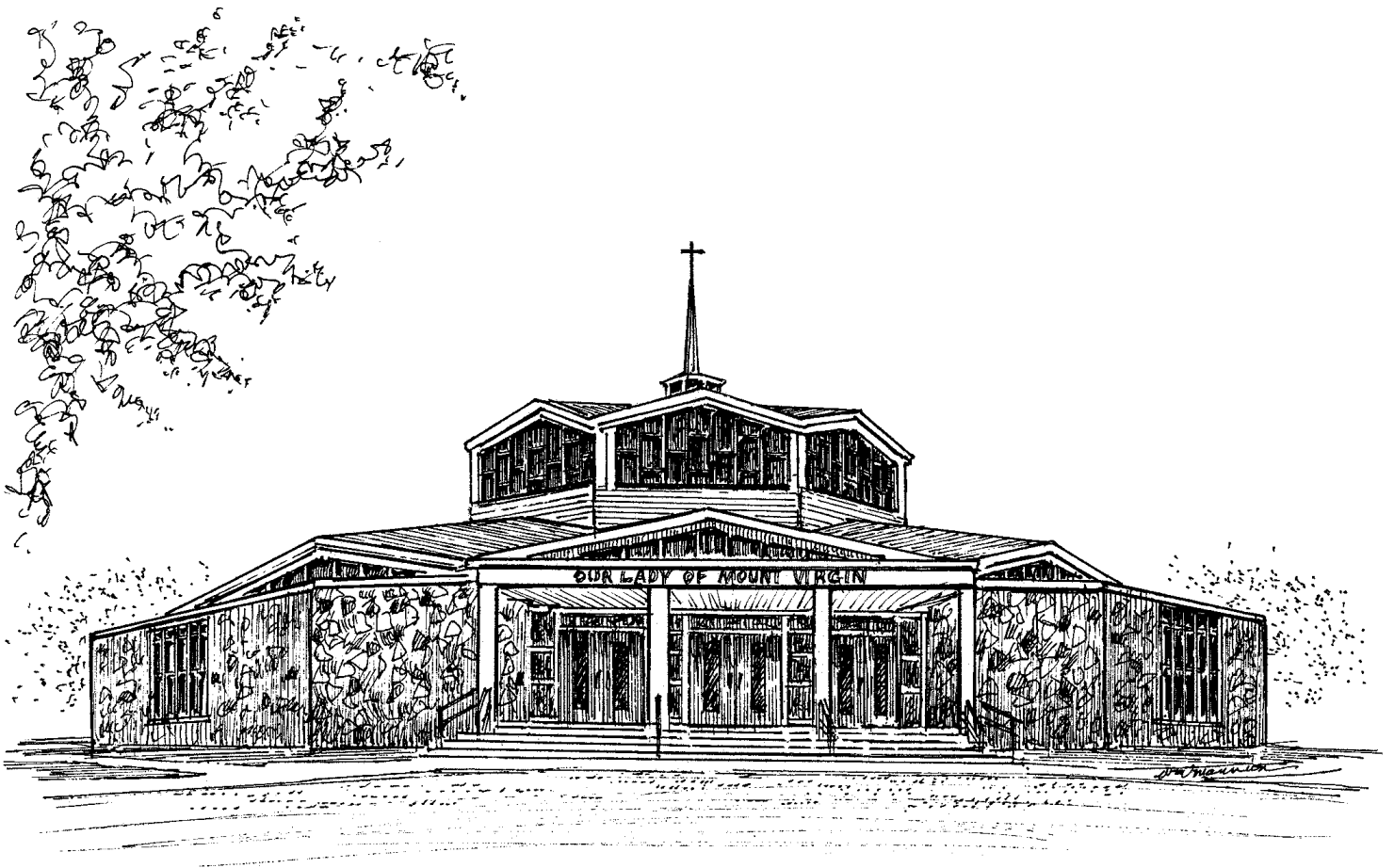


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MISSION

Our Lady of Mount Virgin Religious Education Program is a faith community rooted in Jesus Christ. Our community is “Catholic” because it welcomes all people and shares the message of Christ locally, and throughout the world. The message that Jesus brought was one of hope and love, of justice and freedom.

