



St. Anthony of Padua Parish Children's Faith Formation ~ CFF

Inspiring a new generation of disciples.

260 Forest Ave. Ambler, Pennsylvania 19002 215-646-6150 x 2200 CFF@saintanthonyparish.org

Volunteer Handbook

2025-26

(Updated 2/2025)

For Catechists and All Volunteers in Supporting Roles
in St. Anthony's Children's Faith Formation

— “ —
BE WHO YOU ARE, AND BE THAT *well.*
— ” —
ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

The purpose of this handbook is to set forth guidelines for those who participate in the St. Anthony of Padua Religious Education program. This handbook and the policies contained within are subject to revision, in which case volunteers will be notified in writing of any changes.

Updated 3/2025.

What is a catechist?

A catechist is...

CALLED to proclaim, to live and to celebrate the message of Christ in his Gospel.

CHOSEN to create, to enter into, and to build community and the Kingdom of God, which is at the heart of Christian education

COMMITTED to the growth, development, and wellbeing of one's educational family in the form of service and love.

ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA MISSION STATEMENT

We, the parishioners of St. Anthony of Padua, believe that here the merciful heart of Christ speaks a loving word to our hearts, forging a communion of love. It is this grace which draws us to gather on the Lord's Day for Eucharist, proclaim his Good News and give ourselves in service to those in need.

We commit ourselves to share our faith in the Lord Jesus with all we meet and to hand on our Catholic faith to the next generation. In the spirit of Saint Anthony, we welcome any who have lost their way in life so that together we may hear Christ speak to our hearts.

CALLED TO BE A CATECHIST

The ministry of catechist is a vocation, an interior call of the Holy Spirit. It springs from the sacrament of Baptism and is strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation. Catechists need to be practicing Catholics who participate fully in the communal life of the Church, and who have been prepared for their apostolate by appropriate catechetical training. Commissioned by the Church, they participate in the divine calling to teach as Jesus did. Catechists include deacons, Catholic school principals and faculty, parish religious education personnel, youth ministers and campus ministers. Parents and guardians are the first teachers of the faith. When a child reaches catechetical age, catechists can serve to assist them in this role.

Therefore, the spiritual life of a catechist should be categorized by:

- **love** for God and the Catholic Church
- **faithful** practice of the Catholic faith
- **personal** prayer and dedication to the evangelizing mission of the Church
- **enthusiastic** proclamation of the faith
- **active** participation in parish life
- **devotion** to the Eucharist, the source of nourishment for catechists, and Mary, the first disciple

In order to present the Catholic faith in its fullness and in a way that is attractive, those who catechize need preparation and ongoing formation.

PHILADELPHIA ARCHDIOCESAN CATECHIST CERTIFICATION

Basic Certification will be offered to the catechist in the form of a small faith group as well as private study.

QUALIFICATIONS and RESPONSIBILITIES for CATECHISTS and CFF VOLUNTEERS

1. Every volunteer over 18 years of age is required to have current federal and Archdiocesan clearances on file (detailed below) and must abide by the *Standards of Ministerial Behavior and Boundaries* with the parish in order to be eligible to serve in the faith formation program. Background checks must be on file within 30 days of beginning service in ministry and volunteers are required to renew those clearances every five years. An FBI background check is required for volunteers who have moved to the state in the past 10 years.
2. Certain offenses on required background checks would preclude a person from being a volunteer.
3. Catechists and volunteers must understand, agree to, and sign a statement of their responsibilities in ministry. These include, but are not limited to the following:

A catechist should be:

- a fully initiated, practicing Catholic in good standing with the Church
- eighteen years of age or older
- an exemplary follower of Christ with unquestioned personal integrity and moral character

- committed to presenting the authentic teachings of the Church
- committed to developing a greater personal understanding of Catholicism
- a person of prayer who has carefully discerned the ministry of catechesis
- a disciple of Christ who can share his/her faith with students in an age-appropriate manner
- an effective communicator with adults and children
- capable of relating to people in general and children in particular
- capable of working collaboratively

A catechist should:

- complete a personal information record
- observe the Archdiocesan Religion Guidelines
- accept the policies/calendar of the Parish Religious Education Program
- comply with the directives of the Director of Parish Religious Education
- attend catechist meetings
- prepare lesson plans in a thorough and faithful manner
- submit lesson plans if requested by the Director of Religious Education
- be punctual for class
- be responsible for his/her classroom or meeting space
- be evaluated by the Director/Coordinator of Religious Education.

