

Mother of Divine Providence Parish

Parish Religious Education Programs

2020-2021 Family Handbook

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Welcome to Mother of Divine Providence Parish's Religious Education Programs. I am looking forward to serving this community of faith in the ministry of walking with students on their faith journey. A child's faith can develop a strong and steadfast foundation when he or she is surrounded and supported by strong models of faith. – parents, grandparents, family, the parish community, catechists, and volunteers. I am committed to journey with your children this year in the hope of laying that foundation of faith and I pray that you will join me in that effort for your children.

The curriculum for each level of the Religious Education Program is determined and decided based off of recommendations from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. It is conveyed to our children by volunteers who have responded to the call to share their gifts and talents through teaching and love for children's faith formation. Please support your child's catechist and classroom volunteers in prayer, support, and cooperation throughout the coming year.

Please take a few moments to review the family handbook and review it with your children as well. Our working together will ensure your children's safe and fulfilling completion of their faith formations years.

Sincerely,

Alexandra LaMastra

Alexandra LaMastra

Director of Religious Education

610-337-2173

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Mother of Divine Providence Parish

Parish Religious Education Program (PREP)

333 Allendale Road
King of Prussia, PA 19406
www.mdpparish.com/prep/
www.facebook.com/MDPReligiousEducation

PREP: A Family of Faith

Wednesdays
6:30 pm – 7:30 pm
September – May

IGNITE 1 and 2: Confirmation Preparation

One Sunday per Month +
Multiple Weekly Sessions throughout the year
6:30 pm – 7:45 pm
September – May

MDP Parish Mission Statement:

We the parish of Mother of Divine Providence, are of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Nourished by the Eucharist and guided by the example of Mary our Mother, we are called to open ourselves to an intimate relationship with our Lord, Jesus Christ. As a welcoming community, we strive to live our Catholic faith and to foster an share this faith through worship, education and service.

“Parents above others are obliged to form their children in the faith and practice of the Christian life by word and example; godparents and those who take the place of parents are bound by an equivalent obligation.”
(Canon Law Can 774, 2)

UNIVERSAL STATEMENT OF CATHOLICITY

"Catechesis describes the essential ministry of the (Catholic) Church through which the teachings of Christ have been passed on to believers throughout the ages...Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people and adults which includes the teaching of Christian doctrine" of the Roman Catholic Church. (National Directory for Catechesis, no.1, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)

Keeping in mind that all the baptized have a right to catechesis, every person, however limited, is capable of growth in holiness (General Directory for Catechesis, no. 189). Catechetical and sacramental programs are inclusive of parishioners with disabilities and may need to be adapted for some parishioners with disabilities.

Getting Started: Registration Basics

All families must be registered members of Mother of Divine Providence Parish. Under special circumstances families from other parishes may join our program, but only with pastoral permission.

Tuition is a necessary and required part of our program that ensures our program can provide children with the best and most current resources for their formational journey. Online registration begins in early May. Payment is requested in full at the time of registration, however, those who are facing financial or personal difficulties should contact the DRE to make other arrangements. Inability to pay tuition should not hinder you from registering for religious education. Religious Education tuition is due in full by November 1st, 2020.

Families may not register for the upcoming school year if there is any back tuition due. All fees for the previous years must be paid prior to registration. If a student voluntarily leaves or is dismissed from the program for any reason, no refund of tuition or material fees will be made.

An additional sacrament fee is applied for Reconciliation/Communion and Confirmation students to cover sacrament textbooks, retreats, meetings, and sacrament specific preparations.

Policies and Procedures

Parental Participation

Faith formation begins at home and through the parents' Catholic witness. Parents give their children their first experiences of God and the community of faith called the Church. This influences the way in which our program walks with children on their faith journey, instills in them the knowledge of the faith, and prepares them for the reception of the sacraments. The director, catechists, and volunteers support this development in the classroom. Your help in the areas listed below will allow us to work in a unified way to make your child's religious education experience positive, productive, and meaningful:

- Attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days
- Teach your children to pray in their own words, as well as to learn the prayers required at their level and previous learned prayers
- Join your children in their faith formation through engaging them in conversation about what they covered in class, reviewing textbooks, class papers and emails from catechists or director at home
- Ensure your family comes prepared to class
- Join your child by participating in activities offered in his/her grade

Schedules

Families will receive a yearly calendar with sessions, At Home Family Projects, and Special Events listed. These dates will also be sent out in a weekly communication newsletter through Constant Contact. Please ensure the parish has your most up to date email address. Please prioritize your commitment to the religious education of your child by putting the dates on your calendars at home.