As a “Catholic” community, we accept the invitation of Jesus to join in His work of bringing the Good News to others. This means that we are recognized as followers of Christ. We are members of His community, known by our love for one another, and by lives centered on Eucharist.

Our Mission is centered on the radical truth of Jesus’ Gospel message. We are committed to assisting our parish families as they develop and continue to experience a deep love of God and His Church.

Our Lady of Mount Virgin Religious Education Program recognizes that parents and guardians are the “first teachers in faith.” Our Religious Education Program personnel complement our parents and guardians; and together, we share our faith as a learned and lived experience.

INTRODUCTION

You, as parents, have selected a Roman Catholic Religious Education Program for your child/children. Our program is faithful to the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, upholds current documents, including the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and utilizes Diocesan programs to train our Catechists. Please sign the agreement at the conclusion of this handbook and return your signed agreement page to the Religious Education office. The agreement page will be kept on file in the parish religious education office. **If this office does not receive the signed agreement page of the handbook and your child(ren) continues to attend religious education classes, this office will accept your child’s enrollment in classes as your formal agreement and acceptance of this handbook.**

PHILOSOPHY

Our Lady of Mount Virgin Religious Education Program is committed to providing quality religious education to the children of our parish.

Your child's faith journey began at their Baptism and continues with the moral and spiritual values you've imparted to your children. So, even though our Catechists make every effort to share our Catholic faith with your children, the primary responsibility of faith formation rests with you, the parents. A weekly experience of Sunday liturgy is a must for complete Catechetical formation. Without the children attending weekly Mass with their families, our program will not be effective. We consider it an honor to share this crucial ministry with you, but stress that a faith-filled family unit is vital to the success of this program.

Catechesis, or Religious Education, is the process of communicating the beliefs, values and practices which make people Catholic Christians. It is the work of handing on, from one generation to the next, the faith that has come down to us from the apostles, and the way of life to which that faith calls us.

Our goals are:

- to aid parents and guardians in leading their children to an awareness of God in their lives;
- to teach students what a Catholic believes and assist them as they grow in faith, hope and love;
- to integrate faith and Christian living by encouraging participation in our Parish community, especially at Sunday Mass and at other Sacramental celebrations;
- to enable parents to share in the preparation of their children for the reception of the sacraments; and
- to encourage parents to continue their own religious development.

The purpose of this Parent Handbook is to serve as a policy statement and to acquaint you with the philosophy, objectives, procedures and methods used in Our Lady of Mount Virgin Religious Education Program which is in accord with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Diocese of Metuchen.

Our Lady of Mount Virgin Parish takes seriously the mandate of the Second Vatican Council's Declaration of Religious Education: there needs to be full parental involvement in parish religious education, and there should be a structured elementary and intermediate school of religion in every parish.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

Priest: “You have asked to have your child baptized.

In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training him/her in the practice of faith. It will be your duty to bring him/her up to keep God’s commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God’s neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?”

Parents: “We do.”

(Excerpt from the Rite of Baptism of an Infant).

Our Catechetical Program is designed to assist parents in their sacred responsibility to educate their child in the faith. It never replaces the parents’ obligation to carry out this responsibility.

It is essential to the child’s growth and development in the Catholic Faith, that the parents live a life of faith in the home. The effectiveness of the catechetical process radically depends on this. For example, the children learn in their religious education classes that celebrating the Eucharist on Sunday with the community of faith, that is the local parish, is essential to being a Catholic. When parents “sleep in” instead of attending Mass, they are saying to their children by their actions: “They told you it was important to belong to the community of the church, but it is not important to us.” The children are then receiving a “mixed message” and statistics demonstrate that it is the parents’ beliefs that they will absorb and model. Parents have the responsibility to be active members of the parish. This includes regularly supporting the parish and participating in the spiritual life of the parish.

