

St. Ignatius of Antioch Church
Parish Religious Education Program
(PREP) Grades K – 8
Parent Handbook
2023 – 2024

Contact Information:

Religious Education Office: 215-493-5204

Director of Religious Education (DRE): Anmarie Flanagan
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Administrative Assistant:

PREP Sessions:

- 1) Sunday: 10:35 a.m. – 11:50 a.m. Grades K – 7 beginning Sept. 10
- 2) Monday: 6:30 p.m. – 7:45 p.m. Grades 1 – 7 beginning Sept. 11
- 3) Summer Plus: Week of July 17 – 21, 2023 – Monday through Friday (9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon) plus the following Sundays (9/10, 10/15, 11/5, 12/10, 1/7, 2/11, 3/10, 4/14, and 5/5) – (10:35 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.) – Grades 1 – 7 only
- 4) Grades 8 – 11 students will meet at an acceptable time for teacher and students
- 5) (Grades 8 – 11 students and older students preparing for Sacraments will meet at a mutually acceptable time for the parents, students, and the DRE).

Note: Our Religious Education Program teaches what the Roman Catholic Church believes and teaches.

Message from the DRE:

Dear Parents,

Our Church has always stated that you, as parents, are the primary, religious educators of your children. At the Baptism of your child, the priest or deacon asked if you accept the responsibility of training your child in the practice of the faith, and if you clearly understand what you are undertaking. You replied that you did. Each one of us, the DRE, PREP Catechists, and PREP Aides, is here to help you with this awesome task of teaching your children about the God who loves us beyond all understanding, and about our Church Community who supports us in our journey of faith. Your faithful practice of our faith (particularly attending weekly Mass), together with our work in PREP, can give your children a strong foundation in the faith that will guide them throughout their lives in loving God above all things and loving our neighbor as ourselves. We support you and your children in this great mission.

Our program shares “the teachings of Jesus Christ in such a way that a person comes to know about [God] and believes in God, enters a relationship with God, and is transformed by him.” Our teaching centers on the Paschal Mystery of Jesus, the Son of God. Following the direction and guidance of the Office for Catechetical Formation of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, we present the authentic doctrines of our faith, based on a spiral curriculum, in an appealing manner through the use of the Finding God and the Christ Our Life series from Loyola Press. We strive to make disciples of Jesus through the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation, and we invite believers to ongoing faith formation. Our program includes liturgical, communal, and personal prayer experiences.

We serve all students in our parish, including those with disabilities.

Since we all need spiritual encouragement at various times in our lives, please know that I am here to serve you, as well as your children. My door is always open. Please don't hesitate to contact me.

Please keep this “handbook” as a reference for the particular aspects of our program. May God bless you and keep you. May God let his face shine on you and be gracious to you. May God smile on you and bring you his peace.

*Sincerely,
Annmarie*

REGISTRATION:

All children, who are entering Kindergarten through eighth grade and do not attend Catholic school, are invited to participate in PREP. If you are new to the area, please register at the

rectory first and then enroll your children in PREP classes. We will also need a copy of your child's Baptismal certificate. You can come to the PREP Office in the school building to complete the registration form. The PREP Registration form as well as other information is also on the parish website at www.stignatius.church. Click on *PREP* and scroll down the page. Print out and mail it or bring it to the PREP Office. The tuition is listed on the last page of the registration form.

All those already in PREP will receive a Registration Form and Information for the following school year in the spring, and a date for the "Walk-in Registration" is also announced in the Parish Bulletin and by email. Class size is limited; therefore, you are encouraged to register early for the session of your choice.

TUITION:

This money covers the cost of the students' books, resource materials, art supplies, and everything else related to PREP. Full tuition is expected at registration. If a family has difficulty paying this tuition, the parents are encouraged to contact our pastor, Father Andrew Brownholtz to set up an appointment to discuss a payment plan.

In addition, each PREP family is expected to contribute a yearly minimum of \$100 in your Church envelope.