4. The catechist understands and agrees to his/her parish responsibilities
5. The catechist must complete the on-line Information form.

6. All volunteers are asked to dress appropriately. The following dress code will aid in providing an atmosphere conducive to religious formation for volunteers and students:

- No revealing clothing
- No clothing with words or graphics that are anti-Christian, racist, sexist, advocate violence, consumption or use of drugs, alcohol or tobacco.
- No clothing with words or graphics that are demeaning to another person or group.

VOLUNTEER SAFE ENVIRONMENT REQUIREMENTS

- **Safe Environment Training** This training is required and provided by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The session is about 2 ½ hours long and must be completed by new volunteers one time only within 90 days of beginning service with Saint Anthony's.
- **Standards of Ministerial Behavior and Boundaries (SMBB).** All volunteers must agree in writing to abide by and uphold the SMBB, which will be presented at the Safe Environment Training.
- **Mandated Reporter Training:** This training is required by PA State Law and is provided by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. It consists of three 20 minute training modules, which can be completed online. This training will be updated from time to time as PA State Law requires. Volunteers will be notified when updating is required.

REQUIRED BACKGROUND CHECKS

- **PA State Police Criminal Record Check & PA Child Abuse History Clearance.** To be completed prior to beginning service with Saint Anthony of Padua Religious Education Program (free for volunteers). Must be renewed every five years
- **Federal Background Check (Fingerprinting):** Required only of volunteers who reside outside of Pennsylvania or who have resided outside Pennsylvania any time within the last 10 years (fee paid for by the volunteer and reimbursed by the parish once the processed clearance and receipt for payment have been submitted). To be completed prior to beginning service in Saint Anthony of Padua Religious Education Program. Must be renewed every five years until 10 years of PA residency is attained. Thereafter, the volunteer must submit a *Disclosure Statement Application* every five years (see next bullet point).
- **Disclosure Statement Application.** To be completed every five years by volunteers who have resided in PA for at least 10 years.

MANDATED REPORTING

- According to PA State Law, every catechist is considered a mandated reporter of child abuse because they are responsible for the welfare of the children that they catechize. Volunteers who have a reasonable suspicion of child abuse must report it to the program director immediately.
- **Corporal punishment (including but not limited to pushing, shoving, slapping, pulling hair, etc.) is unacceptable.** Volunteers who overstep this boundary may be dismissed immediately and the incident reported to the proper authorities. Volunteers should adhere to the Archdiocesan Standards of Ministerial Behavior and Boundaries.

PHOTO AND VIDEO PERMISSION

Parental permission is necessary for the photographing or filming of Parish Religious Education students. Before taking pictures/videotaping, the catechist must check that parental permission has been granted.

ARCHDIOCESAN RELIGION CURRICULUM GUIDELINES

St. Anthony of Padua follows the Archdiocesan Guidelines. Below is a synopsis of the core content for each level as applicable to St. Anthony of Padua Religious Education Program.

Grade One - God the Father, Creation, Living in God's World, God the Son-Jesus Christ, God the Holy Spirit, the Sacraments of Initiation, Mary, Liturgical Year, Prayer

Grade Two -Preparation for sacraments of Reconciliation and First Communion

Grade Three - The Trinity, Sacraments, God's Law, Christian Community, Mary, Liturgical Year

Grade Four -God the Father, Jesus Christ Our Redeemer, Holy Spirit, Creed, Commandments, Grace, Sin, Conscience, The Beatitudes, Mary, Liturgical Year

Grade Five - the seven sacraments, Mary, the Liturgical Year, the Holy Spirit, the Bible

Grade Six - The Bible, Old Testament, New Testament, and preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation

Grade Seven – Preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation

PRAYERS TO BE LEARNED BY LEVEL

(Prayers Learned Each Year build on prior years):

Kindergarten: Sign of the Cross, Intro to Hail Mary, Our Father, Glory Be

Grade 1: Sign of the Cross, Hail Mary, Our Father, Glory Be, Grace Before & After Meals

Grade 2: Act of Contrition, Basic Mass Responses

Grade 3: Morning Prayer, Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed

Grades 4-6: Act of Faith, Act of Love, Act of Hope, Hail Holy Queen, Angelus, Come Holy Spirit, Knowledge of Mass parts, prayers and responses, and how to pray the Rosary using prayers from previous years.

