



Church of the Incarnation
Parish Religious Education Program (PREP)

CATECHIST HANDBOOK

Mission Statement

At Church of the Incarnation PREP, we are committed to the religious education of our children. Our program strives to foster faith formation through the Mass, prayer, teaching the message of Jesus Christ, celebration of the Sacraments, family involvement and community service. We encourage our children and our families to bring the love of Jesus into their daily lives and to become models of our Catholic faith.

What is a catechist?

The word "catechist" has its roots in the Catholic Church. It comes from a Greek word meaning "To teach" or to "inform." In the times of St. Augustine, the word took on the meaning "to resound, to echo, to sing out."

"Next to home and family, the witness of the catechist may be pivotal in every phase of the catechetical process. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, catechists powerfully influence those being catechized by their faithful proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the transparent example of their Christian lives. For catechesis to be effective, the catechist must be fully committed to Jesus Christ. They must firmly believe in His Gospel and its power to transform lives." National Directory for Catechesis.

Catechesis is the process of helping people acquire and deepen faith and identity. This happens through initiation rites, instruction, and formation of conscience.

Parents are the primary catechists for their children, but you (as teachers) are also catechists. Principals in Catholic schools, everyone in the PREP office and youth ministry, deacons, priests and bishops are also catechists. All of these catechists have their own role and unique responsibilities in helping students as well as parents acquire and deepen their faith.

To that end, a catechist should strive to:

- Believe deeply in Jesus and the teachings of the Catholic Church and desire to share that belief with others.

- Be a positive person, alive with the joy that comes from living the Gospel message.
- Be committed to teaching the mission of the Catholic Church.
- Give active witness to their faith commitment.
- Have a love for and be sensitive toward the age group they catechize.
- Be open to growth by participating in activities that provide personal and spiritual development.
- Be devoted to the Mass and prayer.
- Live and share your Catholic faith.
- Be respectful of students and expect the same from them.

PREP General Class Schedule

During our regular academic year, PREP classes have 2 components: 1) Face-to-face classroom sessions meeting every other week and 2) Online assignments via *My Catholic Faith Delivered* (MCFD). The face-to-face classes are held either on Tuesdays or Wednesdays. Parents can select from 2 different class times on either day: 4:15 - 5:30 PM or 5:45 - 7:00 PM. The online assignments are designed to supplement in-class work, providing another unique layer of catechesis to help your child grow in the Faith. The PREP academic year usually begins in mid-September and ends in mid/late April, including a break during Christmas. Additional activities are held for those students making their First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion (Grade 2), and Confirmation (Grade 8).

We also offer a week-long intensive Summer program for grades 1-8. Normally, grades 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 meet from 8 AM - 11:30 AM Monday - Friday. Grades 2, 7, and 8 meet from 8 AM - 2 PM Monday - Friday. There are three summer sessions; the first session is held in mid-June and the remaining two sessions are held in mid and late July; dates vary each year. Summer classes also have online assignments (via MCFD) that students complete during *and* after their summer session as well as Summer Enrichment activities. Class registration is completed online. A Flocknote will be sent to all families once registration is available.

Background Check, Fingerprinting and VIRTUS

As mandated by the Camden Diocese, a background check and fingerprinting is required by all volunteers working with PREP students. You must also attend VIRTUS training. You can learn more about these requirements here: <https://www.incarnation-church.org/catechist-corner> If you have additional questions, please contact the PREP Safe Environment Coordinator, Abigail McCrane amccrane@incarnation-church.org (856) 468-7566, Ext. 108.

CATECHIST RESOURCES, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES

Valuable information and useful resources are always available and frequently updated on the PREP “Catechist Corner” website:

<https://www.incarnationchurch.org/catechist-corner>

Catechist Orientation

An orientation will be held approximately one month prior to the start of classes. This 45-minute presentation will be held in the Kernan Center, usually in the Father Salerno room. You will be given teacher’s materials, including the catechist teacher’s guide for your grade, badges, lesson plans, and other information regarding PREP policies. A Flocknote will be sent to your email to all catechists scheduled to teach for the upcoming semester once the date for the orientation is set.

Lesson Plans

We provide a scope and sequence along with important dates and deadlines for each catechist at the start of the academic year. Lessons are based on the online curriculum from *My Catholic Faith Delivered*. All lessons are in accordance with the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#). If you do not feel qualified to teach about a particular aspect of the faith or have difficulty understanding what the lesson plan is trying to communicate, we can help you with teaching supplemental materials, suggestions, and ideas. The Director of Religious Education or anyone from the PREP office is always available to help teach your class.

We may plan and schedule the following activities during the academic year:

- Confessions during Advent and Lent
- Fire Drills
- Church visits/tours
- Priest visits
- VIRTUS® materials/activities
 - (These are **required**; you can access the materials online at [VIRTUS® Online](#). Be sure you complete the required chapters by the deadlines noted in the lesson plan for the academic year.)
- You may add other activities to help supplement your class; please contact the PREP office with any questions.
- Complete tutorials, videos, teaching materials, and other information regarding *My Catholic Faith Delivered* is available online at <https://www.incarnation-church.org/catechist-corner>.

Smart TVs

Smart TVs are now available in all of the classrooms; you can access videos, websites, and other resources on the Internet for your classes. Use the remote

control kept in the desk drawer to operate the TV. After turning on the TV, click on the “Home” icon, then use the arrows on the remote to scroll to the “web browser” icon to access the Internet or click on the pre-sets for apps like YouTube, Google, etc. A tutorial is available in all classrooms in the teacher’s desk.