This year's tuition is as follows:

April through June 29 (discounted period)

GRADES K – 6

\$230 for one child

\$450 for two children

\$640 for three or more children

GRADE 7 – \$100

GRADES 8 – 11 – No Tuition

HOMESCHOOLING (with the DRE's permission) – same rates as above

After June 29

Grades K – 6

\$250 for one child

\$490 for two children

\$700 for three or more

CALENDAR:

PREP classes begin on Sunday, September 10, 2023 and Monday, September 11, 2023. Classes end on Sunday, May 5, 2024 and Monday, May 6, 2024. The dates for the "Summer Plus" Program are listed on the first page of this Handbook. Each family will receive the PREP calendar by email. This calendar contains all PREP events, as well as the schedule of classes. In addition, you can access the parish calendar on the parish website at www.stignatius.church.

COMMUNICATION:

Communication between PREP and our families is critically important. For this reason, we need accurate email addresses, phone numbers, and addresses. If any of these change, please notify

the PREP Office immediately. Mostly all communication between PREP and our families is by email; therefore, you should give us the email address you check most often. Emails are sent out through *Flocknote*. Please make sure that your server accepts these emails. **All calendars, PREP Parent Handbook, forms, important news from St. Ignatius or the Archdiocese, reminders of upcoming events, and any class cancellations due to inclement weather come to you by way of email. In the case of inclement weather or other emergency, you should check your email within an hour before classes should begin.**

GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS:

- 1) Parents, we ask that your children attend all classes faithfully, arrive on time for class, and stay until class ends. Please spend some time reviewing the weekly lesson with your children and help them complete any homework and/or study for tests.
- 2) Please pray each day with your children, especially before bedtime, and attend Mass on Sundays and holydays.
- 3) During Advent and Lent, students have the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Dates will be listed on the PREP Calendar. Please take your children to Confession at other times as well. Confessions take place every Saturday between 4:00 and 5:00 p.m.
- 4) If a PREP class falls on a holyday or the vigil of a holyday, we will attend the 7:00 p.m. Mass together. Parents are encouraged to join us.
- 5) Our program depends on volunteers. Please consider volunteering as a catechist, classroom aide, hall/door monitor, or substitute. All of our volunteers have received criminal and child abuse clearances and are trained in Safe Environment and Mandated Reporting practices (per Archdiocesan regulations).
- 6) Occasionally, it becomes necessary that a parent homeschool a child for Religious Education. The parent meets regularly with the DRE throughout the PREP year. At the end of the year, the student must take a test with the DRE before he/she can move to the next level. According to Archdiocesan policy, parents may only homeschool their own children. Putting groups of children from different families together is strictly forbidden by the Archdiocese since it would mimic the regular PREP program.

PREP SAFETY POLICIES:

*We have put into place several security measures to keep your children safe. I know this is often an inconvenience for you, the parents, but please realize that we do care about your children's safety in the unpredictable world in which we live at the present time.

1) Safe Environment Clearances and Trainings for Adults:

* All of our teachers, aides, and door monitors must have criminal checks and child abuse checks renewed every 5 years. In addition, they must attend a two-and-a-half-hour Safe

Environment Training Session (*Protecting God's Children*) and complete the one hour online *Mandated Reporter* Training. Any adult who has not lived in the State of PA in the last 10 years must also have the FBI Fingerprints Check. Those who have lived in PA in the last 10 years must sign the *Disclosure Form*. Even substitutes must have clearances.

2) Safe Environment Trainings for Students:

* Once each year, the students in grades K – 8 are taught an Archdiocesan lesson called *KidTalk*. The goal of this lesson is to help keep our PREP children safe in their personal lives and online. *KidTalk* is a trauma-informed lesson, which acknowledges that children are NOT responsible for preventing abuse; adults are responsible.

3) Safety Drills:

*Each year, PREP students practice what to do and where to go in a fire drill. We will also practice inside and outside lockdown drills. All classroom doors are always in the “locked” mode in case of danger.

