

ASCENSION CATHOLIC CHURCH

Religious Education Program

Student/Parent Handbook

2023 – 2024



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We Serve the Community



WELCOME to the Religious Education Program (RE program) of Ascension Catholic Church. The purpose of the RE program is to share the word of God with children, youth, young adults, and adults in the Catholic faith by creating an atmosphere where the voice of the Lord can be heard, experienced, and felt. In the short time we have with young students each week, we cannot give them all that they need to be fully educated in the Catholic faith and to grow in their friendship with Jesus.

WE ARE HERE TO HELP YOU!! Parents are the first and foremost teachers of their children and have the primary responsibility for the faith education of their children. Parents teach informally, but powerfully by example and instruction. They communicate values and attitudes by showing love for Christ and His church. Parents are encouraged to discuss class topics and inspire students to learn about their Catholic faith.

Learning about the Catholic faith is a lifelong journey, and for young children/youth it requires Mass attendance and a commitment to participating in the religious education classes. Religious education (RE) begins in kindergarten and continues through the 12th grade. Students should attend all years of RE, not just those required to receive a sacrament. Children/youth may not have a total understanding of the true beauty of receiving sacraments, if they are simply attending to receive a sacrament.



CALENDAR

Schedule

Wednesdays

Kindergarten through 6th grade

4:30pm-5:30pm 1st Session -DROP OFF: Regular drop off begins at 4:10pm. Parents should drop off students through the drive through area with a safety monitor. Students may play on the playground until 4:25pm when the 1st bell rings. The second bell rings at 4:30pm and classes begin. Students arriving after the 2nd bell are marked as tardy, 3 tardies will be counted as an absence. Please for the safety of your child, **DO NOT** drop off at the front of the church or allow them to walk across any street alone. Only teachers and aides may enter the RE building before the first bell.

PICK UP: Students must be picked up from the class room. Parents, please enter through the front door and EXIT through the back rear RE doors. (signs are posted) .

Please pick up your children promptly at 5:30pm, so we can prepare for the 2nd session

Kindergarten through 6th grade

6:00pm-7:00pm 2nd Session -DROP OFF: Regular drop off begins at 5:40pm Parent, please drop off students through the drive through area with a safety monitor. Students may play on the playground until 5:55pm when the 1st bell rings. The second bell rings at 6:00pm and classes begin. Students arriving after the 2nd bell are marked as tardy, 3 tardies will be counted as an absence. Please for the safety of your child, **DO NOT** drop off at the front of the church or allow them to walk across any street alone. Only teachers and aides may enter the RE building before the first bell.

PICK UP: Students must be picked up from the class room. Parents, please enter through the front door and EXIT through the back rear RE doors. (signs are posted) .

First day of class is September 13, 2023. **Parents and Students** will meet in the Church, at least one parent must attend with the student(s).

Last Day of classes will be April 24, 2024.

Classes will meet **every Wednesday** with the exception of the following dates:

November 1, 2023
November 22, 2023
December 20, 2023
December 27, 2023
January 3, 2024
March 13, 2024
March 27, 2024

All Saint's Day
Thanksgiving Holiday
Christmas Holiday
Christmas Holiday
New Year's Holiday
Spring Break
Holy Week



Please join us for the following special Wednesday sessions

1st Mass service for K-6 grade, RE students/Parents
During regular RE session.

October 18, 2023

Praise and Thanksgiving for Students/Families

November 15, 2023

Come early and join the fun BEFORE classes begin

****4:30 Worship Session begins at 3:45-4:20 in the Parish Hall**

****6:00 Worship Session begins at 5:15-5:50 in the Parish Hall**

Praise & worship w/hotdogs!!

2nd Mass service for K-6th grade. RE students/Parents

April 3, 2024

****Ash Wednesday Mass Services @ 4:30 & 6:00pm**

February 14, 2024

*****Ash Wednesday Service on February 14, 2024 – Both the 4:30 ad 6:00pm session will attend the Ash Wednesday services with their classrooms.**

PLEASE DROP OFF STUDENTS 15 MINUTES EARLIER than usual. We will quickly take attendance and attend the Mass. Students need to be seated with their class.



6:30pm-7:30pm- Students should report directly to their classrooms, classes begin promptly at 6:30pm. Parents May drop off student in front of the Religious education building, it is the parent's responsibility to ensure they enter the building and go directly to their classrooms.

First day of class is September 14, 2023. **Parents and Students** will meet in the Church, at least one parent must attend.