The Pastor entrusts the administration of the Catechetical Program to the Parish Catechetical Leader of Religious Education and has delegated his authority to her/him for the fulfillment of this responsibility. Therefore, communication with parents concerning the participation of their children in the Catechetical Program will ordinarily be done by the Parish Catechetical Leader. Parental cooperation with the parish catechetical staff is essential not only when a problem involving the child arises, but at all times.

Parents meetings are mandatory. Each child must be represented by one parent or guardian.

TUESDAY SCHEDULE

4:00-5:10 P.M.	Grades 1, 2 and 3
5:30-6:40 P.M.	Grades 4 and 5
7:00-8:15 P.M.	Grades 6, 7 and 8

Tuesday 4 P.M. dismissal will be through the back of the school-cafeteria exit. The remaining sessions will be dismissed through the side gym doors. For safety reasons we ask that parents NOT park in the first row of parking spaces next to the school. We must insist that a parent/guardian get out of the car to pick up their child(ren).

- Students should line up, by class, in the gym prior to the start of the session for group prayer.

ATTENDANCE:

Religious education classes must be given first priority. **Athletic and social activities are not an excuse for continuous absence or early dismissal.**

It is imperative that a child be present for all classes unless illness or other serious reason prevents this. If a child continually misses class, he/she will not be eligible for the next grade. Excessive absence may delay the reception of sacraments.

When a child is absent due to illness a written note must be given to the child's teacher explaining the reason for the absence. Three (3) absences will be considered the limit for eligibility to the next grade level.

Please Note: The sacramental preparation classes (First Communion and Confirmation) are two (2) consecutive year programs. Therefore, a child will not be eligible to receive the sacraments if they miss one year of preparation. Religious Education is a continuous program. Grades 1 through 8 are required.

EARLY DISMISSAL AND PUNCTUALITY:

A child will not be released to anyone other than a parent/guardian unless we have explicit written permission from the parent/guardian. A form listing adults that may pick up a child is enclosed with each family's re-registration packet. If an adult is not listed on the form, that adult will not be permitted to pick up the child. If a child is to walk home after classes, the teacher must receive a note from the parent/guardian before he/she can be released.

Students are expected to be on time for their classes. Habitual tardiness will not be tolerated. Any child who continually arrives late for classes will be asked to repeat the Religious Education year.

Please do not ask that a child be dismissed from classes early. If an emergency arises and the child needs to be released early, the parent/guardian must write a note and come into the building to sign the child out of the program. The child must be picked up at the Religious Education office. Students may not wait outside the school or run across the street to a waiting car. A parent/guardian must come into the building to pick up their child. This ensures the safety of each and every child.

DISMISSAL PROCEDURES:

The catechist or aide will wait by the door with the student(s). Parents/Guardian(s) **MUST** get out of the car and walk to the door to pick-up their child. Only Parent(s)/Guardian(s) and/or adults listed on the Pick-up Release Form (which is kept on file in the Religious Education Office) may pick-up a child. Please ask the adult(s) listed on the Pick-up Release Form to provide photo identification to the office prior to pick-up/dismissal.

SNOW DAYS:

In the event of inclement weather, the catechist will contact the parent/guardian of each child in that class. The catechist will also notify their aide of any closings/changes. The Pastor and/or Director will make the decision to close as early as possible.

CALENDAR:

The entire Religious Education year is outlined on the Religious Education Calendar which is given to each family prior to the start of classes. Please place the Calendar in an obvious place for easy referral. Reminder notices will not be sent. The calendar can also be accessed through the parish website.

REGISTRATION:

The Parish Catechetical Program is open to registered parish families. A parent/guardian must register the child.