Copies

A copy machine is available for your use in the front office. We’d be happy to either make copies for you or you can use the copy machine anytime; no code needed. Anyone in the office can help you operate the machine if you need assistance.

In the classroom (please read this carefully)

As mandated by the Camden Diocese and VIRTUS policies, a **catechist or volunteer cannot be alone with only one student at any time in a classroom or any other room during PREP or at any of its functions.** If your class has only one student present for any reason, please exit the classroom with the student and move into the Kernan Center Hall, using a table to continue the lesson for the week. Laptops and other learning aids are available for your use. You and your student may also join another classroom in session if the lessons are compatible.

Arrival

- Please arrive 10-15 minutes before class begins.
- Turn on the light in your classroom before standing by your table in the Kernan Center.
- Stand next to your table so the PREP office knows you are present.
- Prayer and announcements are presented before sending students and teachers to their classrooms; please wait until your table is released to take your students to class.

Dismissal

- End your class with the prayer “Act of Contrition” and any other prayers.
- Escort your students to the appropriate door for exiting the building; release them directly to the parent or guardian.
- No children are to be left alone at any time; if a parent is late picking up their child, return to the Kernan Center tables and wait with the child until their parent arrives.

Disciplinary Challenges

It is our policy to discipline with love and understanding. Do not allow a behavior problem to continue, immediately speak to the student about their behavior and do not be reluctant to contact the Director of Religious Education or the PREP office as needed.

Substitute Catechists

Please contact the PREP office as soon as you are aware you are unable to teach a class. We will provide a substitute teacher. **All substitute teachers must have VIRTUS clearance, have been fingerprinted, and pass all background checks according to the same policies in effect for regular catechists and volunteers.**

PREP School Policies

Attendance Requirements – Students must attend all classes; during the Fall/Spring academic year students are allowed no more than 3 absences; during Summer, students are only allowed 1 absence.

Online Work (My Catholic Faith Delivered® MCFD) – It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to make sure all online work is completed in a timely manner, and that the student is putting forth *adequate* effort into the program. Catechists and/or someone from PREP regularly monitor student progress with online work. Emails are sent to student's parents (from either the catechist or the PREP office) when satisfactory progress is not being made.

Make-up classes – If students miss a class, they should try to attend a different class to make-up for their missed session. As a courtesy to the PREP office, we ask that parents call the PREP office at 856-468-7566 letting us know if they anticipate their child being absent and/or making up a class and we can work together to schedule a make-up class. **NOTE: A child present in your class who doesn't regularly attend may be making-up a missed class. Please be sure to note this on the attendance roster. Make a note on the attendance roster including the child's first and last name and the time/day for their normal class. This is extremely important so we can properly document their attendance.**

Discipline Policy – Our teachers are generous men and women who volunteer their time and talent sharing their faith and teaching God's message. As such, the PREP office has little tolerance for students being disruptive or unruly.

- 1st disruption– Students will be corrected by the teacher. The teacher reserves the right to contact the parent about disruptive/disrespectful behavior.
- 2nd disruption– The child will be sent to the PREP office; parents/guardians may be contacted. This class will be marked as an absence that cannot be made up.

Emergency Procedures

Active Shooter

In the event of an active shooter, immediately close the door, if classroom door is not locked, lock it, and then pull down the shade of the classroom door. Push the emergency button located in your classroom. This sends an alarm directly to local police. Dial 911 on your cell phone. Bring all your students out of line of sight of the door. Remain in the classroom until the 'all clear' is announced. Try to remain calm. Pray silently.

Student Illness or Injury

If a student becomes sick or injured during class, bring them to the office. Do not under any circumstances dispense medication to the child, even if you know the child and the parent.

PREP will not dispense medication for the parents. If a student requires medication during class time, the parent must come to the PREP office to administer the medication. An event report may be filed. Basic first aid can be administered, such as band-aids.

Defibrillator Machine - Located outside Room 2 in the Kernan Center

Immediately call 911 in the event of a suspected cardiac arrest! An AED unit is available. An AED (Automated External Defibrillator) is a lightweight, battery-operated, portable device that checks the heart's rhythm and sends a shock to the heart to restore normal rhythm. Located on the wall outside Room 2; there is a sign noting its specific location. To access the unit, open the compartment; an alarm will sound. To silence the alarm, close the compartment door again. Instructions for using it are included in the compartment. You can learn more about operating an AED here:

<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/defibrillators>

Emergency Closings

In case of inclement weather or any other emergency, you will be notified via Flocknote® and text in the event PREP classes are canceled.

In the event of an emergency involving a child, we will call the parent/guardian whose name is listed under emergency contact. An incident report may be filed.

If phone numbers or addresses change at any time during the year, please contact the PREP office immediately. This is especially true for emergency contact numbers. Keep all contact information current.

Fire Drill Procedure

We will have at least one announced fire drill during the academic year and will notify you in advance of the date. A plan for an emergency exit is posted in your classroom. **Take a few minutes to familiarize yourself and your class with the specifics.**

Please remember:

- Stay calm - students will follow your cue.
- Quickly count students before you leave and take the class roster with you.
- Quietly take the students to the designated exit as noted in your classroom.
- If you are the last one out, close the door.
- Once outside, proceed to the Church or parking lot as instructed.
- Count the students again.
- The students should be quiet at all times so they can hear instructions.
- Return to the classroom ONLY after the “all clear” signal has been given.
- Recount the students once you are back in the classroom.

CHURCH OF THE INCARNATION - PREP OFFICE

<https://www.incarnation-church.org/meet-the-prep-team>

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Normal business hours are Monday through Friday from 9AM-4PM.

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