Last Day of classes will be April 25, 2024

Classes will meet **every Thursday** with the exception of the following dates:

November 2, 2023
November 23, 2023
December 21, 2023
December 28, 2023
January 4, 2024
March 14, 2024
March 28, 2024

All Souls Day
Thanksgiving Holiday
Christmas Holiday
Christmas Holiday
New Year's Holiday
Spring Break
Holy Thursday



Please join us for the following special Sunday Youth sessions

Youth Mass
Youth Mass

October 26, 2023
February 1, 2024



Policies and Procedures

ATTENDANCE Regular attendance in class is essential for any measure of success in a religious education program. Weekly attendance enables students to grow in the knowledge of their Catholic faith, develop a sense of belonging to the parish community, and through regular prayer develop a relationship with God. Since class time is only 1 hour each week, we ask that students only be absent in the case of an emergency. Parents should call the office or send an email to the DRE if an absence is required. **Students preparing for First Communion or Confirmation are required to have no more than 3 absences each year.** **It is very important that students arrive and depart on time.**

STUDENT ENVELOPES- Students in 2nd year of sacramental preparation years for First Communion/Confirmation will receive church envelopes. These envelopes must be used by the students as they attend Mass each weekend. You and your child can decide if you would like to give a money donation, prayer request or they can write a gift or talent they offered to someone that week. All donations received through the children's collections go directly to the RE program and is greatly appreciated.

CHANGE OF PHONE NUMBER OR ADDRESS Please notify the Religious Education office of any changes of address, phone number(s), or email address. It is important to keep the Religious Education database current in case of any emergencies and to better serve you.

STUDENT SAFETY AND HEALTH **After arriving on church grounds, students are not permitted to leave the Church premises except with their parent or guardian.** Parents need to ensure students understand and follow these guidelines. Students should be dropped off in the drive through area between the RE building and the church. **Please drive slowly and carefully in the parking areas on RE nights.**

Text Notifications for Parents/Students- Text Messages using the Diocesan-Evangelus program is used to send parents and students information regarding meetings, emergencies, and class cancellations. Please keep your cell number up to date in order to receive these important notifications.

BAD WEATHER If BISD schools dismiss early or close on a Wednesday due to inclement weather or other reasons, RE classes on Wednesday will also be cancelled. This does not include any BISD early release or staff development days. Sunday sessions will be notified of closures by text message.

SPECIAL NEEDS-Parents should notify the DRE in writing regarding medical conditions, allergies, or special needs of their child or any legal restrictions for child pick up that are in effect.

STUDENT PHOTOS Classroom teachers/Youth Director or DRE will be taking photos of RE students from time to time to be used in a classroom, RE projects, or bulletin announcements. **If you do not want your child's picture taken, posted, or used** in a religious education display in the Religious Education Building, parish hall, or Church bulletin, please email the DRE at desquivel@ascen.org.

Visitors A student may not bring friends to class who are not enrolled in our program unless approved by the DRE or Youth Director.

CLASSROOM RULES

Discipline Policy

Catechists are volunteers who are giving their time and effort for the benefit of the students. They have very limited time in which to teach their lesson. They are not expected to deal with students who do not plan to cooperate.

The learning environment is sacred. Teacher or Aides will ask any student who is disrupting the learning environment to stop any disrespectful or inappropriate behavior. If this is not effective the student will be brought to the Religious Education Office. The Director will attempt to resolve and determine a solution with the student, to resolve any problems that may exist. If further disruptions occur, the parents will be called. A conference with parents and/or Pastor may be requested at that time. It is the responsibility of the parents to correct any discipline problem, if the child is to remain in the program.

Cell phone Policy

Cell phones are to remain on silent or turned off and out of sight during religious education classes, youth Masses, adoration, and other religious education events unless otherwise directed by an RE teacher or a youth leader.

If inappropriate uses of cell phone continue, the parents, student, and director of religious education or youth coordinator will meet to determine how or if the child/youth will continue in class.



Weapons

Weapons of any kind are strictly forbidden on church property or at off-site event sponsored by Ascension Parish. For the purpose of this policy a weapon is defined to be a gun, knife, or any other article, which could be used to cause injury. Any student found with an offensive weapon will be asked to leave the Religious Education Program. Parents and/or law enforcement authorities may be notified.

Substance Abuse Policy

The use or possession of illegal drugs or illegal mood-altering substances, alcoholic beverage, drug-related paraphernalia, or the abuse of prescription or over the counter drugs by any student on parish property or while attending or participating in any religious education program sponsored activity is forbidden. Violation of this policy may result in dismissal from the Religious Education Program. Parents and/or law enforcement will be called if any student is found to be in possession or selling drugs on parish property or events and will be removed from the Religious Education program.