All new students must present their Baptismal Certificate (and proof of any other Sacraments received – in the case of transfer students) at the time of registration. Transfer students must also

bring a letter from their former parish stating years attended and grade completed as well as the child's most recent Progress Report.

It is expected that children will attend Religious Education Classes each year. Parents/guardians whose children have left the program are required to meet with the Pastor before a child can be re-admitted to the program.

FEES:

If there is a legitimate financial problem, parents/guardians are asked to make an appointment with the Pastor.

TEXTBOOKS AND CURRICULUM:

Each child will receive a textbook as part of the registration fee. This textbook must be brought to class each week. If a student forgets to bring this book, it will reflect a lack of preparation. Lost books must be replaced and can be purchased from the Religious Education Office.

The textbook used in Grades 1 through 8 is Our Sunday Visitor's "Alive in Christ" Program. Grade 7 also utilizes a workbook created and provided by the OLMV Office of Religious Education. Grade 8 also utilizes Our Sunday Visitor's "Call to Celebration" confirmation sacramental preparation book. In addition to the text Grade 2 uses Our Sunday Visitor's First Reconciliation and First Eucharist workbooks. The 8th Grade also utilizes the You Cat Series.

Each student will receive a Bible in Grade 6. The student is expected to bring this Bible to class each week for Grades 6 through 8.

As mandated by our Bishop, the Religious Education instructors will be teaching the Benziger Family Life Program. The textbook used by the Catechists addresses the needs of today's developing young Catholics.

Benziger Family Life Program: The Benziger Family Life Program helps to communicate five themes that strengthen family values:

- (1) Family Living – respect for family.
- (2) Personal Growth and Understanding – respect of self; self- esteem.
- (3) Respect for Life – learning to respect and cherish all life.
- (4) Catholic Christian Sexuality – gradual development of a healthy, wholesome Christian attitude towards sexuality.
- (5) Social Living – respect for others, responsibility, and the call to Christian social ministry.

Each student will receive a copy of the Benziger text for their grade level as well as a coordinating Parent Handbook.

HOMEWORK:

The Catechists will assign homework to the students on a continuing basis. Students are responsible for completion of these assignments by the next scheduled class. Parents/guardians should go over with their child each assignment. Assignments for Grades 7 and 8 should be reviewed by the parent/guardian prior to submission to the teacher or office.

TESTING:

At the end of each Religious Education grade, a final test will be administered to all students covering the material learned during the year. Students are expected to achieve a passing grade in order to proceed to the next level. Grades 5 and 8 may be tested periodically using the ACRE Testing Services.

PROGRESS REPORTS:

Progress reports will be distributed in January and at the close of the Religious Education year. These reports will inform you of your child's development in Religious Education classes. Please refer to the Religious Education calendar for the dates that the reports will be sent home.

SPECIAL NEEDS CLASSES:

Our Lady of Mount Virgin provides catechesis for special needs students. Classes will be arranged for special needs students as the need arises and if volunteer teachers/aides are available.

DISCIPLINE:

1. The Religious Education classes will take place in an atmosphere of learning within a Christian setting. Each student is expected to uphold proper decorum showing respect for the Catechist and his/her fellow students.
2. Parents/guardians are asked for their cooperation in solving any discipline problems in the classroom. We want your child in class and we will do all we can to help.

If a child is disruptive, disrespectful, or acts in any other inappropriate manner, he/she will be immediately sent to the Religious Education office.* After the child is spoken to, he/she will be sent back to class. If the behavior continues, the Director will set up a meeting with the parent(s)/guardian(s). If after this initial meeting the inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be asked to leave the program. Behavior which takes away another child's right to learn will not be tolerated.

Examples of inappropriate behavior are as follows:

1. Improper language, attitude or gestures
2. Destroying property
3. Smoking
4. Gum chewing
5. Violence of any type (i.e. fighting, name calling, etc.)
6. Rudeness, disrespectful of those in authority
7. Indifference to the program.

