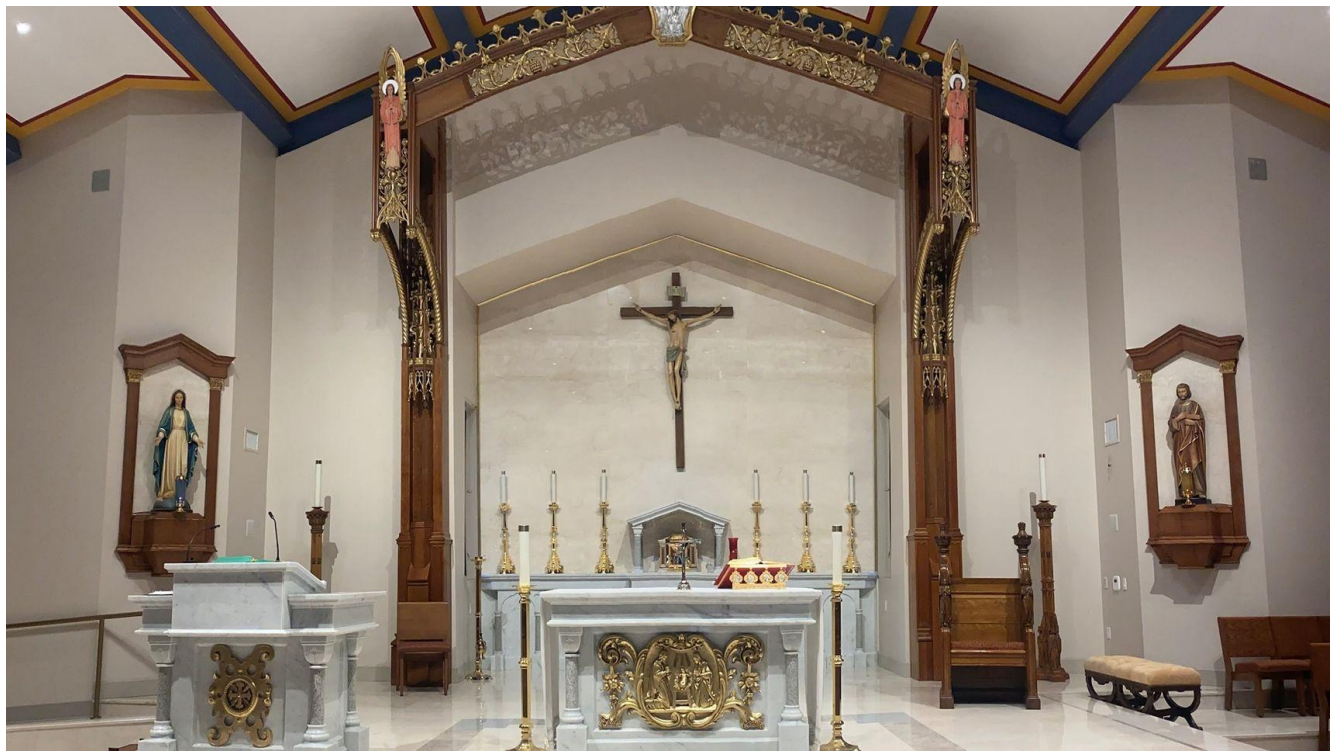


2025-2026 Religious Education PARENT HANDBOOK



*Nativity of Our Lord Church
185 Applegarth Rd
Monroe Township, NJ 08831*

Mission Statement:

"Sustained by the Eucharist, we reflect the joy of Christ's birth to all people through love, compassion, and service."

Dear Parents,

Welcome to Nativity of Our Lord's 2025-2026 Religious Education Program.