Student Withdrawal From the Religious Education Program

The education of a student is a partnership between the parents and the Religious Education program. The Church considers the parents to be the primary catechists of their children. Just as the parent has the right to withdraw a child if desired, the Religious Education Program reserves the right to withdraw a student, if the Pastor or the Director of Religious Education determines that the student has violated the agreed to policies.



A PROGRAM AND SERVICE OF
THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC RISK RETENTION GROUP, INC.

 **VIRTUS[®]** *Online*

Empowering God's Children[®]

Protecting God's Children, Empowering God's Children[®], is a school-based curriculum. The job of ensuring children's safety is a challenging undertaking. The prevention of child sexual abuse requires more than adult awareness, education, and training about the nature and scope of the problem. We must also give our children the tools they need to overcome the advances of someone who intends to do them harm. The Teaching Safety program is a vehicle through which parents, teachers, catechists, and youth ministers (educators) give children and young people the tools they need to protect themselves from those who might harm them.

The award-winning **Power to Protect[™]** video lays the groundwork for the educator, who uses the activities to help students apply the message from the lessons to their daily lives. The lessons are organized in a three-year cycle so each child experiences a totally different lesson plan each time the materials are presented. Each child receives the full range of information from the teaching, Teaching Safety Guide in small, "digestible" bites, over a three-year period. Then, as a child advances to the next age group, there are a whole new set of age-appropriate lessons that explore the major topics in increasingly greater detail.

The **Teaching Boundary and Safety Guide[™]** is a booklet guide that provides best practices for caring adults, lesson leaders and parents for teaching children how to protect themselves. It can be used as a stand-alone guide, or can be distributed to caring adults and parents to assist with the Teaching Safety Program for Children. In an effort, to assist in this monumental mission of protecting youth, all of our programs, including our school-based curriculum and this booklet guide, provide for collaboration between parents and lesson leaders in establishing safety guidelines and principles. Through these programs, caring adults become partners with parents to ensure that all children are protected and that youth also have the tools they need to protect themselves.

FIRST COMMUNION/FIRST RECONCILIATION

– Important Information for Parents



First Communion is one of the holiest and most important occasions in a Roman Catholic person's life. It is the first time that a person receives the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, which is the eating of consecrated bread and drinking of consecrated wine. As Catholics we truly believe these to be the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Most Catholic children receive their First Communion when they are 7 or 8 years old, as this is considered the age children are able to reason and understand.

For anyone to receive communion, that person must be without mortal sin and in a state of grace. Traditionally, young Catholic children will make their first confession, also called the Sacrament of Reconciliation, prior to receiving their First Communion. At confession, the child will tell his or her sins and misdeeds to a priest, the priest will then assign a penance. The penance usually is several prayers to be recited immediately after leaving the confessional. The Priest will then grant absolution (forgiveness). Confession is a sacrament and should be practiced as often as possible.

Students **may** receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion in the 2nd grade, if they were enrolled and actively attended religious education classes in the 1st grade or after attending the 1st year of Sacrament Preparation. All students are required to attend 2 years of preparation in order to receive their First Communion. The teachers and staff ask for parents' support in preparing students to receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation (Confession) and Eucharist (Communion). Parents should help children learn and recite their prayers daily. **Students will be tested to see if they are ready and understand the sacrament they are preparing to receive. They must be able to recite the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, and the Act of Contrition prior receiving their First Holy Communion. Students who are unable to pass the exam and cannot recite the basic Catholic prayers may be delayed in receiving their First Holy Communion.**

1. **Students and their families are expected to attend Mass every weekend** as part of living their faith, as this is the central part of our Catholic Faith. Students preparing to receive their First Communion will be assigned their own donation envelopes that they should bring with them to Mass each weekend.
2. Parents must provide the student's official **Baptismal Certificate** if he/she was not baptized at Ascension. **The certificate is due in the office by December 15, 2023**, please bring the original certificate to the Religious Education Office to be copied during business hours. If you do not have the baptismal certificate, you will need to contact the church of baptism NOW as it may take time to receive the certificate from the church of record. **Your child cannot receive their first communion without a baptismal certificate. If your child was baptized here at Ascension, you do not need to bring in a certificate.**
3. **Three excused absences will be allowed.** Student who are absent more than three times risk not being prepared to pass the test and may be delayed in receiving the sacrament of First Holy Communion. They may also be required to complete extra assignments. Parents must email the DRE @ desquivel@ascen.org when the student will not be attending a weekly RE session. Please provide students name, teacher's name and grade.
4. **There is a mandatory parent meeting and at least one parent MUST attend. The date for the parent meeting is Wednesday, February 7, 2024 during your child's regular class session.** Please drop off your child in their classroom and come directly over to the church. **This meeting is very important, and will cover information that is needed for your child to be prepared for their First Holy Communion.**
5. **Father Luis and Father Jim will be hosting a First Communion Parent and Student retreat on Saturday, February 24, 2024 from 9am-Noon.** All students preparing to receive sacraments this school year and at least one parent must attend.
6. The Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) will be celebrated on **Saturday, April 13, 2024 at 10:00** am in the church. There will be 2-3 priest available to hear confessions.
7. Students preparing to receive their First Holy Communion are required to attend a rehearsal on **Wednesday, May 1, 2024 at 6:00pm.** We will meet in the Parish Hall, parents may pick up their students at 7:00pm in the church.
8. First Holy Communion Mass will be celebrated on **Saturday, May 4, 2024 at 10:00 am.** Students must arrive no later than 9:30 am in the parish hall.
9. Children **do not** need a sponsor for the Sacrament of Eucharist (First Communion).



