

**Stella Maris and Epiphany Parishes
Faith Formation Program**

Parent & Participant Handbook



**Engaging the Children of God
to Fill Their Hearts with Faith
& Deepen Their Relationship with Christ**

Revised August, 2024

Stella Maris and Epiphany Parishes
Office for Parish Faith Formation
Parent & Participant Handbook

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Checklist

The purpose of this handbook is to set forth the guidelines for those that participate in Stella Maris and Epiphany Faith Formation Program. By enrolling your child into our programs, you agree to support and abide by the provisions outlined in this handbook. Parents are therefore encouraged to discuss these provisions with their children to ensure that all parties understand the requirements and obligations of their participation in the Faith Formation Program.

*Stella Maris and Epiphany Parishes
Office for Parish Faith Formation*

PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

“The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.” (Saint John Paul II)

“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)

*The following programs are offered by the
Office for Parish Faith Formation*

CONFRATERNITY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE
(CCD)

The CCD Program assists parents in providing a sound foundation for the faith formation of their children to develop. The program is for children in grades one through seven, and a Teen program. Catechetical sessions are held Sunday Mornings from 9AM to 11:15AM in the Stella Maris school building and church. Sessions begin the second or third week of September and conclude the second or third week of May.

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION PROGRAM

All baptized children from grade two and up who desire to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church with the reception of Holy Communion and/or Confirmation are eligible for this program **provided that they have successfully completed the Archdiocesan Curriculum for all Levels prior to and including the sacramental level.** First Penance is celebrated for children in grade/level 2 and up. First Eucharist is celebrated for grade/level 2 and up. Confirmation is celebrated every year in the Spring for children in grade/level 7 and up.

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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.

Stella Maris and Epiphany Parishes embrace all its children regardless of special need or disability. We will make every effort to accommodate the needs of participants with special disabilities and provide them with an inclusive environment in our programs. If your child has a special need or disability you are encouraged to contact the program director to discuss your concerns and enrollment options.



POLICIES & PROCEDURES FOR FAITH FORMATION PROGRAMS

I. ATTENDANCE/LATENESS

The faith formation received in the programs is ongoing in that each session builds upon the previous session. Therefore, it is imperative that children attend their program sessions regularly.

If your child is unable to attend, or will be late for a session the parent/guardian *MUST* complete the following procedures:

1. Email stellamarisdre@comcast.net to report the absence or lateness. Please be sure to provide your child's name and grade level.
 - a. If your child fails to report to a session and no notification is received, the absence will be recorded as unexcused unless a doctor's note is provided.
 - b. Sessions begin at 9:00AM for the Sunday Morning Program; Arrival after that will be considered late without notification. Two late arrivals will be recorded as an unexcused absence.
 - c. After four unexcused absences the program director will contact the parents by email and phone to remind the parents that the child may be required to repeat the grade level and that dismissal from the program could result should unexcused absences/lateness continue.
 - d. A participant dismissed from the program may re-enroll the following school year. The participant will be required to repeat the previous level which may delay the reception of sacraments.
 - e. In the event that your child is dismissed from the program due to excessive absences, lateness, or problem behavior, no refund of tuition or material fees will be made to the family.
 - f. Extended absences due to illness require a doctor's note. In addition, parents should be in regular contact with their child's catechist in an effort to obtain assignments and keep their child's formation up-to-date when possible.

II. ARRIVAL & DISMISSAL PROCEDURES

Sunday Morning Program (Levels 1-6) arrival time is 9:00AM. Students will enter the church where they will be greeted by the Director of Religious Education and the Catechists.

Sunday Morning dismissal time is 11:15AM. Parents/guardians will come to the front pews of church to meet the children.

Parents must inform the program director and the catechist in advance by email or note if they are picking up their child early.

Students are permitted to walk home only if there is a signed Release Form from the parent/guardian on file with the DRE.

