

Gatechist Handbook

Our Lady of Lourdes Parish
Office of Religious Education
379 Linden Street, Massapequa Park, NY 11762
(516) 799-5179

Pastor:

Monsignor James P. Lisante

Moderator:

Rev. Fernando (Andiy) Egargo

Director of Religious Education:

Mrs. Donna Kesselman
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Program Assistants:

Mrs. Pat Babinelli
Miss Sue Bouffier
Mrs. Angela Buffolino

Office Hours - Room 21

Mondays through Wednesday: 9:00am to 2:00pm

Thursdays by appointment only

Wednesdays until 8:30pm on class days only

Saturdays: 9:00am to 10:45am on class days only

When classes are not in session, please use our office's outside entrance on Linden Street

Catechist Job Description

Catechist's Role

- To assist parents in their sacred responsibility to educate their children in the faith. Catechists complement, but do not replace parental obligations as the primary teachers of their children's faith
- To guide others to choose and find joy in the narrow path of Jesus Christ (Matthew 7:13-14), and help them to acquire and deepen their Catholic faith and identity

Six Fundamental tasks of a Catechist

- To promote knowledge and understanding of the Catholic Faith
- To direct the formation of a moral compass
- To provide liturgical education for actively participating in the Sacraments and in weekly Mass
- To lead students in various forms of prayer
- To prepare students to take the love they have received from God and share it within the community
- To promote missionary spirit for helping those in need

Time Requirement

- **Preparation time: 1 to 2 hours per week preparing the lesson in advance of the class**
- **Class time: 85 minutes, once a week (75 minutes of class time **PLUS 10 minutes before class begins**)**
- Attendance at teacher's meetings
- Attendance at events specific to the Grade Level you are teaching, such as grade level Mass, parent meetings, Sacrament rehearsals and celebrations, etc.

Length of Commitment

- The academic year runs from late-September until late-March;

Qualities of a Catechist

- A love of the Lord, and a love of children
- **Willingness to live and share your faith, and not just provide information**
- Have a strong personal prayer life
- A regular participant in Mass and an active member of Our Lady of Lourdes parish (or your home parish)
- A commitment to your personal faith development through prayer, reading, studying and **a willingness to journey in faith along with your students**
- Devotion to Mary, the model for all catechists as the first disciple of Jesus
- Devotion to the Most Holy Eucharist as the true Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ, the source of spiritual nourishment for Catholics
- A generosity of spirit, respect for diversity, and a habit of hospitality and inclusion

Benefits of Involvement

- Live out your baptismal call by modeling Jesus and creating disciples
- Prayer, liturgy, and your own relationship with God will become more vibrant and meaningful
- Practice stewardship of God's creation by sharing your gifts and talents with the youth of our parish
- Gain a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment in serving others, and a sense of true joy in serving the Lord
- Share in Christian fellowship by taking an active role in the parish community
- Gain renewed energy and vitality by spending time with energetic, enthusiastic young people
- Set an example to your own family by sharing your faith with others and practicing your faith in a concrete and visible way

Requirements for Catechists

- **Completion of the Diocesan Background check**
- **Completion of the Virtus program**
- **Completion of Monthly Bulletin Articles on the Virtus Website**
- Attendance at scheduled teacher's meetings.
- Commitment to being fully prepared for each lesson and fully committed to filling class time with instruction
- Commitment to communicate God's love to those entrusted to your care by proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ in your actions as well as in the lessons
- **Religious Education should not be regarded as lessons or chores which need to be completed, but rather a journey of faith in which we come to know, love and encounter God.**

Responsibilities:

You are responsible for abiding by the policies outlined in this Catechist Handbook AND in the Parent Handbook

- **Be prepared for class.** Invest approximately 1-2 hours beforehand to read and reflect upon the chapter you will be teaching. Create a lesson plan and have a plan for engaging students for the entire class time with relevant activity.
- **Simply reading the assigned chapter in class is not acceptable or appropriate.** A catechist's role is to supplement the chapter with discussion points, additional instruction, prayer, inspiration, Bible activities, and **to provide students with a faith journey.**
- **Be in the building at least 10 minutes before class begins.** You should be sitting at your table in the auditorium ready to greet your students when they arrive.
- **During the opening prayers, all teachers must be standing next to their class, praying with them, guiding them, and keeping them on task.**