CURRICULUM and ASSIGNMENTS

- **PRAYER and LESSON PREPARATION:** Grade Level catechists are asked to prayerfully prepare a lesson plan for each week according to the Archdiocesan Guidelines and our text.
- **COURSE OUTLINE:** In order to enhance standardization across all classes, a series of lesson outlines have been prepared by catechists and can be found on our website.
- **HOMEWORK:** Catechists should provide weekly homework. We strongly encourage it to be something that can engage the family. 'With My Family' activity suggestions at the end of each session reinforce the lessons in the form of activities or other appropriate means that will nurture the child's faith. If a student is absent, the parent is responsible for reviewing the missed lesson and completing the missed assignment with their child.
- **JOURNALING:** Journals are not encouraged. Catechists who utilize any form of journaling are obligated to read what participants write.—If catechists cannot read the assignments, the assignment should not be made. It is strongly recommended that journaling should not be assigned as homework or an in-class activity.
- **SHARING OUR FAITH** is a major part of our faith formation. Catechists should establish and enforce firm ground rules for sharing personal experiences and maintaining student confidences.

PARISH and FAMILY EVENTS

In addition to normal classes, parish and family events are a way to build our faith together as a community in worship and service. Parish and family events, especially regular attendance at Sunday Mass, are a part of the religious education curriculum.

Event dates are noted on the yearly calendar. **Use these events and services as conversation starters in the following sessions!**

- Although formal written tests and reports are no longer an Archdiocesan requirement, regular assessments may be done in class in a manner that engages the students and provides an opportunity for all to participate. Verifying that the children can recite prayers for their grade level is expected. Knowledge of other content that can be memorized, such as the Ten Commandments, Beatitudes, etc. is also required.
- Formal mid-term and final tests will no longer be taken by the children. However, testing in class remains an aid to learning and understanding the material they should be mastering at each level. The catechists should update the tests in line with the Archdiocesan standards.

RECORD KEEPING

- **Attendance and homework completion check is to be taken at the beginning of each class by the catechist, adult assistant, or teen aide (with assistance).**
- **ATTENDANCE LOG and ABSENCES:** Every catechist will have a class folder with an attendance register. Place the folder with the absence sheet in your clear wall bin mounted in the hall outside your classroom door. Office staff will pick up the folders at the end of each class. Class folders will be returned to you for the following week.

Please mark your attendance this way:

- Check Mark = Present, A = Absent, Check Minus = Late

In the event of an emergency evacuation or drill, catechists will be responsible for taking the class folder with them to assure emergency personnel that all the children are safe/accounted for.

- **Homework Completion Log:** Check homework returned in the log. It is important that it is completed and turned in on time.
- Place any notes/paperwork for DRE from students in the classroom folder for pickup.
- Please reach out to the DRE if you have concerns about a particular student's absences, behavior, or completion of homework.

CATECHIST/VOLUNTEER ARRIVAL/DISMISSAL PROCEDURES and PERSONNEL POLICIES

- **ARRIVAL**

- **Catechists/Volunteers are asked to arrive at least 15 minutes before class starts.** Class folders and any handouts/resources for the week will be in the bins located outside your classroom. The resource center located in the CFF office will always be open if you need supplies or materials.
- If you need administrative support (copies, crafts, etc.) in preparation for your session, please email the DRE at cff@saintanthonyparish.org with your requirements by midday Monday each week.
- When you arrive, proceed to the multipurpose room and flip your class sign to indicate you are present and students can proceed to your classroom. Sessions begin promptly at their designated time.
- Go to the classroom and prepare your materials for class. Be ready to greet students and have an activity ready as they arrive.
- Welcome and prayer will begin over the intercom promptly. Begin your class with grade level prayers to reinforce the prayers students should be mastering.