Programs

PREP: A Family of Faith (Entire Family K-5th Grade):

- Meets two times per month on Wednesday from 6:30PM-7:30PM. The entire family is encouraged to attend, but at least one parent must attend each session with the child.
- Mass attendance is required as a part of this program. You have the option to attend 8:00 or 10:30 am.
- 2nd Grade is a sacrament year for First Penance and First Holy Communion. There will be additional sessions for parents and students in this grade to help prepare for the sacraments.
- COVID Adaptations: All meetings for the Fall Semester will be taking place via Zoom. In the Spring, we will re-evaluate whether we will be able to hold classes in person again. If you are not comfortable attending mass in person, we ask that you watch the live stream on the parish's Facebook page.

IGNITE/Confirmation PREP (Beginning in 6th Grade):

- Meets monthly on Sunday from 6:30PM-7:45PM. In addition, both IGNITE 1 and IGNITE 2 will hold a 4 consecutive-week session in the fall as well as an 8 consecutive-week session in the spring.
- The Program begins promptly at 6:30 pm.
- COVID Adaptations: All meetings for the Fall Semester will be taking place via Zoom. In the Spring, we will re-evaluate whether we will be able to hold classes in person again.

Attendance--Absentee Policy

Archdiocesan policy considers more than 3 absences in a year to be excessive. This would be equivalent to a child missing a full month of weekday school.

Excessive absences may jeopardize a child's readiness to receive a Sacrament and their advancement to the next class level. An age-appropriate project, in addition to class work missed, may be assigned by the Director of Religious Education.

Please email to the director and catechists to report student absences. An excused absence will be given for serious reasons beyond the family's control, e.g. hospitalization, death in the family.

Make-up work assigned by the catechist is to be returned the following week. Please help your child catch up.

Sports are not an excused absence. Please do not let your child miss class because of sports! CYO sports teams are not allowed to practice during PREP times. If your child is on a non-CYO team that has practices and games on Wednesday nights, please contact the DRE for a copy of the "coach's letter" to submit to your coach.

Communications

All families are responsible for the content of emails from the director and catechists. Please pay attention to these memos!

Reception of Sacraments

It is the policy at Mother of Divine Providence Parish that students continue their religious education uninterrupted through Confirmation. Students who leave the program and return at a later age may have to complete missed levels, even if those levels differ from their grade in school. This decision ultimately rests with the DRE.

Preparation for First Holy Communion always takes at least two years. Even students joining the PREP program "late", in later years, should expect to attend for two full years before making their First Holy Communion. The DRE reserves the right to make exceptions or additional requirements to this policy in consultation with the MDP Pastor.

"Readiness" will determine the timing of the reception of the sacraments! Readiness is judged by the DRE using the criteria of the child's expressed desire for the sacraments, the family's demonstrated commitment to celebrating the faith at home and at weekly Mass, and the mastery of relevant faith knowledge.

Homework Assignments

Each catechist decides how much, if any, homework is best for their class. Special projects or interactive trips may also be assigned. Please check with your child's catechist for details.

Lost Books, and Bibles

| Book: | Cost to Replace: |
|--|------------------|
| Sophia Press Family Faith Activity Bk | \$25.00 |
| Sophia Press Family Faith Parent Guide | \$25.00 |
| Children's Bible | \$25.00 |
| Teen Bible | \$25.00 |
| IGNITE 1: Chosen Bk | \$30.00 |
| IGNITE 2: Decision Point Bk | \$15.00 |
| Sacrament Bk (Penance or Communion) | \$10.00 |

PREP Student Behavior

We are proud of our students and are delighted to see the considerate and respectful ways in which they treat themselves, their teachers, and their peers. Our PREP students are expected to:

- Attend weekly Mass with their family and pray a few moments each day, telling God their joys and struggles
- Be patient and kind with fellow classmates
- Be respectful when speaking to staff and adults
- Use appropriate language, including respecting God's name
- Complete homework assignments on time
- Leave the desk they borrow during class exactly the way they found it! (Please do not touch anything inside the desks – those materials and pencils do not belong to us!)
- Gum, toys, food, and electronics are not permitted in class.

Virtual Classroom Policy

- Students are expected to be on time, appropriately dressed and seated at a table or in a chair.
- Students should be respectful at all times of catechist and others in virtual classroom.
- Students screen must use correct names and appropriate backgrounds.
- Students remain active, engaged, and visible at all times, face to face.
- Students remain on mute and only unmute when called upon.
- Students with questions use "raise hand button."
- Students should refrain from eating and chewing gum.
- Student and families may not share the link to the "virtual" classroom.