• **Responsibilities (continued)**

- Follow and enforce all safety procedures. **Per Monsignor, a catechist will be dismissed immediately for not upholding the diocesan “No food, drink, candy, sweets in the classroom” policy, or for allowing early dismissal of a student directly from the classroom.**
- **No cell phones are to be used in the building for personal or social reasons by students or catechists.** Students should have their phones turned off and stowed away. Catechists can keep their phones on their desks to check the time or to use in the case of emergency only.
- **Classroom control and management is expected.** Behaviors that aren't tolerated in an Elementary/Middle School classroom are not permitted in our classrooms either, including talking or fooling around during a lesson, getting out of their seats, gathering around the teacher's desk, etc. Be consistent and upfront about expectations. **Remember, you are their teacher and not their friend or peer, and your class is not a play date or social hangout.**
- **Distribute all the handouts that our office places in your folder once you get to the classroom.** Handouts are still the primary way we communicate with parents. **Do not distribute them in the auditorium,** where they get dropped, forgotten or misplaced and never make it home. Remind your students to bring in a folder for transporting these handouts home to their parents.
- **Keep accurate attendance records.** These are legal documents and must be handled as such.
- **Your reliable attendance is expected** for weekly class, at teacher's meetings and at all Grade Level specific events such as parent meetings, Family Mass, Sacrament practices and celebrations.

Catechist Arrival Procedure

- **Arrive at least 10 minutes before class begins.**
- Pick up your folder outside the Religious Ed office. Memos to catechist will be placed inside your attendance folder. Read these immediately, as they contain important information which may affect that day's class.
- After setting up your classroom, go into the auditorium and greet your students as they arrive at your table. Make sure students who do not yet know the prayers have their book opened to the prayer pages. **Quiet down students and show them how to place themselves in the presence of God.**
- **Opening prayers will begin at the exact time class is scheduled to begin. All teachers must be standing alongside their class, praying along with the students, guiding them and keeping them on task.**
- For respect and reverence during the prayers, all late arriving people will wait in the back of the auditorium and will recite the prayers from there. Do not motion for late arriving students to join your table until after the prayers conclude.
- After the prayers, the Director may make some general announcements, and then students/teachers will be asked to proceed to their classrooms. **Make sure that students quietly tuck their chairs under the table as they leave.**
- For the safety and protection of students, all parents and other adults must leave the auditorium once class begins, and the classroom area will be secured.

When Class Begins

- Take attendance with accuracy and integrity. If a student is not here, they **MUST** be marked absent, even if they bring a note or have an excuse. Record attendance on the sheet in your folder using the following notations:
 - Denotes Present
 - / Denotes Absent
 - X** Denotes Late (15 minutes after starting time)
- Per diocesan guidelines, we will strictly enforce the attendance policy as outlined in the parent handbook. **Please familiarize yourself with this policy!** Our office staff will be following up with parents of students when they've missed either two classes in a row or three classes in total.
- After taking attendance, distribute any notices to be send home and instruct the students to place them in their folders. **Do not distribute these notices in the auditorium.** Read all notices so you are aware of what is going on when parents ask questions.
- Place absence notes or any other correspondence from parents in your folder so it can be filed by our office.
- Students who are not on your roster should not be in your classroom. **Please do not promise parents that their child can be in your class.** While our office tries to accommodate such requests, it is not always possible.
- Rosters contain sensitive information. In addition to phone numbers and addresses, they also indicate any learning disabilities, educational or medical accommodations, medical conditions, etc. **As such, rosters are to be safeguarded, and all information that they contain is to be kept confidential.**

Lesson for the Day

- **Catechists MUST follow the lesson schedule and the assigned chapter.** Our workbook lessons are in accordance with the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Diocese of Rockville Centre. If you skip or omit lessons, the children will miss the faith and doctrine requirements for their grade level.
- **Your students are required to know the following prayers.**
 - All students:** Sign of the Cross, Hail Mary, Our Father and Glory Be.
 - Levels 2 and up:** Act of Contrition
 - Levels 3 and up:** Apostle's Creed.
- **Students in Levels 2 through 8 are required to know Mass responses and the proper procedure for receiving Communion and Confession. They must also know that the Eucharist is the true Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus.**
- **Students in Levels 7 and 8 are required to understand the meaning of the Sacrament of Confirmation, and they should develop spiritual reasons for receiving the Sacrament.**
- **Some of the additional activities our office may plan and implement during Class time throughout the year:**
 - Confessions
 - Fire Drills
 - Stations of the Cross and other Seasonal activities
 - Prayer services or Meditative Prayer
 - The diocesan required Thoughtful and Safe safety lesson
 - Level 8 Formation of Chastity Lesson
 - Special Events and/or guest speakers for older students