*An incident report will be filled out by the child's teacher and MUST be signed by the parent/guardian each time the child is asked to leave class due to improper behavior. In the event that THREE (3) incident reports are taken during the Religious Education year, that child will be suspended from the Religious Education Program for the remainder of the year. The student may be re-admitted the following year only after the parent/guardian and child have met with the Pastor. It will be understood that the child will repeat the grade and that there will be no repetition of unacceptable behavior.

GENERAL RULES:

- No eating or chewing gum in class.
- No hats inside the building.
- Children are expected to have respect for the building environment and belongings in the building.
- Students and their parent/guardian will be responsible for damage and/or graffiti to the school property.
- Cell phones must be turned "off" in the building.
- No electronic devices (iPods, MP3 players, tablets, etc.) permitted during religious education classes.

FOOD ALLERGIES:

Food allergies are a growing health concern for children across the country. Even a miniscule amount of the allergenic food is sufficient to cause a life-threatening reaction and inadvertent contact (via nose, eyes, mouth) can be sufficient to put a child in danger. It is the goal of the Religious Education Program of Our Lady of Mount Virgin to provide an allergen free environment for children with food allergies, so that they may enjoy a safe and respectful place to grow in their faith.

Recognizing that strict avoidance of the allergen is the only way to prevent a potentially life-threatening reaction, we ask your cooperation with the following policy: **No food and/or drink of any kind are permitted during parish Religious Education Programs. This includes foods that are considered “safe”.**

Parents and guardians of highly allergic children **MUST** make known the special needs of their child to the parish catechetical leader and catechist.

SACRAMENTAL POLICIES:

All requirements for the reception of First Communion, Penance and Confirmation will be handled at a parent meeting scheduled for each of these sacraments. These meetings include faith instruction and adult education for parent(s)/guardian(s) on the particular sacraments. Attendance at these meetings is required and failure by a parent/guardian to attend may jeopardize a child's reception of the sacrament (see Religious Education calendar for specific dates). Additional sacramental information is contained on pages 12 through 15 of this handbook.

UPDATED INFORMATION:

If phone numbers or addresses change at any time during the Religious Education year, please contact the office immediately. This is absolutely necessary in the event of an emergency. This also holds true for emergency contact numbers.

ILLNESS OR INJURY:

If a child becomes ill or injured during religious education, the parent(s)/guardian(s) will be notified. The child(ren) will be released only from the Religious Education office.

FIRE DRILLS:

Will be performed twice per school year.

CELL PHONE POLICY:

Catechists and aides must refrain from texting or making/receiving calls during class time. Of course, if an emergency arises, the class will be supervised by the aide while the catechist takes an imperative call. Please **leave** the classroom to make or take an emergency call or text. If an aide is under 18 years of age, please send the aide to the Religious Education Office to get an adult to supervise the class while you attend to the emergency.

Any student using a cell phone or electronic device during class time needs to have that cell phone or electronic device taken away and **immediately brought to the Religious Education Office**. The student's parent(s) may then pick up the cell phone, iPod, electronic device, etc. from my office.

OLMV cannot be responsible for any items lost and/or stolen that have been brought into the building by the students, catechists or aides. All electronic devices, toys, etc. should be left at home.

CHILD ABUSE POLICY:

If a Catechist/Director suspects a child has been abused, New Jersey State statutes require the Division of Youth and Family Services to be notified immediately.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE POLICY:

Drugs of any type (alcohol, illegal substances, prescription medicines) will not be allowed on premises. If a student is found to be in possession, the student(s) will be detained until the police and parents/guardians are notified. Drug possession by a minor will always be considered a police matter.

The Parish Catechetical Leader/Catechist/Aides will not send a student home with a driver who is visibly impaired—the program director reserves the right to contact the emergency number on file.