III. NON-CUSTODIAL PARENTS

It is the responsibility of both biological parents to provide the Parish with the latest, most up-to-date Custodial Order or Custody Agreement. Stella Maris and Epiphany Faith Formation Program will request these documents at the time of registration. If either Custody Order or Custody Agreement change during the course of the year, it remains the responsibility of both biological parents to provide that document to the Parish immediately.

Our program abides by the provisions of the Buckley Amendment with respect to the rights of non-custodial parents. In the absence of a court order to the contrary, our program will provide the non-custodial parent with access to the records and other program related information regarding the child. If there is a court order specifying that there is to be no information given, it is the responsibility of the custodial parent to provide the program director with the latest official copy of the court order.

If a court order prohibits our releasing a child into the custody of a non-custodial parent, it is the responsibility of the custodial parent to provide the program director with an official copy of the court order or custody section of the divorce decree.

In situations with shared legal custody, the parish program expects the cooperation of both parents.

IV. DISCIPLINE

The Faith Formation Programs offered by Stella Maris Parish are designed to assist parents with the faith formation of their children, as well as foster values and behavior that are in accord with Catholic Church teaching. The program has **NO TOLERANCE** for behaviors that are contrary to Catholic faith and morals, including but not limited to ongoing acts of obstinacy, improper language, fighting, physical, emotional or psychological intimidation, vandalism, demeaning behavior such as name-calling, obscene language or gestures, and harassment. Such behaviors violate the central teaching of our faith and will not be tolerated in any form.

These categories do not cover every possible situation. The parishes determine what is appropriate or inappropriate behavior, both in and out of the program sessions, in the program generally, and outside the program where such improper behavior affects the program community.

Conduct by children or parents/guardians, or anyone acting on their behalf, incompatible with the educational and religious mission of the Parishes is grounds for disciplinary action, including but not limited to, immediate dismissal of the participant, as well as reporting the incident to the appropriate legal authorities where appropriate.

In addition, in the case of threats of violence or harassment, in any form, including oral, written, or electronic, by a child against any member of the program community, the child, if suspended but not dismissed, may be required to have psychological or psychiatric clearance before returning to the program.

In the event a participant engages in any of the above listed behaviors or any other inappropriate conduct, and has failed to respond to a catechist's attempt to stop or correct the behavior, the following action may be taken and at the discretion of the Pastors or the Director of Faith Formation:

1. **First Incident:** The participant will be removed from the session and the parents/guardians will be immediately notified by phone by the program director. The program director will schedule a conference with the parents/guardians, participant, and catechist to discuss the matter.
2. **Second Incident:** The participant will be removed from the session and be suspended from the program for a period of one session. The parents/guardians will be immediately notified by the program director and required to pick up their child. Prior to returning to the program the program director will schedule a conference with the parents/guardians, participant, and catechist to further discuss the matter.
3. **Third Incident:** The participant will be removed from the session and dismissed from the program. The parents or guardians will be immediately notified by the program director and required to pick up their child. Following a conference with the program director, parents/guardians, participant, and catechist, the parents/guardians will be provided with the option of having their child repeat his or her current grade level the following school year or opting to complete the current year's material by home-schooling their child. In either case, no refund of tuition or material fees will be made.

However, Stella Maris and Epiphany Faith Formation Program reserves the right to supersede the forgoing course of action depending on the particular circumstances of any given situation.

V. CONTRABAND

BRINGING CONTRABAND TO PROGRAM SESSIONS IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED AND WILL BE CONFISCATED AND RETURNED TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS ONLY! Depending on the contraband confiscated, the proper legal authorities could be notified.

1. Items considered contraband include, but are not limited to, gum, food, beverages, toys, electronic device/games, weapons, drugs, alcohol, and tobacco/vape products.
2. It is unlawful for minors to be in the possession of alcohol or tobacco/vape products. Participants found to be in the possession of such products may be immediately suspended from the program. Depending on the contraband confiscated, the proper legal authorities could be notified.
3. Participants who bring weapons or drugs/drug paraphernalia of any kind onto parish property may be immediately dismissed from the program and all proper and necessary authorities could be notified.