Hints for Lesson Planning and Delivery

- **Prepare your lesson in advance.** Classes without the direction of a prepared lesson plan are vulnerable to boredom, lackluster performance, poor participation, and discipline problems.
- Stand and walk around the room instead of teaching from a seated position behind the desk.
- **Overplan to avoid dead and wasted class time at the end of the session.** Do not stop 5 minutes early to allow children to put their coats on and pack up.
- If you don't know the answer to a student's question, simply say "that's a great question, let me get back to you" or "we can talk about that next week" to give yourself time to research an appropriate answer. If you need guidance, ask! Never make up something off the top of your head or give your opinion, which may not be aligned with the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- For Level 1, Mrs. Angela Buffolino will provide you with supplemental activities. For Level 2, Miss Sue Bouffier will provide you with sacramental preparation activities.
- For Levels 3 through 6, our office may provide some supplemental activities. The Sadlier Website has numerous resources to enhance your lessons. Google "Sadlier Connect We Believe Catholic Identity Lesson Plans" and choose the option for your Level. If you need assistance finding these resources, please ask.
- For Levels 7 and 8, Google "Matthew Kelly Decision Point". Under Free Resources, you will find many useful categories to explore.

When Class Ends

- Dismiss your class on time; **not early** because you must fill the entire time with relevant activities, and **not late** because it creates problems with the waiting parents.
- **End your class with prayers.** It provides a spiritual tone for the completion of the lesson, and the students learn prayers by repetition.
- **Straighten the desks, erase the board, pick up trash and leave the room in good condition for the next catechist.**
- Write the name of any absent student on the handouts and place them in your folder to distribute the following week.
- **Remove all other papers from your catechist folder before returning it to the office. Do not leave the building with your folder.** For security and legal reasons, your folder must be stored in the office and cannot go home with you.

Students Arrival Policy

- Children in Levels 1 through 6 must be escorted to and from the building by parents or their adult designee. Students in Levels 7 and 8 may be dropped off and picked up from outside the doors of the building
- Only the doors in the front and sides of the chapel should be used to enter or exit the school building. **All students will enter the auditorium through the South Hallway located to the left of the chapel by Room 24.**
- For safety and security, the doors in the back of the school building are always locked from the outside and are not to be used for arrival or dismissal.

Student Dismissal Policy

- Parents or their adult designee must wait outside at dismissal time. They cannot enter the building. Teachers will dismiss the children through the outside doors on the sides of the chapel.
- Students in Levels 1 through 6 are not permitted to leave the building unescorted. Familiarize yourself with the parent or authorized pick-up person of your students, and hand each student off to the appropriate person.
- Students cannot run out into the parking lot to meet a parent. Students cannot exit through the rear doors by the library or student's bathrooms.
- Early dismissals must be conducted through our office. A parent must come in and sign the student out, and office staff will get the child from the classroom.

Wednesday 4pm session: Dismissal is at 5:15pm

- Levels 1, 2 and 3 classes will be dismissed from the North Doorway by Room 1
- Levels 4, 5 and 6 classes will be dismissed from the South Doorway by Room 24

Wednesday 5:45pm session: Dismissal is at 7pm

- All students will be dismissed from the North Doorway by Room 1

Wednesday 7:15pm session: Dismissal is at 8:30pm

and Saturday 9:30am session: Dismissal is at 10:45am

- Students will be dismissed through the South Doorway by Room 24

Assessments

- **To minimize student/parent stress, do not give written quizzes to your students.**

You can assess the progress of your students by using worksheets or oral assessments.

Only the teacher can assess a student, and all assessments must be kept confidential.

- Students in Levels 2 and 8 will be asked to demonstrate readiness to receive the Sacraments, and knowledge of the procedures for receiving the Sacraments.

Substitutes

- Reliable attendance is expected, however if you must be absent from class, give us as much notice as possible so we have time to arrange for a substitute. If another catechist is willing to cover your class, let us know! If you have another substitute in mind, such as a parent, speak to the Director first.

Discipline

- All students are expected to exercise self-control and to conduct themselves properly. They must be respectful of you and all staff, and they must treat their classmates kindly.
- Expectations for discipline are detailed in the Parent Handbook. Firmly set rules for class behavior on the first day of class. It is best to be strict in the beginning, and then ease up as time goes on.
- **Do not tolerate unacceptable behavior.** For the first offence, give the student a verbal warning. For the second offence, send the student to our office.

Cell Phones

Student's phones must be turned off and stowed away during class time. Students are not permitted to use their phones during class, or to take their phones with them to the bathroom.