4) Custody:

*If you are separated or divorced and have custody issues, please provide our office with the most recent court order. We ask this to prevent a non-custodial parent from picking up his/her child. A note from home will not suffice.

5) Arrival and Dismissal:

*All students will enter the building through the blue doors under the blue canopy. **No parent may accompany the child to the classroom. Please be on time.**

*At dismissal, parents should come to the same blue doors and tell the door monitors your child's name and your name. The monitor will then ask you to step inside and wait in the entrance area until all the students have gone to the cafeteria. Then you should go to the teacher or aide and identify yourself before taking your child/children. Leave the building via the side door in the cafeteria.

*If someone, other than the parents, is picking up the child, you should complete the **Permission for Other Drivers Form. You need one form for each of your children. You will receive this form by email** before PREP classes begin. Your child should give this completed form to his/her teacher on the first day of classes. To save time, it may be helpful to you to write in the names of any adult who could possibly pick up your children during the year. This includes carpoolers. If you list everyone at the beginning of the year, then you will not need to complete the form again. Of course, if someone not on the list comes to pick up your child, please ask your child to give his/her teacher another completed form when this is necessary.

***If a PREP Catechist or Aide will be driving your child, you must complete a special form (per Archdiocesan requirements), which our volunteer will give you. This form must be kept in the Religious Education Office Files.**

6) Illness or Injury:

*If a child becomes ill or is injured during class, the classroom aide will bring him/her to the DRE, and parents will be notified. (Some young children will say they are sick when they are really just tired or upset about something). The DRE will help the child and then send him/her back to class but will notify a parent anyway. If the illness or injury is extremely serious, the DRE will call an ambulance and notify the parents and the pastor as well. For serious illnesses and injuries, the Archdiocese requires that we complete an *Accident/Injury Report*.

7) Other Personal Safety Issues:

*Students should **never wear flip-flops** or other unsafe shoes to PREP. These are especially dangerous on the stairs.

*Since we do not allow food or drink in the classrooms, parents are requested **NOT** to send in any food, drinks (including water bottles), candy, cakes, or snacks to the classroom – not even at holiday time. Many of our students have various food allergies, and it is cruel to single out those children. There are water fountains with very cold water at the end of each corridor.

There is an exception for the students in the Summer Week Plus Program. They may bring a snack from home and a water bottle for their recess break.

*If your child must carry medication to school or has a chronic illness, please make sure that our office is aware of this situation. You should have recorded this on the registration form. If you did not, please let the DRE know. **No child should be carrying medication to class without our knowledge (this includes insulin and epi-pens).**

***Photographing students by adults or other students is prohibited in PREP.**

OTHER PREP POLICIES:

1) Attendance:

*While we encourage all students (Grades K – 8) to come to class each week, the attendance policy for students in Grades 1 – 7 (Sacramental preparation levels) is stricter. The Archdiocese states that PREP students should not miss more than 10% of all classes. Since we schedule approximately thirty 75-minute PREP classes a year, this would mean no more than 3 absences (not counting snow days). Of course, we know that sometimes unexpected crises do occur. If this is the case, please contact the DRE as soon as possible. The DRE will contact the parents when absences begin to accumulate. The purpose of this contact is to devise a plan that could help the students attend classes regularly. This could mean switching to a different class for a period of time. The period of time must be at least a month or more. Please be aware that students cannot simply come to another class when they are absent (unless they have permission from the DRE).

***If a student participates in the Summer Week Plus Program, absences are not permitted because one class is actually 2 classes. The child may need to switch to the regular program.**

***If a child has EXCESSIVE ABSENCES, he/she may have to complete a proficiency test before moving to the next grade level.**

2) Lateness and Early Dismissals:

*Please have your children come to PREP classes on time. (Here's a thought – if your child comes to class 5 minutes late each week, he/she will have missed 150 minutes of class. This equals 2 classes). Of course, sometimes lateness cannot be helped. When a child arrives late, the hall/door monitor records the child's name on the late arrival sheet.