CONFIRMATION – Important Information for Parents

Through the Confirmation sacrament, the candidate receives the fullness of the Holy Spirit that was given to us at Baptism. This is the same Spirit that filled the Apostles with the zeal and courage needed to be public witnesses to Christ. Confirmation celebrates God's presence in our lives as the Holy Spirit continues to guide, strengthen, and empower us to live and witness the Good News of Jesus Christ. Christians on the day of their Confirmation become public witnesses to Christ and his saving works. Confirmation is a sign of God's love and presence in our lives. It gives us sanctifying grace (the free gift of God's love). Confirmation establishes the beginning of a life of full participation and responsibility in the Church.

1. The Diocese of Austin requires a minimum of two years of formal religious education in a parish program before a candidate may be presented for the Sacrament of Confirmation. **Students must pass a final exam and be able to recite the Basic Catholic prayers. Students who are unable to pass the exam and/or cannot recite the basic Catholic prayers may be delayed in receiving the sacrament of Confirmation.**
2. Candidates and their families are expected to attend Mass every weekend as part of living their faith. We are obligated as Catholic Christians to attend Sunday Mass. The Eucharist is the source and summit of our Faith, in the blessed Eucharist is the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself. (CCC 1324)
3. **Three excused absences will be allowed.** Student who are absent more than three times risk being delayed in receiving the sacrament of Confirmation and may not be able to pass the final exam. Parents must call the DRE when the student will not be attending a weekly RE session.
4. Parents need to provide the student's official **Baptismal Certificate** if he/she was not baptized at Ascension. **The certificate is due by December 15, 2023.** You may bring the original to the Religious Education Office during business hours to be copied. Please begin to locate/request the baptismal certificate **NOW** as it may take some time to receive the certificate from the church of record. **Your child cannot receive the sacrament of Confirmation without a baptismal certificate. If your child was baptized here at Ascension, you do not need to bring in the certificate.**
5. **PARENT MEETING-** There is a mandatory parent meeting and at least one parent **MUST** attend. **The date for the parent meeting is Thursday, January 18, 2024 during your child's regular class session.** Please drop off your child and come directly over to the church. **This meeting is very important, and will cover information that is needed for your child to be prepared for their Confirmation.**
6. **CONFIRMATION RETREAT** All second year Confirmation students **MUST** attend the confirmation retreat. The Confirmation retreat is scheduled for **Saturday, February 10, 2024 from 8:30am until 6:00pm** here in the Ascension parish hall. If a student cannot make the retreat scheduled here at Ascension, the parent must locate another Confirmation retreat scheduled within the Diocese of Austin. Parents must provide proof of attendance to the Director of Religious Education or Youth Director.
7. **COMMUNITY SERVICE** – All students preparing to receive the sacrament of Confirmation must attend/participate in 3 community service projects. Service is part of confirmation in that it teaches one of the most important lessons Jesus taught us, we must be willing to be a servant to all people in His name. By doing parish and community service, we demonstrate a willingness to show Christian responsibility to our mission. It also demonstrates the relationship between faith and action.
8. **SPONSOR-** Students will need **ONE** sponsor for the Sacrament of Confirmation. A Sponsor must be actively attending Mass, have received the sacraments of Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation. If the sponsor is married, he/she must be in a marriage recognized by the Church as valid. IF unmarried, they must be living a fully single life. Sponsor forms are available online, in the office and will be provided to each student.
9. **CONFIRMATION MASS-** The confirmation Mass has not yet been determined by the Diocese of Austin. Parents will be notified as soon as the date is confirmed. All students and sponsors will meet in the parish hall 30 minutes prior to the start of Mass. There will be a reception after the Mass in the Parish hall.
10. **REHEARSAL** Candidates and sponsors (or their proxies) must attend the Confirmation rehearsal, which will be Wednesday or Thursday evening prior to the date of the Confirmation Mass.