- **USE OF CHURCH**

- Spending time in church is important for the children. If you would like to go to church for your lesson, please sign up at least one week in advance on the large calendar in the hall outside the CFF office. This will allow time to contact a priest or deacon if requested. Please be sure to identify your level and session on the date.

- **DISMISSAL**

- An announcement on the PA system will signal the end of class.
- Students will be dismissed from their classrooms and taken by the catechist or aid to the multi-purpose room, where they wait in the designated areas with their class for pickup.
- Parents-enter the school through the multi-purpose room doors. They collect their children from the catechist or aide who will check them off the sign-out sheet.
- After dismissal, please restore your classroom's order as you found it before you leave. Classrooms with movable whiteboards or bulletin boards should move them to the proper storage location.
- Be sure students take all belongings.

PERSONNEL and PROFESSIONALISM

- Catechists are not permitted to distribute personal handouts/letters or sell/solicit products to the program participants or families without prior DRE approval.
- Volunteers are expected to dress and conduct themselves in a professional manner. As Christian witnesses, volunteers are expected to uphold the teachings of the church in their everyday lives and model Christian behaviors and values.
- **Cell phones are not to be used except for emergencies or video resources during sessions**

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP and VOLUNTEER COLLABORATION

- **Classroom volunteers** should remain in contact with one another on how you can serve as a resource for each other in classes and for lessons each week. Adult classroom assistants are encouraged to serve as substitutes if a catechist is unable to attend.
- **Lesson plans** are to be shared with all assistants in the event of an emergency.
- **Adult assistants and teen aides** should be responsible for:
 - Taking attendance and noting absences
 - Checking and logging homework completion
 - Reserving handouts for absent children to be given at the next session
 - Helping to lead discussion groups or assist with hands-on activities.
 - Handle bathroom visits, injuries/illness during class.
 - Listen attentively to names of students called at dismissal. Help monitor the hallway for safety.
 - **Cell phones are not to be used except for emergencies or video resources during sessions**
 - Classroom cleanup/end of class tasks (boards erased, lights off, trash picked up, supplies away, close windows, turn off lights and fans, return technology to office if necessary)
- **Office Staff** are a resource and support for the DRE and catechists/assistants. Responsibilities include:
 - Meet with DRE to get an overview of the office needs for the session.

- Assist with the arrival of children. Help supervise children waiting in the MPR.(Multipurpose room)
 - Walk hallways to collect class folders and note attendance in the attendance binder.
 - Be available to help with any injuries, illnesses, catechist requests.
 - Manage dismissal at the end of sessions. Update DRE on any circumstance that needs addressing.
- Assist with office work as requested by the DRE.

CATECHIST/VOLUNTEER ABSENCES

- If a catechist/volunteer is unable to attend a session at any time due to illness or personal matters, he or she must notify the DRE:
 - At least one week in advance for prior commitments
 - Before 1pm on the day of the session in the event of illness or emergency when possible.
 - If classroom assistants can secure a sub (classroom parent, etc.) notify DRE in the process.
- **Catechists are asked to secure their classroom assistant as the sub if they are able and notify the DRE.** If you are unable to secure a substitute, notify the DRE.
- Catechists are required to notify the DRE of the lesson plan and any additional take home assignments for the session they are unable to attend when advance knowledge of an absence is foreseeable.

COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS/GUARDIANS

- All emails sent to families regarding religious education must be sent via an email address that clearly reflects that the email is originating from the CFF program (emails are provided to the catechists)
- **All emails regarding religious education issues sent to families should be copied to the Director of Religious Education. This includes newsletters and updates.** Behavioral/classroom issues may not be addressed via email but rather with a phone call **after** discussion with the DRE.
- Catechists should maintain appropriate contact methods with parents/guardians for religious education in order to maintain proper boundaries. Appropriate methods include phone and email.
- Students may not be contacted via cell phone, text, or social media. Emails may only be sent to family email addresses. Be mindful of what you send to families via email as emails can be forwarded and do not disappear. An email

can also be misinterpreted by the reader as something that was never the writer's intention.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Matters of a confidential nature are often disclosed to a catechist for the purpose and only for the purpose of his/her work in the parish religious education program. This information may not be disclosed beyond the purpose of his/her work in the parish religious education program.