Va. SEARCH AND SEIZURE

It is the policy of Stella Maris and Epiphany Faith Formation Program to respect the privacy of its participants. However, in the event that a participant is suspected of having weapons or drugs in his/her possession or is believed to be a threat to himself/herself or others, the director will be notified immediately. The director will conduct a search with an adult staff member as a witness. Refusal on the part of the participant to cooperate will result in the parents/guardians being contacted and asked to assist with the search. Parental refusal to cooperate will result in the participant's immediate dismissal from the program.

Vb. CELL PHONES:

We realize that devices such as cell phones have become a necessary tool in keeping communications open with children. However, it is the policy of this program that such devices may not be turned on or used during class times without express permission from the Catechist/DRE. If a participant turns on or uses his/her cell phone during class times without permission, the device will be sent to the school office and must be picked up by a parent/guardian.

Vc. BULLYING POLICY:

A safe, secure and respectful environment is necessary for participants to learn, achieve, and build appropriate relationships with others. Stella Maris and Epiphany Faith Formation Program refuses to accept any behaviors that hinder or undermine such an environment. Therefore, acts of harassment, hazing, intimidation and bullying (including cyber bullying and the like) are unacceptable behaviors and are prohibited in our programs. The Faith Formation Program personnel cannot monitor the activities of program participants at all times and eliminate all incidents of bullying between participants, particularly when participants are not under their direct supervision. However, to the extent such conduct affects the environment of the faith formation program and the rights and welfare of the participants and is within the control of the faith formation program in its normal operations, it is Stella Maris and Epiphany Faith Formation Program's intent to prevent bullying and thus, will take action to investigate, respond, discipline and remediate any acts of bullying. Administration and the catechetical staff are to demonstrate appropriate behavior by treating others with civility and respect, and being aware of and not tolerating harassment, intimidation, hazing and bullying, etc. If incidents do occur, participants should be able to report and know that the inappropriate behavior will be dealt with promptly and effectively. There will be no retaliation against a victim, reporter or witness.

Policy

Bullying involves actions or words against another for the purpose of inflicting physical or emotional harm or discomfort or damage to a person's reputation that is intimidating or threatening and affects the learning and program environments. The following describes types of bullying but is not an exhaustive list.

- Hitting, kicking, shoving, spitting, hair pulling, or throwing something
- Getting another person to hit or harm 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 the student
- Intimidating (bullying), extorting or exploiting
- Spreading harmful rumors or gossip

If anyone in the program is threatening harm, a program participant should tell a catechist, adult volunteer and/or the Program Director immediately so that action can be taken to remediate the situation. Parents/guardians and the Pastor will be notified of the situation, and Law Enforcement Officials may be contacted if warranted (e.g., someone threatened with a weapon, terroristic threats, etc.).

VI. ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENTS

Every catechist in the program assigns take-home assignments on a weekly basis in the form of written work, activities, or study. *Incomplete assignments will be recorded as an unexcused absence. This may delay reception of the sacraments.*

Faith formation is not an academic exercise, nor is it intellectually based. Faith is experienced, witnessed to, and lived. Therefore, this faith formation program does not utilize standard grading procedures. Catechists, to gauge the understanding and formation progress of the participants, will use appropriate review materials and Midterm and Final Assessments.

Progress Reports will be mailed to parents after each semester. The purpose of the Progress Report is to provide parents/guardians with feedback regarding the faith formation of their children.

As active and interested parties in the faith formation of their children, we require parents/guardians to review student work and Progress Reports.

VII. WORKBOOKS AND SUPPLIES

Every participant is provided with a backpack, workbook and school supplies at the beginning of the year and is required to bring them to **EVERY** class.

Lost workbooks must be replaced by purchasing a new workbook priced at \$25.00. A new workbook will not be issued until the full purchase price has been received, unless prior arrangements have been made with the program director.