Every year, it is standard practice to re-evaluate our program to find better methods of educating your children. Our Religious Education Program is an extension of our mission "*reflecting the joy of Christ's birth to all people through love, compassion, and service*" and we do so in accord with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

It is our privilege this year to teach your children, however, please remember that we have them for only a short time, so the task of religious formation must be a cooperative effort. We bring God's word to your child in the classroom by conveying knowledge. Religion, however, is more than knowledge. **Catholic Christianity is a way of life.** Your support of this program enables us to assist you in your responsibility of passing on your faith to your children. Please try to cooperate with us in this important task. Without parental support and involvement, our goals cannot be met. Students need to see and feel that their parents are interested in what they are doing. Today's religious formation requires commitment.

Our program is inclusive and interactive. It is designed to target each individual child depending on their grade/age and way of learning, all while fostering community.

- Child must attend **17** religious instructional classes in person with a catechist.
- Child must fulfill the requirement of participating in their **Service Mass** with their grade.
- Families must fulfill the requirement of **4 Family Faith Formation** Events this year.
- Families must complete the Diocesan **Family Life Program-Empowering God's Children**. This is an at home assignment that is done by the parent and child/children.
- Child must attend the Religious Education **penance service** (Grades 3-7).
- Families must attend Mass on a weekly basis.
- **Sacramental years:** Children must attend ALL retreats, practices, special events, etc.

We welcome all **special needs children** and offer them the ability to learn about the love and care of Jesus in their own way and at their own pace. Special emphasis is provided on the sacraments of the Eucharist, Reconciliation and Confirmation.

Sunday Mass attendance is the most important part of our curriculum. As Catholic parents, it is your obligation to model your faith and bring your child to weekly Sunday Mass to fulfill your promise made to God at your child's Baptism. Please take this responsibility very seriously and attend Mass together every week.

I hope this format will help all families grow deeper in their faith. I look forward to assisting you and helping guide you and your children through a spiritual path that you will follow through life. I hope this **revised 2025-2026 Parent Handbook** will help you with the policies and practices of Nativity of Our Lord Church's Religious Education Program.

God Bless,

Tara Vigario

PCL

Nativity of Our Lord Church

609-37-2518

Nativity of Our Lord Church
185 Applegarth Rd.
Monroe Township, NJ 08831
www.nativitymonroe.org

Pastor – Father Nalaka Silva

Parish Catechetical Leader (PCL) – Tara Vigario

Phone: 609-371-2518

Email: pcl@nativitymonroe.org & reoa@nativitymonroe.org

Religious Education Office Hours
(May 20 – Sept. 26, 2025)

Monday 9:00 am - 2:00 pm
Tuesday 9:00 am - 2:00 pm
Wednesday 9:00 am - 2:00 pm
Thursday 9:00 am - 2:00 pm

Friday (off)

Religious Education Office Hours
(Sept. 29 – March 25, 2026)

Monday 9:00 am - 2:00 pm
Tuesday 9:00 am - 12 noon
5:30 pm – 7:15pm
Wednesday 9:00 am - 12 noon
5:30 pm – 7:15 pm
Thursday 9:00 am – 2:00 pm
Friday (off)

Parish Secretary – Sandra Buttons

Phone: 609-371-0499 ext. 10

Email: admin@nativitymonroe.org

Parish Office Hours:

Monday thru Thursday 9:00am – 12:30pm (12:30 – 1:30pm Lunch) 1:30pm – 4:00pm

Mass Schedule

- Saturday - 4:00 pm (Vigil)
- Sunday – 7:30 am, 9:00 am & 11:00 am
(View livestream of 11:00 am Sunday Mass on our webpage www.nativitymonroe.org)
- Holydays - 7:00 pm (Vigil), 9:00 am
- Weekdays - Monday - Friday 8:30 am
(View livestream of our 8:30am daily mass on our webpage www.nativitymonroe.org)

Our parish bulletin contains weekly news from the Religious Education Office. You can pick up a copy each week at Mass or you can access it from our website at www.nativitymonroe.org. The bulletin is in the middle of the homepage.

Website: Check out our **revised** religious education section this **August**.