Divulging information revealed in confidence that leads to the direct or indirect harm of an individual can make the volunteer liable and subject to possible lawsuit.

- Comments to parents/guardians should pertain to their own children **ONLY**.
- Communication should be addressed **ONLY** to persons with legal custody who have a legitimate right to know about their children.
- Legal custody of a child should be known to the DRE and will be communicated to volunteers.
- Volunteers are legally obligated to reveal information obtained in confidence if such information will prevent the direct or indirect harm of the student or others. Such information should be revealed to the program director and if appropriate, to parents and proper authorities.
- Catechists will be informed of any special accommodations/needs of students as indicated by their parents.

BEHAVIOR AND DISCIPLINE

Please review the Family Handbook.

SUPERVISION

As a general rule, the duty of care owed to our students is a standard of ordinary care. Since our students are children, the standard is ordinary care that any adult would owe a child. The younger the student, the greater the standard of care that must be exercised.

1. **At NO TIME should students be left unattended or placed in the hallway unsupervised.**
2. In the event of an emergency, catechists/volunteers must make every reasonable effort to contact another adult or catechist to supervise the class in their absence
3. **DO NOT** send students alone to the DRE. **DO NOT** leave the classroom yourself to take a participant to the office unless you have provided proper supervision for your class. Send two students or a classroom aide to bring the DRE to you.

4. **If the catechist is taking the class outside or to the Church, please let the DRE know ahead of time.**
5. Proper supervision of students must ensure that students do not tamper with things in the classrooms, closets, bathrooms, or hallways. Any vandalism is to be reported to the DRE immediately.
6. **THE STUDENT OR GROUP WILL COMPENSATE FOR DAMAGE TO SCHOOL PROPERTY.**

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Archdiocesan policy considers more than 3 absences in a year to be excessive. If necessary, the parents and DRE may develop an educational plan to remedy excessive absences that may be affecting their child's readiness to move to the next level of religious instruction. Attendance records are a diocesan requirement and absences are recorded on each child's permanent record card.

WEATHER CANCELLATIONS AND MISSED LESSONS

In the event of inclement weather Religious Education classes will not gather at the St. Anthony Education Center at the discretion of the parish staff. If classes do not gather, a notification will be sent via email and posted on the St. Anthony Children's Faith Formation webpage to communicate this change.

St. Anthony Religious Education Program **does not** follow the decision of any local school district for weather related closings. In the event of a cancellation, parents are responsible for implementing that week's lesson at home with their children. The assignment should be checked for completion and reviewed in class at the next session.

CATECHIST AND ASSISTANT SELF EVALUATIONS

Catechist and assistant evaluations will be completed at the end of the year and kept on file. This is to comply with the diocesan requirement that a written form, which states that the catechist acts in a reliable and responsible manner, be kept on record.

CLASSROOM SUPPLIES

- Cardstock table tents for names can be found in your CFF closet
- Catechist box with adult scissors, tape, stapler, chalk, etc.
- Construction paper in closet available for all classes
- Pencil sharpener, paper towels, disposable cleaning wipes, tissue box

- Always check with the DRE for special craft materials. Please place orders for these two weeks before the craft is needed and use Oriental Trading for selecting crafts. Email the correct item number so the craft can be purchased.

CLASSROOM TECHNOLOGY

- Class spaces will be equipped with or have access to video or internet technology. Access is a work in progress and hopefully will be updated soon.
- If you need assistance with technology, please contact the DRE before the session begins or send an assistant to the office to request help.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

- Some CFF classes and some PreK classes share the same space. Be creative and respectful in using the space available to you.
- Posters and other materials are available in the CFF Resource Center
- Please do not bring, give out, or allow food or edible treats in CFF classes, whether packaged or otherwise. Children should not chew gum, consume candy, or eat snacks in the preschool building. At special times of celebration, some treats may be provided for CFF students at designated whole group gatherings in Friendship Hall. Classroom rewards may be non edible, such as stickers, medals, holy cards, erasers, pencils, etc. Please ask the office if you would like these, since we have many small items that could be given as prizes or birthday remembrances. Our one-hour weekly class meetings should be reserved for religious instruction.
- If you have a video other than those listed or those not in the office, it must be approved at least a week in advance prior to viewing.