EMPLOYEES, CATECHISTS/AIDES:

In cooperation with the Office of Child Protection of the Diocese of Metuchen, all catechists/aides and employees of the OLMV Religious Education Program must have a background check and be fingerprinted through the Kidsafe Program. All catechists/aides and employees must also attend the Protecting God's Children Seminars and attend any workshops updating the Protecting God's Children program as well as additional workshops provided throughout the year as determined by the Religious Education Office.

SACRAMENTS:

FIRST PENANCE

Our program endeavors to teach our children that Reconciliation is a call to strengthen our friendship with people and with God. We stress the basic belief that God is all loving and all forgiving.

Through parental example of forgiveness in daily situations at home, children will learn of God's never-ending forgiveness and regularly use the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a means for inward peace.

First Penance Requirements:

1. Attendance at all Sunday Masses and Holy Days of Obligation.
2. Attendance at all religious education classes. Unexplained or excessive absences may delay reception of the sacrament.
3. Parental attendance at all mandatory Penance meetings. Parent and teacher cooperation is necessary.
4. Mastery of class material and format for Penance which includes: Act of Contrition and basic prayers.
5. Church bulletin must be handed in weekly.
6. Parents are invited to receive the sacrament of Penance during the celebration. If any parent/guardian has any difficulty with receiving the sacrament, please see the Pastor.
7. Dress respectfully to the occasion.

FIRST HOLY COMMUNION

The Eucharist is the sacrament which is the "source and summit of Christian Life." Eucharist signifies our union with the blessed Trinity and is the source of union among the People of God. Eucharist is the sublime mystery of God's love, a

mystery which unites us to Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Eucharist is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Catholic persons fully participate in the Mass when they come forward to share in Eucharist.

In the Eucharist we are called to imitate Jesus in His giving which "was an unconditional giving of self to and for others."

The Eucharist is a memorial and a celebration which unites us with Jesus and with our Catholic Family. Through, with, and in the Church, Christ's sacrifice on the Cross and the victory of His resurrection becomes present to all who receive His precious gift of Himself – BODY AND BLOOD.

First Holy Communion Requirements:

1. Attendance at all Sunday Masses and Holy Days of Obligation.
2. Attendance at all religious education classes. Unexplained or excessive absences may delay reception of the sacrament.
3. Parental attendance is mandatory at all meetings.
4. Church bulletin must be handed in weekly.
5. Practices for First Communion are mandatory.
6. Dress code for First Communion:
Girls will wear white dresses, white socks, tights or knee socks, white shoes, and a white veil. Boys will wear white shirts, blue or white ties, navy blue suit, and dress shoes.

Prior to reception of First Penance and First Holy Communion, children need to show a true readiness for Sacramental Life. Two years in attendance at Religious Education Classes as well as regular attendance at Sunday Mass are minimum requirements. It is expected that parents/guardians will actively participate in the education and religious worship with their child(ren).

CONFIRMATION

For many years now, our young adults have been living and growing as baptized Catholics. At this time, the Catholic Community extends an invitation to take the next step in a wonderful journey of faith – the sacrament of Confirmation.

Our program is filled with stories and questions, prayers and activities, which ask the youth to open themselves to the Holy Spirit – the spirit of wisdom and revelation. We endeavor to help the students face the everyday challenges on their faith journey.

The parish community joins with St. Paul's prayer for all:

MAY THE HOLY SPIRIT BE WITH YOU AS YOU GROW
IN FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE!

Confirmation I Requirements:

1. Attendance at all Sunday Masses and Holy Days of Obligation.
2. Attendance at all religious education classes. Unexplained or excessive absences may delay reception of the sacrament.
3. Church bulletin must be handed in weekly with an explanation of that week's gospel and homily.
4. Mandatory attendance at all special events pertaining to Confirmation.
 - a. Parent/Sponsor/Student meeting
 - b. Discovery Retreat Day
 - c. Contract signing.
5. Sponsor MUST be chosen during Confirmation I.
6. 15 Hours of service.
7. Letter to Pastor.
8. Participation in a Liturgical (church) event.