*If a student needs to leave class before the regular dismissal time, he/she should bring in a note (stating the reason) and give it to the DRE. **Please keep in mind that sports is NOT a valid reason for early dismissal.** When the parents come to pick up their children, they should come to the Religious Education Office and sign them out with the time listed. The PREP Secretary or I will notify the teacher to send the child to the office. ***Parents may not go to the classroom for their child. Reminder: Frequent lateness and early dismissals can add up to another absence on the child's attendance record.**

3) Disciplinary Issues:

*Please remind your children that they are expected to **behave in a respectful manner** toward the Catechist, the Classroom Aide, and the other students. They must also respect the school property and the property of the day students. If a child continually disrupts the class, the DRE will address the problem first with the student. If there is no change, she will contact the parents. If the inappropriate behavior continues, the parents will need to come in for a conference with the catechist and the DRE to discuss possible solutions.

*We know the students carry **cell phones** with them; however, these may not be used to make phone calls or to play games during class time. If a student does this, the teacher will take the phone and return it to the child at dismissal time.

*Parents, if you see or hear of a disciplinary problem developing, please contact the DRE **before** the trouble escalates.

4) Extremely Serious Disciplinary Issues:

***Acts of harassment, intimidation, hazing, inappropriate touching, and bullying of all kinds are strictly prohibited.** If this occurs, the student will be removed from class, an investigation will ensue, the pastor will be notified, and serious consequences, which may involve law enforcement, will follow.

*Parents of any student who is in **possession of a weapon or drugs** will be notified immediately **after** law enforcement is called.

*Parents of any student responsible for **setting off a fire alarm** will be notified immediately.

The student, his/her parents, our Pastor, and the DRE together will determine disciplinary measures.

* If a student exhibits **cruel, violent, or consistently disruptive behavior**, the Catechist and the DRE will complete a *Behavior Incident Report* (per Archdiocesan requirement).

STUDENT LEARNING:

Typically, students are tested at the end of every unit so that teachers can see what and how much the children are grasping. These tests are designed by the DRE specifically to measure student growth in the knowledge of their Faith. Parents should have indicated information regarding a child's special learning problems on the registration form. This confidential information, which is shared only with the classroom teacher, makes it possible for us to use alternate means of testing and discretion in grading these students. If we do not know, we cannot help. Although we educate children within a regular classroom environment, our teachers and classroom aides make every effort to provide for the learning needs of each child. Often, the DRE helps as well. If your child needs more than this, please be aware that we offer a "special needs" class during PREP.

GRADE LEVEL CURRICULUM:

*In Grades K – 6, we use the 2021 Loyola Press Series, *Finding God*, as our tool for teaching your children. This is a spiral curriculum that builds on and expands what was previously learned. The series contains five units with five sessions or chapters in each unit. Unit 1 zeroes in on God the Father. Unit 2 focuses on Jesus Christ. Unit 3 concentrates on the Holy Spirit and the Church. Unit 4 emphasizes the Sacraments, and unit 5 centers on morality and how we should live. The Knights of Columbus provide each 6th grade student with his/her own Bible as an early Confirmation gift.

*In Grade 7, we use the Loyola Press Series, *Christ Our Life*, the Bible, and other sources to study Jesus in the Gospels more intensely. Seventh grade students also use Loyola's Confirmation preparation book, *Confirmed in the Spirit*, to prepare for the Sacrament of Confirmation. These students also use the Bible they received in 6th grade.

Kindergarten – children learn about God's love and how this love creates the universe, me, and other people to love.

Grade 1 – the focus is on the introduction of the Trinity, the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, and the groundwork for the study of morality. Children learn the *Sign of the Cross*, *Our Father*, *Hail Mary*, *Glory be...*, and *Grace before Meals*.

Grade 2 – children review Baptism and zero in on the preparation for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. They learn the *Act of Contrition*, an Examination of Conscience,

the Form for Confession, and the parts of the Mass and its purpose. They are also introduced to the Rosary.

Grade 3 – the emphasis is on the Church, the marks of the Church, the Mass parts, and the *Apostles' Creed*. They continue to build on their previous knowledge.