EDUCATION CENTER CRISIS RESPONSE PROCEDURES

A **shelter in place** procedure may be implemented when a situation occurs that may be a hazard to health or is life threatening. It can be used when it is safer to keep the students inside the building rather than expose them to possible harm by allowing them to leave the building. Once the shelter in place is called, the school should remain in that condition until the “All Clear” is given. A shelter in place may be called by emergency responders or weather agencies as well as the director of religious education or Preschool Child Care administrators with knowledge of immediate danger.

Lockdown is the highest state of readiness that is activated when violence is occurring or is imminent in the area or any other situation deemed by the police or staff administrator to warrant a total lockdown of the Education Center. We will run one lockdown drill in the fall.

Shelter in place and lockdown are not synonymous terms. While both contain the students and staff, a shelter in place will allow individuals into the building to seek safety.

Please refer to the red Lockdown Emergency Procedures handout for shelter in place and lockdown procedures.

FIRE DRILL PROCEDURES

- **Use the Fire Drill Procedure sheet at the end of this handbook to see where your class is directed to exit in a fire drill or in the event of a fire emergency.**
- Direct the children to leave quickly and quietly when the bell rings. Without stopping, bring the Attendance Register with you when exiting the building
- Do not take time to shut windows but close the door after exiting.
- Move the class away from the school building and keep children together quietly while accounting for all in attendance.
- Return to the classroom when the all clear signal is given.

INJURIES

- Each class has a Classroom First Aid Kit with basic supplies and latex gloves on their shelf. Gloves are to be used whenever there are bodily fluids that need to be cleaned up.
- There is an additional First Aid Kit in the Religious Education Office. Assistants should accompany injured/ill children to the Religious Education Office to phone home.
- See the director for an Incident Report Form for injuries of a more serious nature. This form **MUST** be filled out the day of the injury to answer any insurance inquiries.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Rebeca Perez, Director of Religious Education
cff@saintanthonyparish.org

St. Anthony Religious Education Office
260 Forest Ave., Ambler, PA 19002
Office: 215-646-6150 x2

Web Site: www.saintanthonyparish.org

Qualifications and Responsibilities for a Parish Religious Education Catechist

Name of Catechist: _____

1. This catechist meets the following personal qualifications and abilities:

- a fully initiated, practicing Catholic in good standing with the Church
- eighteen years of age or older
- an exemplary follower of Christ with unquestioned personal integrity and moral character
- committed to presenting the authentic teachings of the Church
- committed to developing a greater personal understanding of Catholicism
- a person of prayer who has carefully discerned the ministry of catechesis
- a disciple of Christ who can share his/her faith with students in an age-appropriate manner
- an effective communicator with adults and children
- capable of relating to people in general and children in particular
- capable of working collaboratively.

2. This catechist has completed all Safe Environment Training and submitted all clearances and forms as required by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

3. This catechist understands and agrees to the Archdiocesan Basic Catechetical Certification Policy.

4. This catechist understands and agrees to his/her parish responsibilities:

- completion of a personal information record
- adherence to the Archdiocesan Religion Guidelines
- adherence to the policies/calendar of the Parish Religious Education Program
- adherence to the directives of the Director/Coordinator of Parish Religious Education
- attendance at catechist meetings
- preparation of lesson plans in a thorough and faithful manner
- submission of lesson plans if requested by the Director/Coordinator of Rel. Ed.
- punctuality for class
- responsibility for his/her classroom or meeting space
- proper attire
- evaluation by the Director/Coordinator of Religious Education.

These qualifications and responsibilities of a catechist have been reviewed.

Signature of the Director/Coordinator of Religious Education

Date

Signature of the Catechist

Date