Cell Phones, Electronic & Gaming Devices

Cell phones, electronic, or gaming devices, are encouraged to be left at home. If they happen to make it to a religious education program, they may not be used during the session. ALL devices must be off and out of sight. Cell phones may only be used to call late drivers at dismissal time. If issues arise, these prohibited items (including cell phones) may be taken from the student and returned to the parent after class. Mother of Divine Providence Religious Education Programs are not responsible for any damage to or any loss of an item brought to scheduled sessions.

No Food at PREP

For the safety of our students with life-threatening food allergies, there is a strict “no food” policy for all religious education programs except for special events when allergy safe snacks are provided by catechists or the program. Student allergies must be communicated at registration.

Dress Code

Please have your children dress in clean, neat-looking clothing. Inappropriate slogans or logos are not permitted, and modest clothing is expected.

For days we are in church, please help your children dress in a special manner, as they would for Sunday Mass. Children are very sensitive to cues like dress code – special clothing helps them understand that this is a special event!

Please send your child with a coat on nights we are in Church! It gets cold and rainy on our walk up the hill!

Police-Assisted Parking Management

Please be aware that the Upper Merion PD have agreed to monitor our parking lot during dismissal and issue tickets to illegally parked cars, including cars in the handicap spots without proper tags. With over 150 families all using the parking lot (especially on Wednesdays), illegally parked cars cause serious congestion and endanger our children. Thank you for your cooperation in keeping our parking lot safe!

Weather & Emergency Closings

We’re on KYW! Listen to the radio or www.kyw1060.com for closings.

- Our PREP KYW number is #1069
- If the Upper Merion school district closes, we’re closed too!

Please monitor your email and our Religious Education Facebook Group if closings seem likely. An email will be sent if a decision is made to close for the evening (unless the Wifi and electricity are down.)

Every precaution will be taken to ensure the safety of the children while they are on Mother of Divine Providence property. In case of sudden severe weather, or in the event of a local or national emergency we will attempt to notify parents to pick up their children *if it is safe*, or we will *shelter in place* temporarily until it is deemed safe to dismiss the children. In these situations, we count on your understanding, cooperation and support of any decisions that are made by the Pastor and Director of Religious Education or their delegate.

Custody Information

If there is a legal custody arrangement for your child(ren), we must have a copy of the latest court documents on file. If there are individuals who are legally prohibited from contact with your child, PLEASE let us know! We need to have this information to keep your child safe! Absences due to custody issues will be assessed individually. Please arrange a meeting with the DRE if this applies to you. The custodial parent is responsible to teach missed lessons. In all custody cases, a copy of the *most recent* custodial court order must be on file in our office. **In compliance with the Family Educational Right to Privacy Act (Buckley Amendment) non-custodial parents may request a copy of the progress report unless there is a court order in effect denying access to the student.**

If your family has experienced separation and/or divorce, you know personally how this pain can impact both you and your child. Please let us know if there is any way we can help your family through this difficult time – whether that be recommending support resources for you or your children, making accommodations for children with multiple caregivers, or by arranging a meeting with the pastor to begin thinking about applying for an annulment. Issues surrounding separation, divorce, and child custody impact our families deeply. Let us walk with you through this difficult time – please give the DRE a call if we can help in any way.

Emergency Plans & Drills

The MDP PREP program takes the safety of our students very seriously. We have emergency plans in place for Lockdown, Fire, and other relevant situations. These plans have been constructed with guidance from Archdiocesan and law enforcement professionals. Please be in touch if you have any questions.

We will have at least one fire drill and one intruder drill per year. If there is a serious reason that your child should not be part of this drill, please let the DRE know.

If your child needs to carry and use an Epi-Pen, it is **your** responsibility to send one in their backpack every week. Please show your child's catechist where it is kept in the backpack and

share any relevant information on when to use it. (Ex. Symptoms your child would show, etc)

Visitors to the building

For the safety of our children, all visitors in the building must please report to the front desk and sign in!

Protecting God's Children

We are committed to the safety of your children, and thoroughly screen our paid and volunteer staff in the following ways.

All adult staff (paid & volunteer) are required to pass:

- PA State Police background check
- Childline Child Abuse background check
- FBI Fingerprint Checks (or a Disclosure Statement for those residing in PA for the last 10 years)

All adult staff (paid & volunteer) complete the following trainings:

- Archdiocesan "Protecting God's Children" workshop
- Signed agreement to the ministerial standards set forth by the US Bishops
- Mandated Reporter Training

These documents are on file at the parish and are checked periodically by Archdiocesan and national auditors.