VIII. SERVICE INITIATIVES

The Program Director and/or Catechists may invite participants to engage in service activities as a means of deepening the formation process. Details will be communicated to students as well as parent/guardian for permission and relative release forms. Some activities encourage families to take an active role by participating in the event with their child.

IX. WORSHIP

Prayer and worship are a vital and necessary dimension of our faith as it is the primary way in which we commune with God.

1. All students must attend the 10:30am mass with their class.
2. **CONFESSIONS:** Each Semester one CCD Sunday Program will be replaced with a weeknight CCD Penance Service. Services will be indicated on the Program Calendar and email reminders will be sent.
3. Spiritual Devotions are an important aspect of faith formation and required for level completion. Students must participate in 1 Spiritual Devotion in the Fall Semester and 2 Spiritual Devotions in the Spring Semester. Opportunities are emailed semi-weekly.

SOME EXAMPLES OF SPIRITUAL DEVOTION OPPORTUNITIES

FALL SEMESTER	SPRING SEMESTER
Forty Hours (Sunday)	Stations of the Cross (Fridays of Lent)
Forty Hours (Monday)	Rosary Rally
Rosary Rally	Last Supper Liturgy
Christmas Caroling for Homebound	Good Friday Passion Service

X. SACRAMENTS

Archdiocesan policy requires that school age children satisfactorily complete Archdiocesan Curriculum for all Levels prior to and including the sacramental level to be eligible to begin preparation for the reception of a sacrament.

PARTICIPANTS EXHIBITING CHRONIC ABSENCES, LATENESS, OR WHO ARE A PERSISTENT DISCIPLINE PROBLEM MAY HAVE THEIR RECEPTION OF BAPTISM, RECONCILIATION, FIRST HOLY COMMUNION, AND/OR CONFIRMATION DEFERRED UNTIL THE FOLLOWING YEAR OR LATER.

Preparation for the reception of a sacrament is a time of prayerful reflection and discernment. A participant's desire to receive the sacrament is reflected in his or her positive attitude toward the preparation process. Proper attendance and behavior are expected.

The parents of all sacramental candidates are required to attend a special parent meeting relating to the appropriate sacrament. The sacramental candidates are required to participate in all activities relating to the preparation process including rehearsals and retreats. Failure to comply with the requirements outlined at the parent meeting may result in the reception of the sacrament being deferred until a later date.

XI. TUITION

Tuition is a necessary and required part of our faith formation programs and ensures that our programs

can provide participants with the most current and best catechetical resources for their formation needs.

Tuition is due at the time of registration. Early Bird Specials are applicable with Spring registration. Installment plans and payment options are available upon request. Balances must be paid in full prior to level completion. Anyone who cannot meet the tuition payment schedule or who has difficulty making a payment due to hardship should contact the program director to discuss the matter to make other arrangements.

If a student is dismissed from the program due to excessive absences, lateness, problem behavior, or for any other reason for dismissal, no refund of tuition or material fees will be made to the family.

XII. SNOW EMERGENCY AND CANCELLATIONS

Families will receive email notification of cancellation. Phone calls will be used for any family without email access. These forms of notice will be the *only* notification given for the cancellation of scheduled programs, activities, or events.

In the event of a non-weather related cancellation, we will make every effort to contact families as early as possible by email and/or phone.

XIII. COMMUNICATION

Calendar and Communiqués

Parents are provided with a Tentative yearly calendar at the beginning of the program year. *This calendar is subject to change during the course of the year.* Parents will be notified of changes and upcoming activities via email as well as handouts, and flyers sent home in the student's *Communication Folder*.

Contact Information

Parents should feel free to contact the program director regarding any concerns or problems that may develop during the course of the year. The program director may be contacted by calling or emailing.

Rectory Office: 215-465-2336

E-mail: stellamarisdre@comcast.net

Direct communication with your child's catechist is sometimes a necessary component of the catechetical process. Catechist correspondence will be available through the remote portal of the text series.

Updating Contact Information

The contact information that you provide at the time of registration will be used as the primary means of communication. In order to receive necessary and vital information pertaining your child's participation in our programs, it is imperative that you notify the program director of any changes in address, phone numbers, or email.