PARENT MEETINGS

This year, your parents' meeting will be held the same night as your child's first religious education class Tues. 9/30 and Wed. 10/1. Please plan on one parent staying the full hour and 15 minutes to hear important information about the 2025-2026 program. This packet outlines the complete program including policies and procedures. You will receive a hard copy of this packet at the meeting. Anyone who has questions can contact the religious education office to set up an appointment.

Our new **NEW 2025-2026** Religious Education calendar can always be found on our Nativity of Our Lord website. **Please commit the dates to your calendar.**

GENERAL POLICIES

Arrival and Dismissal

All classes **begin promptly** at their designated times. For the safety of our children, please drive slowly and carefully in the parking lot and arrive at least 5-10 minutes before the start of your child's class. Younger students must be escorted into the building and directly to their assigned rooms. The entrance is on the left side of the church, follow the walkway down the steps. We are located in the basement of the church. **A child who arrives after the start time should report to the hall monitor to sign in before going to class. Students who are late by 15 minutes or more will be marked late and 3 lates will be counted as absences. Students picked up early by 15 minutes will be marked early pick up and 3 early pickups will be counted as an absence.**

All parents must pick up their child/children at their classroom door. Students **WILL NOT** be permitted to leave the building without an adult. Parents are expected to pick up their children **immediately** after class. If the parent is late picking up, the child will be waiting with his/her catechist or in the lobby with an adult.

No student is allowed to leave the building during the time of class without proper authorization. If it is necessary for a parent or guardian to pick up a child early, notification must be sent to the office prior to class. **In addition, one parent must fill out a pink slip with the hall monitor at drop off and then be given to the catechists AT DROP OFF so their teacher knows the child will be picked up early.**

Attendance

It is imperative that each student must **be present for all 17 classes and at least 80% of the scheduled classes/events in a year to meet the attendance requirements. Failure to do so will be able to register, however will also need to speak to Father Nalaka before your registration can be finalized.** Should a student miss a class, parents must contact their catechists to report the absence. Once the absence is reported the catechist will contact you (via email) with their makeup assignment. There should be no more than 3 absences. Anything over 3 results in 80% below and requires a meeting. Late arrivals (15 min) will be counted as late, 3 lates are an absence and early pickups (15 min) will be counted as early pickups. 3 early pickups are now considered an absence.

Sacramental years (Holy Communion and Confirmation) students are required to attend all classes, retreats, and extra events. Students are not permitted to enter a classroom before the Catechist is present.

Attendance at weekly Sunday liturgy is the most important way that you as parents can form your child in the catholic faith.

Make Up Work

This work will be provided by the Catechist, via email, if the child does not attend class. Your child must hand in the assigned make-up work when returning to class the following week to get credit.

Change of Email/Phone/Address

Our communication with families relies **heavily on emails**. Please notify the Religious Education office **immediately** if you should change your email address, phone number, or address so that you do not miss important notices or emergency information.

No Food

Some of our students have severe food allergies. There will be no food allowed in the classrooms throughout the year. All students may bring a water bottle to have during instructional time.

Behavioral Expectations

Students are to behave in a manner that fosters Christian values. Students are expected to participate respectfully and actively in the faith learning experience. Every child is to attend on time, with their textbooks and a pencil. If a child's behavior disrupts the learning process, the following steps will be strictly enforced this year:

- After the first incident, the child will be reminded of expected behavior and the consequences of misbehavior.
- After the second incident, the child will be sent to the Religious Education Office.
- If the child's inappropriate behavior continues, a parent will be called.
- If the disruptive behavior continues each week, alternative solutions will be discussed with Father Nalaka.

If this affects a child in a sacrament year, the child will be deferred from that sacrament.