Parents are encouraged to consider attending the informational "Protecting God's Children" workshop offered periodically. This workshop will also count as one of the clearances needed for working with children.

In class, your child will receive a basic lesson in January on personal safety, focused on the message "say no, run away, tell a trusted adult." Preview your child's lesson at <https://chilyouthprotection.org/docs/Kid-Talk-complete-binder-11-22-19.pdf>. You may pull your child out of class for this lesson if you are not comfortable with the topic- please submit a note.

These lessons are effective, as demonstrated by the brave children who have reported abusive situations after being given the encouragement to speak up if they are being harmed.

Discipline

Please know that if a child is disruptive or in some way causing a disciplinary problem, he / she will be appropriately corrected. Our purpose is to help the child learn that he / she must act respectfully and responsibly toward self, others and other people's property.

For repeated disruption in class or other behavioral issues, a child will be brought to the DRE. The DRE may choose to contact the Parent/ Guardian if this seems to be helpful to the child. In some cases, a meeting with parent, child, catechist and DRE will afford the best opportunity to help a child. Sometimes it is necessary for the Parent / Guardian to be present in the classroom during class. This will be decided during the conference. In extreme disciplinary situations, temporary or permanent suspension from the PREP program may be required.

Contraband – Search and Seizure

Items considered contraband include, but are not limited to drugs, alcohol, tobacco products, and weapons of any kind. It is both unlawful for minors to be in possession of them and forbidden on MDP Church and MTC School property.

It is the policy of Mother of Divine Providence to respect the privacy of its participants. Unnecessary intrusions into persons and possessions are to be avoided.

However, in the event that a student is suspected of having contraband in his / her possession, the Director of Religious Education will conduct a search with an adult staff member as a witness. Law enforcement may be notified in serious situations.

Property Damage

In the event of property damage (accidental or deliberate), the students involved (and thus, their parents) will compensate for the damage. This includes but is not limited to damage of program books and materials, damage to the classroom, classroom items, or Smartboard, and damage to the school or church property.

Bullying and Violent Behavior

The Mother of Divine Providence Parish religious education programs strive to create the safe, secure and respectful educational environment that our students deserve to learn about their faith, develop Christian behavior and build relationships with God and others.

The following actions are unacceptable both on the Christian level of being called to love others, as well as on the basic human level of respect and concern for our neighbor.

- Hitting, kicking, shoving, spitting, hair pulling, or throwing something
- Getting another person to hit or harm a student
- Teasing, name-calling, making critical remarks or threatening in person or by other means
- Demeaning and making another the victim of jokes
- Making rude and/or threatening gestures
- Excluding or rejecting someone cruelly
- Intimidating (bullying), extorting or exploiting
- Spreading harmful rumors or gossip
- Using technology to harm others physically, emotionally, or socially (cyberbullying, gossip, etc)

If the MDP PREP staff becomes aware of such actions occurring in our program or among our students, quick and appropriate action will be taken. Such actions may include students being called to the office so that “their side” of the story may each be heard, parents being notified, appropriate disciplinary action being taken with the notification of the parents. Our goal is to make it clear that respect and courtesy are the foundation of a Christian society – bullying and violence will not be tolerated in any way. The disciplinary response will match the severity of the offence – consequences for bullying and violence may include suspension or dismissal from the PREP program in serious cases.

If a student experiences or witnesses bullying at any time, they are to please tell a member of the staff so that the situation can be addressed.

In serious situations, the pastor will be promptly notified.

If there is reason to suspect physical danger to a student or the PREP program, law enforcement will be notified.

Children With Special Needs

Children with cognitive, sensory, physical or social disabilities are warmly welcome and encouraged to attend weekly classes. Our programs, staff and volunteers do their best to provide quality religious education for children of all abilities. Please call the DRE to develop a personalized plan for your child: 610-337-2173.

If your child needs special attention or accommodations in class, please let us know! We are honored to partner with you in caring for your precious children. Please equip us with the information we need to best work with your child in classroom and liturgical settings.

All such information you provide to us will be kept confidentially by the DRE and staff members.

Contact Information

Alexandra LaMastra
Director of Religious Education
610-337-2173
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If I am not in the office and you have an urgent matter, please contact the parish office and they will forward your message to me.

Parish Office: 610-265-4178