

*Holy Cross Parish*  
*Religious Education Program (P.R.E.P.)*  
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## Handbook

### Purpose

This handbook is designed to familiarize families with the policies and procedures Holy Cross PREP

### What is PREP?

PREP (Parish Religious Education Program) is a program, in place at Holy Cross, to assist parents in a more formal way, meet the religious education needs of their children in grades 1 – 7 who do not attend a Catholic elementary school.

### Structure of PREP

The pastor appoints a Director of Religious Education who is responsible for the overall operation of PREP. Trained and screened volunteers act as catechists, assistants and monitors in the program.

### Curriculum

PREP follows a curriculum for each level established by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and stated in the Religion Guidelines of the Archdiocese. Textbooks are selected from a list of Archdiocese approved texts that are found to be in conformance with the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Classes generally cover one chapter a week. Both written and study homework is usually assigned for each level. This gives the parents an opportunity to reinforce and expand upon concepts and doctrine being taught in class. Prayers are assigned for memorization at each level.

### **Registration**

New registrations are accepted at any time.

- a.. PREP families must be registered as parishioners of Holy Cross Parish.
- b.. Baptismal certificates must be presented at registration.
- c.. Tuition must accompany registration.

## Re-registration

- a.. Notices will be sent home with students enrolled in PREP.
- b.. Tuition should accompany the re-registration form.
- c.. Tuition will increase if a family re-registers after the stated deadline. If a family has a financial or family concern, please call the D.R.E. prior to this deadline to avoid an increase.

## Children with Disabilities

As defined by Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the term disability means a child "with mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech and language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.

We recognize the dignity of God's creation and we attempt to provide religious educational opportunities for those children with disabilities. We ask that parents share with the DRE the nature of a child's disability so we can make accommodations for that child in his /her learning and testing.

We also ask that when registering or re-registering the parent let us know and provide us with a copy of a child's IEP from his/her public school. An IEP can help guide us in making accommodations for a child. The IEP will be shared with the child's catechist to insure we are working to accommodate a child's needs. The IEP will be handled in a confidential manner by both the DRE and catechist.

## Tuition

- a. Tuition covers the cost of each student's textbook as well as audiovisual materials, resource materials, catechist and assistant training and other items purchased for use in the program.
- b. A replacement fee will be charged for lost textbooks.
- c. If a family has a financial concern or difficulty, please contact the D.R.E.  
[PREPHolyCross@gmail.com](mailto:PREPHolyCross@gmail.com)
- d. A fee is charged for all children preparing to receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation, First Holy Communion and Confirmation. This fee covers materials used especially for sacrament preparation including parent meeting speakers, retreats, practices, Confirmation robes, speakers, crafts, refreshments and videos for Confirmation and First Holy Communion

## Classes

- a.. Classes are held on Monday afternoons from 4:30 - 5:45 P.M.
- b.. Classes are held in Holy Cross School.
- c.. Children are usually assigned to a level corresponding to their public school grade, BUT if they have started late or have missed a year or more of religious instruction, they may be assigned to a more appropriate religious education level.

## Parental Responsibilities

- a.. Send children to all classes on time.
- b.. Check the child's school bag for assignments, notices and calendar updates.
- c.. Read all notices sent home by PREP. We send most by email but some are sent home with the child. Please check for notices each week.
- d.. Help the child learn the assigned prayers for his or her grade level. (The National Directory for Catechesis states that "parents are the most effective catechists of prayer.")
- e.. Supervise completion of homework.
- f.. Make sure the child comes to PREP prepared for class.
- g.. Help the child make up any work missed on account of absence.
- h.. Attend "Back to PREP".
- i.. Attend all required sacrament preparation meetings.

## Assessment

Assessment may be formal or informal. Along with informal assessment, the following formal assessments are part of Holy Cross PREP:

- a.. Children are verbally tested throughout the year for knowledge of prayers appropriate for each level of instruction.
- b.. Progress Reports are sent home in January to Levels 2-7 and in May to Levels 1-6.
- c.. If a student has an IEP, we can modify testing to accommodate a child's learning style or disability.

## Promotion and Retention

Promotion is based on the following criteria:

- a.. Consistent attendance and displaying knowledge of the Catholic faith appropriate for level.

b.. A student may not be promoted if he or she has missed 5 or more classes and does not display sufficient knowledge of the faith.

#### Communication between PREP and Parents

Effective communication promotes a mutually supported program. PREP communicates with parents through:

E-mail

Notices sent home (please check school bags each week)

Mail

Parish bulletin

Media outlets in emergencies

PREP Link on Parish website at [www.holycrosscatholics.org](http://www.holycrosscatholics.org)

Facebook page

Parents are asked to keep the PREP Office informed of a current e-mail address. We will use e-mail as our primary form of communication with parents. This reduces our use of paper, ink and postage. If you do not have an e-mail account, please notify the PREP Office and we'll send home notices with your youngest child.