Cell Phones

The use of electronic devices of any kind is disruptive to the spirit of learning and prayer that takes place when children and catechists gather to grow in their faith. However, cell phones may be brought to class under the following conditions:

- Phones must be put on vibrate/silent for the entire duration of all activities including, class, church visitation, prayer, liturgies etc. Cell phones must be kept out of sight upon entering their class and kept away until the session is over.
- **If a parent needs to contact his/her child/children regarding late pick up or other problem, please call the Religious Education Office and we will relay the message directly to your child/children and their catechists.** This way, we can monitor their safety until the child/children are picked up.
- No cell phones may be used for picture taking.
- **Those who violate any of the rules regarding the cell phone or other devices will forfeit their privileges. The cell phone will be collected and given back to the student after class. If it is a problem consists, ALL CELL PHONES WILL BE DROPPED OFF IN A BASKET BEFORE ENTERING THE CLASS AND GIVEN BACK AT THE END OF CLASS.**
- Absolutely no air pods are to be worn in the classroom or at any church event.

Special Needs

For every child to function at his or her best, the PCL and Catechist need to know if a child has a specific disability. **This is not done to label a child but to find creative ways to make the classroom experience rich and meaningful. Having a disability does not excuse your child from demonstrating competence, it means that the criteria will be adjusted to be realistic in their success.** Please contact the office to discuss your child. We want this to be a non-stressful year for you and your child.

Communication

Communication with families is key. Being part of this program also affirms you and your family are part of our community at Nativity of Our Lord. It is important that you are informed. Here is how you can be connected.

- **Email distribution list:** Parents are asked to provide an email on their registration form. This email will be used for **ALL** communication between you, the Religious Education Office and your child/children's catechists. **Parents should check their emails daily.**
- **Class folders:** Each child is given a folder at the beginning of the year. It is the parent's responsibility to check the folder **WEEKLY** for information. At times, newsletters, notices, flyers etc. will be distributed to their children through this folder. Please ask your child for this information.
- **Website:** Information/forms/calendar posted on our website.
- **Church Bulletin:** Announcements concerning Religious Education are posted in the church's weekly bulletin.
- **Parish website:** The parish website is www.nativitymonroe.org. Announcements and information concerning parish life are posted on the website. The parish bulletin is also posted weekly.

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, please share them with your child's Catechists or my self. We welcome and encourage communication between the Catechist, parents, PCL, and Father Nalaka.

Visitors

The safety and well-being of the children you have entrusted to us is of primary importance. Visitors during the sessions must report immediately to the Faith Formation Office. No one may enter a child's classroom without the permission of the PCL. Anyone who wishes to visit a class during the sessions should make prior arrangements.

Medication

- If a child is able to self-administer the required emergency medication, parents/guardians are required to complete and sign a release for Self-Administration of Medication and return the document to the Parish Catechetical Leader (contact office for form).
- If a child is unable to self-administer Epinephrine in an emergency situation, there are no personnel available to administer it, and parents/guardians will not be on site when the child is in the Parish Religious Education program, the Waiver of Liability and Agreement to Hold Harmless

must be completed and signed and returned to the Parish Catechetical Leader (contact office for form).

Illegal Actions

No drugs or weapons will be permitted on church premises. If any student is caught with drugs or weapons, the police will be notified, and you will be dismissed from our program.

Child Abuse Policy

If a catechist or PCL suspects a child has been abused, New Jersey Law requires that the State Division of Youth and Family Services be notified. The Office of Child and Youth Protection of the Dioceses of Metuchen will also be notified of suspected abuse.

The PCL/Catechist will not send a student home with a driver who is visibly impaired. The PCL reserves the right to call the emergency contact.

Harassment

It is the policy of Nativity of Our Lord Parish that all persons be treated with dignity and respect. We disapprove of discrimination in any form. All people associated with this parish are to adhere to these guidelines. No harassment, verbal or physical, will be tolerated.

Definitions of types of harassment are outlined below for you. All people associated with this parish must not participate in any of the behaviors mentioned. If your child displays any of these forms of harassment, he will be removed from the room and sent to the office, and his/her parents will be called.