Participant Communication Folders

Every participant will receive a two-pocket *Communication Folder* for weekly assignments and other important papers. Parents should check this folder after each weekly session to view whatever flyers, bulletins, take-home assignments, etc. are being sent home.

XIV. SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Stella Maris and Epiphany PREP/CCD participate in and adhere to the Safe Environment Program mandated by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

- All program employees and volunteers are subject to complete background checks and trainings which can be found at childyouthprotection.org
- All students in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia take part in grade appropriate lessons on the topic of keeping themselves safe. Catechists are responsible for administering the lessons provided by the Office of Catholic Education in conjunction with the Office for Children and Youth Protection. The lessons are available for review at phillyocf.org/safe-environment-2/

XV. CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Stella Maris and Epiphany Parishes take the safety of our students and staff seriously. A Crisis and Management Plan has been developed to effectively address emergency situations that may arise during the administration of the program and details the protocols for each emergency.

- Medical Emergency:
 1. 911 will be called for situations requiring immediate medical attention and parents will be notified. Unless safety is a concern the child will not be moved until medical personnel assess the situation and decide.
 2. In a non-life-threatening emergency parents will be notified and child will be kept comfortable until a parent/guardian arrives.
- Evacuation: To ensure the safety of our students and staff, if an emergency evacuation of the classrooms occur, the Evacuation Protocol will be employed. Students will exit the building in a similar way to a fire drill and remain outside until the building is deemed safe enough for re-entry. Safe areas have been designated should weather become a factor.
- Fire Drills: After reviewing procedures with the students, a fire drill will be conducted. While drills are a practice, students are expected to behave in an appropriate manner and follow the directions given by the catechetical staff.
- Internal Lockdown: Should a situation present itself where the safety of the students and staff might be jeopardized, the internal lockdown protocol will be employed. Students and catechetical staff will be restricted to their classrooms and not permitted to leave the building until the area has been deemed safe or the emergency has been resolved. Lockdowns may be employed by the program director or local authorities in response to an immediate threat to safety. Parents will NOT be given access to the building until all clear has been given by the local authorities.
- Shelter In Place: This is an emergency response plan to the release of hazardous materials in the air. It can only be called for by the police or fire departments. If the program is instructed to shelter in place, we would initiate our plan to protect students and staff from the dangerous air outside the building. No one is permitted to enter or leave until all clear has been given by the local authorities.

FINAL NOTE

The Pastor reserves the right to amend this handbook. In the event of any such amendment, parents will be given prompt notification of the changes made.

CHECKLIST AND PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURES

Your check mark indicates your understanding of each section of the Stella Maris PREP/CCD Handbook.

- _____ Attendance/Lateness: email stellamarisdre@comcast.net (page 4)
- _____ Arrival/Dismissal: (page 4)
- _____ Custody Agreements: copies must be provided to DRE as they become available (page 5)
- _____ Discipline: No Tolerance policy for behavior contrary to Catholic faith/morals (page 5-7)
- _____ Assignments/Assessments: (page 8)
- _____ Workbooks/Supplies: (page 8)
- _____ Service/Worship: attendance at relative activities outside class-time to inspire faith formation and promote personal growth (page 8-9)
- _____ Sacraments: full participation and appropriate attitude of student/parent (page 9)
- _____ Tuition: (page 9)
- _____ Cancellation of Class/Events: email/phone notification (page 10)
- _____ Communication: email, phone, student folders (page 10)
- _____ Safe Environment: as mandated by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia (page 11)
- _____ Crisis Management: (page 11)

I understand that by participating in the PREP/CCD Program that we (my child/children and I) must adhere to the policies and procedures set by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, Stella Maris and Epiphany Parishes. I have read over the handbook with my child/children and understand the rules that we will follow. My signature below means that my child/children and I/we agree to follow the policies and procedures for the Stella Maris Parish PREP/CCD Program of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____