Confirmation II Requirements:

1. Attendance at all Sunday Masses and Holy Days of Obligation.
2. Attendance at all religious education classes. Unexplained or excessive absences may delay reception of the sacrament.
3. Church bulletin must be handed in weekly with an explanation of that week's homily.
4. Mandatory attendance at all special events pertaining to Confirmation.
 - a. Parent/Sponsor/Student meeting
 - b. Sponsor/Student – completion of textbook and journal work
 - c. Retreat
 - d. Contract signing
 - e. Additional meetings and/or service opportunities may be required
5. 10 Hours of Service.
6. Letter to the Pastor requesting to be presented to the Bishop for Confirmation.
7. Participation in a Liturgical (church) event.

The Sacrament of Confirmation is a powerful sharing of God's grace. Our young parishioners are invited to complete their "Initiation in the Faith" by proudly

proclaiming the fullness of life as a Catholic person. Preparation for the adult experience of our faith is a process, not an activity. Young persons prepare to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation over a period of time. They are invited to grow in wisdom and grace as they participate in Sunday Mass, attend class and perform community service. Certainly it is expected that youngsters will be faithful to their religious education throughout elementary and intermediate school. No child shall be considered ready to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation in the eighth grade who has not completed at least three consecutive years of religious education.

OFFICE HOURS

The Religious Education Office hours are:

Monday 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM
Tuesday 1:30 PM – 8:30 PM
Wednesday 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM

OFFICE TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Religious Education Office 732-356-2149, Ext. 2010
Parish Office 732-356-2149

If there are any questions or concerns, please contact the Religious Education Office at the number listed above.

Dear Parents/Guardians and Students of Our Lady of Mount Virgin Religious Education,

It is with great joy that we welcome you to Religious Education classes. We hope and pray that you are ready to learn about your Catholic faith and share it with others.

Our Religious Education teachers and volunteers are eager to help you to learn more about God, the Catholic Church, prayer, the sacraments, and practical ways to live out our faith each day. While Religious Education classes meet for only a short time each week, each of us has the responsibility of learning about living our faith each day to the best of our ability.

A little over an hour of classes per week is only the beginning of the commitment we are called to make as disciples of Jesus and children of God. The primary place for learning about living a Catholic life is in our homes with our families. Students learn by the example of those around them. We challenge all of you to discuss what was covered each week in Religious Education class, and continually look for ways to give witness to the teachings of the Church. We also ask parents/guardians to take an active role in your child's religious instruction: ask questions about what was learned, review the materials, and supervise and check homework. (The students will have homework!) If religious education is important to the parents/guardians, it will be important to the students.

To live as a Catholic; it is important to know our faith. Religious Education will strive to teach what is important. More critical than simply knowing our faith is living out our desire to be close to God. We are called to know Him, love Him, and serve Him. An important aspect of our vocation as disciples of the Lord is to come together and worship Him each week. Religious Education does not take the place of weekly Mass. All of our students are required to attend BOTH Mass and Religious Education EVERY week. Parents/guardians are also encouraged to bring their children to the Sacrament of Reconciliation on a regular basis, and to pray with them every day.

We look forward to working with you this year. We pledge our service to you and to all of our students during the upcoming year. If you have any questions or concerns at any time, please do not hesitate to contact the office. May God continue to bless you and your family.

Sincerely,
Rev. Patrick J. Kuffner, Pastor
Dorothy Zmigrodski, Parish Catechetical Leader

AGREEMENT

I have read and agree with the policies stated in Our Lady of Mount Virgin's Religious Education handbook.

Family Name

Parent/Guardian Signature

Children are in the following grades:

Child's Name

Grade Class Room

Home Phone #

Emergency Contact Person and Phone #

This agreement must be signed and returned to the Religious Education Office. If the Religious Education Office does not receive the signed agreement page of this handbook and your child(ren) continue to attend religious education classes, the Religious Education office will accept your child's enrollment in classes as your formal acceptance and agreement of this handbook.