- **Verbal** - Harassment includes derogatory comments, jokes, slurs, belligerent, or threatening words spoken to another person.
- **Physical Harassment** - Includes unwarranted physical touching, contact, and assault, deliberate impeding or blocking movements, intimidating interference with normal work or movement.
- **Visual Harassment** - Includes derogatory, demeaning, or inflammatory posters, cartoons, written words, drawing, novelties, and gestures.
- **Sexual Harassment** - Includes unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Any sexual contact with minors is inappropriate.

Fire Drills

One Fire drill will be performed during the year. Students are instructed not to use their cell phones during this drill. Map of evacuation route is located at the back of this packet as well as in every classroom.

Lock Down Drill

One Lock Down Drill will be performed during the year.

Protecting God's Children

We are also responsible for the physical and emotional well-being of each individual child, as outlined by the Dioceses of Metuchen Child of Youth Protection. To provide a safe environment for children and

youth in our Religious Education Program, we are mandated to complete criminal background screening (fingerprinting) and training certification programs for all catechists/volunteers that advance the safety of our children (Virtus).

Books

The Rite of Baptism clearly states the “parents are the primary teachers of their children in the way of faith”. It is very important that parents play an active role in their student’s religious formation in addition to the teachings of our catechists.

We have chosen the “Christ Our Life” program by Loyola Press for grade levels 1,3,4,5,6 and 7, the “Blessed” program by Dynamic Catholic for the 2nd grade Sacramental year and “Confirmed in the Spirit” by Loyola Press for the “8th grade Sacramental year.

All curriculums are cumulative. The concepts taught in lower grades will be revisited in the upper grades. Learning formal prayers is also the responsibility of each student. Accountability of the student’s knowledge of prayers is to be expected.

Each student is supplied a textbook and folder at the beginning of the year. Students are asked to treat their textbook and other class materials with care and respect. We will hold any books which are left behind each week in the office, however, **any lost books will have to be replaced at the student’s expense (\$50)**

Family Life Education

As mandated by our Bishop, the **Safe Environmental Program by Virtus** needs to be completed by your children. **“Empowering God’s Children.”** is a series of videos teaching Boundaries and Safety References to your children. VIRTUS is a registered trademark of National Catholic Services in the United States.

The Dioceses is instructing us to show only 2 out of the 6 videos for the year 2025-2026. These videos and activities will be done at home with your children.

Fees

The registration fee for our program is as follows:

1 child:	\$90 (with a cap of \$250)
2 children:	\$180
3. children:	\$250
4+ children:	FREE

*** An additional sacramental preparation fee of \$60 will be charged for children in grades 2nd and 8th.

Financial Concerns

All financial assistance is confidential. No family will be denied a Religious Education due to financial concerns. If you have any problems with the tuition fees, please contact me directly to work out arrangements.

Refunds

If for any reason your child will not be attending our program in the fall after they have been registered, please notify the Religious Education Office immediately so that our records can be adjusted, and a refund can be issued to you. **REFUNDS ARE NOT ISSUED ONCE CLASSES HAVE BEGUN.**

Registration – Re-enrollment

All forms submitted after the scheduled deadline of July 1st will incur a \$25 fee. All information must be updated when re-registration is completed. **The registration fees and sacramental fees are due at the time of**

registration. Children that do not attend at least 80% of classroom instruction will be able to re-register however will also need to meet with Father Nalaka before their registration can be proceed.