Parents are asked to contact their child's catechist with any questions or concerns they may have via email or write a note to the catechist. If you cannot reach the catechist please call Religious Education Office or email at [holycrossre@gmail.com](mailto:holycrossre@gmail.com) Class time is short and catechists and the administration may not have time to address your concerns before or after class.

#### Arrival

a.. Classes begin at 4:30 P.M. on Monday afternoons. Please plan on arriving 10 minutes prior to class.

b.. Children can be dropped off at the front door of school, by way of a car line. Please do not enter the building through any other door.

c.. Please exercise extreme caution while driving or walking in the parking lot.

#### Dismissal

a.. For safety reasons, the doors of the school are locked during class time. They will be unlocked at 5:45 P.M. for dismissal.

b.. Children in grades 1 - 7 must be picked up in their classrooms by their parent or other designated adult.

c.. Please be aware of traffic and pedestrians and use caution in the parking lot.

d.. Students may not wait outside for their rides. If a parent is late picking up a child, we will wait with them in the PREP office until a parent or designated person arrives to take them home. The PREP room is located in the wing of the school next to the parish hall. Enter through the maroon door marked "CCD Staff", the office is the second door on the left.

Early dismissals are disruptive to learning. If for some urgent reason a child needs to be dismissed early from class, please observe the following rules:

a.. A written note must be turned in to the catechist by the child at the beginning of class.

b.. We ask that you do not pick up a child before 5:15 P.M. A child will not be considered to have attended a full class if he or she leaves before 5:15 P.M.

c.. Parents are to report to the PREP office. We will send a hall monitor to bring the child from class.

d.. Sports practices or games are not considered an urgent reason for early dismissal.

#### Emergency Closing

a.. If Springfield School District is closed or has dismissed their students early due to inclement weather, PREP is closed.

b.. Holy Cross PREP closing number is 1057.

c.. Closings will also be broadcast on KYW 1060 radio.

d.. Closings will also be posted on our PREP link which you can access from the Holy Parish's website. The web address is: [www.holycrosscatholics.org](http://www.holycrosscatholics.org)

e.. We will also send an email notice whenever possible.

#### Attendance

a.. Thirty hours of instruction are the norm for a Religious Education Program in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

b.. The Archdiocese requires that absence be no more than 15% of this time. For Holy Cross PREP, that translates to 3 classes.

c.. Any child who misses 5 or more sessions will be required to make up work as deemed necessary in order to be promoted. Parents are responsible for contacting the Religious Education Office to schedule a make- up session.

d.. If a long term absence occurs due to illness or family situation, parents should contact the D.R.E. to arrange for make -up work.

## Discipline Policy

Discipline should be fair and consistent. Classroom rules are introduced during the first class and reviewed regularly during the school year. Minor infractions should be dealt with by the catechist or assistant.

The parish is responsible for determining appropriate or inappropriate behavior, both in and out of the classroom, in the PREP community generally, and outside the PREP community where such improper behavior affects the school community.

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

If a child repeatedly exhibits disruptive or inappropriate behavior during PREP time the following steps will be followed:

- a.. The D.R.E. will speak with the student and develop a behavior plan.
- b.. The D.R.E. will notify the parents of the problem.
- c.. The D.R.E. will meet with the parents and student.
- d.. The D.R.E. may recommend Home Study.

A serious behavioral problem may be dealt with immediately and the D.R.E. may take appropriate actions including notifying the pastor and/or calling the police.

## Safe Environment

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia has a safe environment policy in place. One lesson per year is taught in PREP. You may view these lessons online prior to it being taught at [www.virtus.org](http://www.virtus.org).

Parents may opt out of these lessons for their child by contacting the PREP Office in writing prior to the published date on which the lesson will be taught.

It is the policy of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and Holy Cross PREP that all volunteers and staff are forbidden to use any form of corporal punishment. In addition to physical abuse, this policy also prohibits sexual, psychological, verbal and emotional abuse.

## Harassment

Harassment, when one person repeatedly makes verbal or physical contacts with a person who does not want these contacts, by staff, volunteers and students will not be tolerated.

## Contraband

Some items are illegal for minors to possess and some items are considered inappropriate for a Religious Education setting.

Items such as weapons, alcohol, tobacco products, and drugs are illegal for minors to possess. Any student found to be in possession of such illegal material will be removed from class, have their parents notified as well as notification of the appropriate authorities if deemed necessary.