CURRICULUM

Each student will be given a textbook which will be kept in the classroom during the year and sent home on the last day of class. Below is a brief explanation of what each grade level covers.

Kindergarten: God Loves Us

The textbook *God Loves Us* teaches children that God loves them and that they are to love God and each other. This book presents simple faith concepts including silence, reverence for the Bible, being sorry, celebration, and God as creator. Children are introduced to five prayers: Sign of the Cross, Our Father, Hail Mary, Grace before Meals, and Prayer to the Guardian Angel.

Grade 1: God Is Good

The textbook *God Is Good* presents God, Jesus, and the Church in their goodness. The lessons lay the foundation for spiritual growth by enhancing children's knowledge of the Faith. This level teaches concepts such as love, salvation, and the Trinity. Children practice basic prayers including the Sign of the Cross, Our Father, Hail Mary, and Prayer to the Guardian Angel.

Grade 2: God Cares For Us

The textbook *God Cares for Us* prepares children for the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist and emphasizes the structure and meaning of the Mass. Children learn to respond to God's call to give themselves in love to God and to others. This level introduces them to the Church, to Mary, and to Morning and Evening Prayers, Act of Contrition, and meal prayers.

Grade 3: We Believe

The textbook *We Believe* presents primary truths that Catholics believe and express in the Apostles' Creed. Children are called to the faith community and learn how Jesus is present to us in the Mass. This level introduces Bible stories and the concepts of vocation, healing, and response to God. Prayers include Morning and Evening Prayers; Acts of Faith, Hope, and Love; Apostles' Creed; Rosary; Act of Contrition and Hail, Holy Queen.

Grade 4: God Guides Us

The textbook *God Guides Us* presents the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes as guides for living. Children learn that, as followers of Jesus, we must know these teachings and live them. Lessons focus on kinds of prayer, the Bible, reconciliation, and the communion of saints. Prayers include Acts of Faith, Hope, and Love; Prayer to the Holy Spirit; and Stations of the Cross.

Grade 5: We Worship

The textbook *We Worship* teaches celebration and worship in the Eucharistic Liturgy. Eucharist is presented as a gift from God through which we share divine life. Lessons introduce liturgical prayer and guide children to respond to God's presence through prayer and loving service to others. The text also focuses on the sacramental system and the paschal mystery. Prayers include Peace Prayer, Vocation Prayer, prayers of the Mass and Psalms.

Grade 6: Finding God The book features Catholic content shared in a rich context with beautiful images, thoughtful prayers, and engaging activities and experiences that draw children in to fully learn, experience, and express their faith. Fact-filled biographies of saints open every unit and reflect the unit theme. Sessions open and close with faith conversations that directly relate to a child's own life. Multiple opportunities to pray in a variety of ways are included in every session. Clear connections to the Mass and Scripture are integrated into the program and in special liturgical sessions.

Grade 7- The life of Jesus The seventh-grade program of the *Christ Our Life* series is devoted to the study of God's saving love as it is revealed through his Son, Jesus. Jesus the Way, the Truth, and the Life is designed to help young adolescents grow in their knowledge of Jesus, that they may love him more ardently and serve him more generously.

8 : Finding God The *Finding God* Grade 8 Young People's Book explores the life of Jesus Christ and the authentic teachings of the Catholic Church. By engaging young people's minds, hearts, and souls, Finding God helps them know their faith, grown in faith, and go in faith. Each Young People's book comes with access to the new *Finding God* 7–8 App that contains engaging and thought-provoking faith-filled multimedia.

Grade 9 (Confirmation Year 1) and Grade 10 (Confirmation Year 2) The main curriculum for these grade levels is *Chosen: Your Journey Toward Confirmation*. *Chosen* is a twenty-four lesson program that prepares your student both intellectually and spiritually to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation and to become lifelong disciples of Christ. *Chosen* seeks to win over the hearts of teens at a critical time in their lives and keeps them firmly planted within the faith community of the Church. It features effective and engaging material conveyed through videos, student workbook activities, and classroom interactions.

Grades 11 & 12: Peer Ministry- As Confirmed young adults, these students will seek to put their faith in action by mentoring, sponsoring community events, and hosting and serving at youth mass. They will continue their religious education through resources including open discussions, videos, and will participate in group discussions and retreats.

**Parents and Legal Guardians:
Enrollment of your child in the Religious Education Program at
Ascension Catholic Church
indicates that you and your child
agree to abide by the policies, procedures, rules, and other
guidelines contained in this Handbook.**