New Families

- Families participating in our program are required to be registered parishioners of Nativity of Our Lord Parish. According to the Diocese of Metuchen, no family can be registered in 2 parishes. To register please contact the Parish Secretary at 609-371-0499 ext. 10.
- **Every new student must provide a copy of their child's Baptismal certificate by August 1, 2025.**
- If your child has received the additional sacraments of First Reconciliation and/or First Communion in another parish, you must additionally provide a copy of certificates no later than **August 1, 2025.**
- All children who are transferring from another Religious Education Program must present a letter of transfer showing the completion of grades along with proof sacraments. (i.e. Baptism, First Reconciliation, and Communion). **All documents must be submitted by August 1, 2025.**

Mass Attendance

Mass attendance is expected of all our families. "Before all others, parents are bound by the obligation of forming their children by word and example in the Faith and practice of Christian life" (Canon Law 774.2). As parents you are the primary educators of your children. Children "learn" religion through experience, particularly by watching and imitating those they love best. **Faith is something that is "caught" rather than "taught".** Classroom learning informs, gives data, and reinforces what the children should be experiencing. **No program can take the place of the example set in the home.**

COVID – 19 (If Outbreak Returns)

We will be following the guidelines of our government and state, as well as the Diocese of Metuchen. We will adjust the policies as they come down from Diocese of Metuchen. All desks will be cleaned and wiped down before the children enter the classroom. Our goal will be to keep everyone safe and to respect each other's comfort levels.

Tentative Precautions:

- Parents or guardians must monitor their child/children's health before arriving to class.
- A student may not attend class or a church event if he or she has a temperature of 100.4 or higher or experiencing symptoms of chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea.
- A parent or guardian must inform the PCL if their child has tested positive for COVID-19 and has attended a class/event within the past 14 days.

Hand sanitizers and disinfectant wipes will be provided in each classroom. If you choose, we encourage parents to send in their own personal products such as hand sanitizer and wipes.

FLOCKNOTE

Nativity has been using **FLOCKNOTE**. This is a free text messaging tool that is created for ministries, teams, churches, and other community organizations. **NEW: The Religious Education office will begin using this tool this year.** This will NOT take the place of emails through Outlook, it is just another way to get the information out and help build community. The easiest and quickest way to sign up is through

your cell phone! Simply text message **nativitymonroe** to the 5-digit phone number **84576**. That's it, just text **nativitymonroe** to 84576. No spaces. If you already signed up, no need to sign up again.

Snow Days/Emergency Closings

In the event of inclement weather, you will be notified in this order:

1. Via email you provided
2. Flocknote
3. Post on "Nativity of Our Lord Roman Catholic Church – Religious Education" web page.

We will make closing announcements no later than 3:00pm. **Please DO NOT call in. Weather announcements will NOT be recorded on the phone.**

Ministries for Children

Family Life

This ministry coordinates and organizes fun family events such as a Halloween party and parade, a Valentine dance, movie nights, parents' dinner, arts and crafts, etc. If your child is interested, contact reoa@nativitymonroe.org.

Junior Youth Group

Geared to grades 6 through 8, this group responds to the spiritual needs of our youth, encouraging and enabling them to share their unique gifts with the faith community. If your child is interested, please contact at Christine Carniero at crlcesq@gmail.com.

Senior Youth Group

A group dedicated to serving the needs of our high school aged youth (grades 9-12) through spiritual, social, and service activities. If your child is interested, email youthministry@nativitymonroe.org.

Children's Liturgy of the Word

A team of volunteers offer the children of our Parish the opportunity to meet during the Liturgy of the Word to "discuss" the Gospel guided by two adult facilitators. These sessions take place on the first Sunday of the month at 11:00am Mass on Sunday. Children in grades 1 to 6 are encouraged to participate. Check Nativity's website under "Calendar" for upcoming dates.

OCIA - Order of Christian Initiation for Adults

The RCIA Program is designed to initiate and welcome new adult members into the Catholic Church and our Parish Community. The emphasis is on prayer, scripture, study and sharing the experience of faith. The program is a process for persons who have never been baptized or for those who have been baptized in other Christian Churches and want to become members of the Catholic Church. Members of the parish are invited to participate as catechists and sponsors. Contact JoLynn Krempecki 732-690-2610.

Nativity Of Our Lord Fire Drill – Map