Bathrooms

- Unless there is a documented medical issue, **students should not be leaving the classroom routinely to use the bathroom.** Parents have been asked to attend to their child's bathroom needs before class starts. **Be clear and upfront about this expectation with your class.**
- Teachers of younger grade levels may wish to stop at the bathroom on their way to class after the opening prayers to allow for a group bathroom break before the lesson starts.
- **Students in Levels 7 and 8 should be told in advance that there will be no bathroom breaks during the video.**
- Students are only permitted to use the bathrooms in the back of the building. Send younger students with a buddy.
- The bathrooms in the front of the building by the chapel are open to the public and are not within the secured classroom area. They are not safe or appropriate for student use.

Instruction outside the classroom

- On a nice day, you can take the students to the grotto for an outdoor lesson. Inform our office when you go outdoors.
- Guides to the wonderful features and fixtures of our church are available in our office. If you wish to guide your class on a tour of the church, please give our office one week's notice so we can reserve the church for you.
- Visit the chapel. Teach students how to bless themselves with holy water, how to genuflect, how to properly use the kneelers, how to be reverent and respectful in the presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, etc. **However, please be quiet and respectful of the people who are in the chapel praying.**

Miscellaneous

- **Assigning seats rather than allowing friends to sit together is strongly encouraged.**
This provides a sense of order and consistency for classroom control, assists in early identification of students, and provides a reference point should an item be misplaced, or a desk misused.
- Students should be addressing you as **Mr./Miss/Ms./Mrs. LAST NAME**. This is the format they use to address their teachers in public school, so it is a level of respect they are already accustomed to giving teachers.
- Do not use regular markers to write on the white boards. They are very damaging! We have plenty of dry-erase markers available for you to use. If you are unsure if a marker is appropriate for the white board, please ask before using it.
- **If you finish the day's lesson early, you must fill the remaining time with relevant material. Some suggestions:**
 - **Proper procedure for going to Confession**
 - **Proper procedure for receiving Communion**
 - Reciting prayers
 - Praying for people affected by world crisis/tragedies
 - Praying for people in our own families
 - Reviewing Mass responses
 - Reviewing Mass etiquette
 - Commemorating Saint's feast days
 - Showing the students how to use the Bible
 - Reviewing the previous Sunday's Mass readings and homily
 - Guiding the students to develop a personal relationship with God

Safety

- The catechist is responsible for all the students assigned to him/her from the moment they join your table in the auditorium to the point of dismissal to a parent or authorized pick-up person.
- Never leave a classroom unattended. In the case of emergency, such as teacher sudden illness or an accident, send two students to the office, call out to the hall monitor, or call the office from your cellphone. In extreme cases, send the entire class to the office, or to another supervised area (such as another classroom).
- Do not under any circumstances dispense medication to the child even if you know the child and the parent. In accordance with the Diocesan Policy, Epi-Pens can only be administered by trained personnel, and only if the parent has filed an Action Plan Form with our office.
- In case of Fire or Fire Drill, follow the evacuation map posted in your classroom. Familiarize yourself with the specifics beforehand.
 - Stay calm— students will follow your cue
 - Count students before you leave and take the folder containing your roster and attendance sheet.
 - Quietly take the students to the designated exit
 - If you are the last one out, close the door
 - Once outside, line up the students and count them again
 - Silence and order must always be maintained.
 - Return to the classroom after the all-clear signal has been given.
 - Recount the students once you are back in the classroom.

For Lockdown, Lockout, Shelter Drills, and other Emergencies, follow the plan posted in your classroom.

Gatechist Commissioning

All catechists are strongly encouraged to be formally commissioned by Monsignor Lisante during the 10:30am Mass on Catechetical Sunday, which is always the third Sunday of September.

Catechist Certification

The Diocese of Rockville Centre Religious Studies Program offers formation and certification—including Basic and Advanced Certificates—for Catholic lay adults who serve in catechetical ministry. The program includes professional and pastoral formation opportunities. It is also open to all those interested in enriching their knowledge of the faith. For more information, visit www.drvc.org

Catechetical Service Awards

The Diocese of Rockville Centre bestows awards upon volunteers with 5, 10, 15, 20, 25 and 30 years of regular catechetical service. If you think that you qualify for one of these awards based upon your years of service, please contact our office.

This handbook may seem firm and overwhelming, but it is intended to present in a formalized and official manner the policies and procedures that, for the most part, we have already been following.

On behalf of our parish community, thank you for serving the families of Our Lady of Lourdes as a catechist.

May the Holy Spirit guide you as you plant the seeds of faith in our community and share the Good News of Jesus with the children entrusted to you.

May God bless you and fill your hearts and your classroom with His love.