Grade 4 – children direct their attention to morality by moving past the *Ten Commandments* to the *Beatitudes* and the *Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy* and the *Virtues*. All seven Sacraments are introduced in this grade level.

Grade 5 – the stress is on a more intense study of the Sacraments and Jesus as the ultimate Sacrament. This is the beginning year for Confirmation preparation.

Grade 6 – the students learn about the *Old Testament of the Bible* (Creation, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and the Passover event, the Judges, the Kings, the Psalms, the Wisdom Books, and some of the Prophets). They see how God is revealed to us in the Old Testament, how God interacts with his people, and how Jesus is its fulfillment in the New Testament. Every 6th grade student is given a new Bible to keep. The Knights of Columbus pay for these Bibles, which are intended to be the students' gifts for Confirmation.

Grade 7 – the students will focus on the study of *Jesus in the Gospels*. They continue to use the Bible they received in 6th grade. They will explore what life was like in first century Israel, the characteristics and purposes of the 4 Gospels, the Infancy Narratives, the Baptism and Temptations of Jesus, the Parables, the Miracles, the Law of Love and the Beatitudes, and the Paschal Mystery. They will also prepare for the Sacrament of Confirmation by studying its origins, its purpose, the Gifts and Fruits of the Spirit, and the Rite of the Sacrament.

Grade 8 – 11 – this year, the students will use Matthew Kelly's video and book ***Decision Point*** to delve more deeply into our Church, our lives, prayer, relationships, and the value of the Sacraments.

OTHER FEATURES OF THE CURRICULUM:

Prayer: Catechists of all grade levels are encouraged to offer their students various experiences in prayer – vocal prayers, spontaneous prayer, and meditative/reflective prayer experiences – to help the children develop a close relationship with God.

Service: Students from all PREP classes participate in some type of service project each year. Individual classes may also have a service project opportunity.

SACRAMENTAL PROGRAMS:

Sacrament of Baptism:

Children who have not yet received the Sacrament of Baptism may also be a part of PREP. The

DRE will work with the parents and the children to plan a program suitable to the child's age to prepare for this Sacrament.

Sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation and First Eucharist:

In **second grade**, students prepare to receive the **Sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation and First Eucharist**. **To receive these Sacraments in second grade, the children must have attended Religious Education classes in first grade.** (Students who are older and have not received these Sacraments will attend their own grade level PREP class and an additional class which prepares them for the reception of the Sacraments).

Students preparing for these sacraments participate in a half day First Communion Retreat in the spring, and a mandatory rehearsal prior to First Communion Day.

Because parent involvement in sacramental preparation is so vital, we request that all parents of these students attend a **Parent Meeting in the fall** for First Penance and First Eucharist to remind them of the meaning and purpose of each sacrament so they can better prepare their children for these sacred events.

Sacrament of Confirmation:

In **seventh grade**, students prepare to receive the **Sacrament of Confirmation**. (Students who are older and have not yet received Confirmation may attend class with the seventh grade students or will attend a separate PREP class with the DRE to prepare them for this Sacrament). Since the Bishop is the usual minister of Confirmation, he determines the date, which is usually in the spring of the year.

To prepare properly for this Sacrament, students should have been attending Religious Education classes throughout their school years. The students concentrate on the study of Jesus and his teachings with the primary purpose of encouraging a personal relationship with God. They also study/review the basic teachings of our Church, and they are tested in the spring. Students choose a Confirmation name and a sponsor and are encouraged to perform "Works of Charity."

Because parent involvement in sacramental preparation is so vital, we request that all parents of these students attend a **Parent Meeting in the fall** so they can help their children take an active role in their life with God. Students preparing for this Sacrament participate in a Confirmation Retreat, and a mandatory rehearsal prior to Confirmation Day.

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL CAMP: Each year at the end of June, we run a Vacation Bible School Camp for students who will be entering grades K – 5. Specific information about this camp will be included in the Church Bulletin each spring, and the children will bring home information on this activity sometime during the month of March.