Some items such as, but not limited to, cell phones, iPods, MP3 players, hand held video games are not necessary for class and should not be brought to class. A catechist, assistant or the DRE may confiscate these items if they are being used during PREP. They will be returned to the parent.

## Search and Seizure

It is the policy of Holy Cross PREP to respect the privacy of its participants. Unnecessary intrusions into persons and possessions are to be avoided.

However, in the event that a student is suspected of having weapons or drugs in his/her possession, the DRE is to be notified immediately. The DRE will conduct the search with an adult staff member as a witness. Refusal on the part of the student will result in parents/guardians being contacted and asked to assist with the search. Parental refusal will result in the student's immediate dismissal from the program.

## Sacrament Preparation

\* Sacrament preparation is a joint effort of the parish, parents and Religious Education program.

\* Enrollment in PREP or Holy Cross School does not imply enrollment for a sacrament. Parents must complete and return a sacrament information form in order to enroll a child for a sacrament.

\* The Archdiocese of Philadelphia recommends a two year formal preparation period for reception of a sacrament.

\* Parent attendance at Sacrament Preparation Meetings is an essential and required part of this program.

\* Families must be registered in Holy Cross Parish or have permission from their pastor to receive a sacrament at Holy Cross Parish.

\* A baptismal certificate must be presented and a copy must be on file in the Religious Education Office.

\* A fee is charged to cover the costs associated with preparing a child to receive a sacrament. Each fee and what it covers is published in the information parents receive to register their child for a sacrament.

\* First Eucharist and Confirmation, along with Baptism are Sacraments of Initiation into the full sacramental life of the Church. Active participation in the Sunday Liturgy, the Mass, is an essential part of preparation for a sacrament.

\* The Religious Education Office will keep parents informed of meetings, practices, projects, dress codes, retreats and requirements for receiving a sacrament.

\* Paperwork and fees have due dates. These due dates allow us sufficient time to verify information and print sacrament booklets and certificates. PLEASE OBSERVE OUR DUE DATES.

## Safety

Please be aware of basic safety procedures in class and in other parts of the school, church and parking areas. Children should be supervised at all times. Children must be escorted when they are outside of the classroom.

A fire drill will be conducted during the month October during class, weather permitting. Please be aware of the fire drill route for the classroom to which you have been assigned. Also be aware of the fire drill route for any other part of the building you may be using. During a fire drill the children should leave silently and in a single file line.

In the event of another type of emergency please follow the directions given by the D.R.E. or her assistants.

## SAFE ENVIRONMENT

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia is committed to the implementation of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. The Office of Child and Youth Protection assists parishes in the on-going development of safe environment programs in the school, religious education program and all parish ministries which involve children.

The Safe Environment Program includes but is not limited to:

- . obtaining the background checks of all archdiocesan personnel, including clergy, religious and laity, as well as volunteers who regularly come in contact with children
- . providing educational programs for students who attend Archdiocesan elementary and secondary schools and parish religious education programs
- . providing training to clergy, parish personnel, catechists, teachers and volunteers regarding their responsibility, under civil law, as mandated reporters. This training also pertains to Archdiocesan personnel who are working in social services and educational ministry.



## BACKGROUND CHECKS

All clearances must be updated every five years. It is the responsibility of parish administration to keep the records of each employee and volunteer, and to renew these background checks.

Attendance at Safe Environment Training is expected within ninety days of start of hire.

Complete information on required background checks can be found on the Office for Child and Youth Protection webpage on the Archdiocese of Philadelphia website ([www.archphila.org](http://www.archphila.org)).

## PARISH EMPLOYEES

Employees must secure the required documents within thirty days of hire. During this provisional period, their service to children must be supervised. If the FBI Criminal History Record (fingerprint check) is delayed in being processed, the employee from day of hire needs to provide proof that he/she has completed the process for securing the fingerprint check.

## PARISH VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers should have all of the required background checks as they begin their service to children or receive provisional permission to volunteer as long as these forms are submitted within thirty days. During this provisional period, their service to children must be supervised. Refer to Appendix XIV for a Parish Religious Education Program Safe Environment Checklist.

## PROTECTING GOD'S CHILDREN TRAINING PROGRAM (VIRTUS)

The Protecting God's Children Program is a required awareness program for adults who are Church employees or volunteers of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and who interact with children. Trainees learn the signs of child sexual abuse, the methods and means by which offenders commit abuse, and five empowerment steps to prevent or avoid sexual abuse. Training dates and locations are listed on the Office for Child and Youth Protection webpage on the Archdiocese of Philadelphia website ([www.archphila.org](http://www.archphila.org)). 17

## THE STANDARDS OF MINISTERIAL BEHAVIOR AND BOUNDARIES

The Standards of Ministerial Behavior and Boundaries of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia are intended to provide clear standards and boundaries of behavior regarding all interactions with children and young people by priests, deacons, religious, pastoral ministers, administrators, staff and volunteers. These standards are reviewed and signed by trainees during the safe environment training.

## "KEEPING GOD'S CHILDREN SAFE" LESSONS

The Parish Religious Education Program is required to teach one personal safety lesson annually.

The Parish Religious Education personal safety lessons are entitled "Keeping God's Children Safe" and can be found at:

<http://archphila.org/catechetical/resources/resources.htm>.

The Office for Catechetical Formation and the Office of Child and Youth Protection recommend that these lessons are taught in the second semester as a relationship between the catechist and students has been established.

#### PARENT OPT OUT

After a review of the personal safety lesson, parents/guardians may opt out their child from the scheduled session for the teaching of this lesson. The Director of Religious Education should, however, encourage parents who do not wish their child to receive a personal safety lesson to review this important lesson with their child at home.

The Director of Religious Education must obtain a written signed and dated opt out letter from the parent or guardian. These forms are to be submitted to the Office for Children and Youth with the annual parish audit report.

#### MANDATED REPORTING LAWS

Under the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) passed in 1974, all fifty states have passed laws mandating the reporting of child abuse and neglect. A child is defined as an individual under the age of eighteen.

Each state is responsible for:

- . providing its own definition of child abuse and neglect.
- . describing the circumstances and conditions that obligate mandated reporters to report known or suspected child abuse.
- . providing definitions for juvenile/family courts when to take custody of the child.
- . specifying the forms of maltreatment that are criminally punishable.

#### INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS

Prohibiting Harassment, Intimidation, Hazing or Bullying, etc.

A safe, secure and respectful educational environment is necessary for students to learn and achieve high academic standards and build appropriate relationships with others.

The Holy Cross Parish Religious Education Program environment refuses to accept any such behaviors. Therefore, acts of harassment, hazing, intimidation and bullying (including cyber bullying and the like) are unacceptable behaviors and are prohibited in our religious education program. The religious education program personnel cannot monitor the activities of students at all times and eliminate all incidents of bullying between students, particularly when students are not under

their direct supervision. However, to the extent such conduct affects the educational environment of the religious education program and the rights and welfare of the students and is within the control of the religious education program in its normal operations, it is the Holy Cross Parish Religious Education Program's intent to prevent bullying and thus, must take action to investigate, respond, discipline and remediate those 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, students 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 school 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 hurtful rumors or gossip

If the bully is threatening harm, a student should tell a catechist, adult volunteers and/or the Director of Religious Education immediately.

The Holy Cross Religious Education must:

- a.. Have a reporting mechanism in place
- b.. Have an investigation procedure-oral/written statements, witnesses to those statements with signatures.
- c.. A plan for removal of students involved for safety/investigation, if necessary
  - a.. In writing, state facts of findings (the nature of the bullying and its causes)
  - b.. Notify the Pastor

c.. Notify law enforcement immediately if there are terrorist threats/acts involving weapons

a.. Document all steps taken (Incident Report)

b.. Notify parents/guardians of the alleged offender and victim's parents/guardians. (Confidentiality applies.)

d.. Apply disciplinary sanctions according to PREP handbook.

e.. Provide staff/parent/student education on bullying.

Please print out the form below:

Please read the attendance policy again and initial and sign the form below. All students must have a copy of this form on file. Please return it the first week of PREP.

Attendance

- a. Thirty hours of instruction are the norm for a Religious Education Program in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.
- b. The Archdiocese requires that absence be no more than 15% of this time. For Holy Cross PREP, that translates to 3 classes.
- c. Any child who misses 5 or more sessions will be required to make up work as deemed necessary in order to be promoted. Parents are responsible for contacting the Religious Education Office to schedule a make- up session.
- d. If a long term absence occurs due to illness or family situation, parents should contact the D.R.E. to arrange for make -up work. A doctor’s note is also needed.

*Please initial:*

\_\_\_\_\_ I give permission for my child's picture to appear on the parish’s website, bulletin boards, and newspaper articles in relation to events that happen in the parish.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have read the attendance policy and agree to the terms and requirements of attendance at PREP

\_\_\_\_\_ I have read the PREP Handbook and agree to the requirement and expectation of the Holy Cross Religious Educational program (PREP). Handbook can be found at [www.HolyCrosscatholics.org](http://www.HolyCrosscatholics.org).

Print Child(ren) name(s)\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_