

Prayer. Community. Intentional Discipleship

*A Christ-Centered Faith Formation Program
for Families and their Children in Grades 1-8*



The Center for Family Discipleship Guidebook 2025-2026

Immaculate Conception Church
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Our Mission

The Immaculate Conception Church **Center for Family Discipleship** employs creative methods of faith formation through:

- Equipping families to be intentional about their personal discipleship
- Understanding that the Parish is a "School of Prayer"
- Promoting a Christ-Centered, Eucharistic Spirituality
- Empowering Families to be the "First Teachers" of the Catholic Faith

Why the new name?

You may have noticed that we have retitled our program to be "The Center for Family Discipleship." This was done to focus our attention on the primary mission of the Church, our parish, and our program, which is NOT completing 8 years of workbooks and "graduating" from religious education, but rather, ***the formation of strong, loving, courageous disciples of Jesus Christ!*** A multitude of experience and research indicates that this endeavor must involve the entire family in order to achieve success. Hence, we are being very *intentional* about how we "brand" our program to emphasize that the parish is not solely an academic school, but a "*school of prayer*" that supports families in their journey as disciples. It is up to the family to make the personal decision to engage fully in the process and discover the rich, endless love of God.

What is "Intentional Discipleship?"

A disciple acknowledges his or her need for a Savior, Jesus Christ, and makes lifestyle changes necessary to authentically follow Him in the Catholic Church. Faith is deeply personal, but it's concretely manifested through:

- Daily Prayer
- Living a Sacramental & Moral Life
- Drawing Strength from Holy Mass
- Engagement in Christian Community, Service, & Evangelization

Enrollment & Late Enrollments

Families who are registered parishioners of Immaculate Conception Church may enroll their school-age children in CFD. Enrollment typically opens by mid-summer with an early-bird fee option, and **closes end of day on September 28.** New families must provide an updated Baptismal certificate with notations for any children who were baptized upon registration. (If your child was not yet baptized, please contact the parish office for information.) Our gatherings are only once a month and include highly-focused curriculum, and joining late causes disruption to the formation process. Late enrollments may still register in the parish and participate in parish life by attending Mass regularly and attending other events, but will be invited to enroll in CFD the *following* year.

Registering in the Parish

Please visit the parish website or contact the parish office at 201-327-1276.

Organizational Structure

The Center for Family Discipleship features:

- Whole-Family Catechesis for Grades 1-6 in a warm, social environment
- Specialized faith formation for youth in grades 7 & 8
- Curriculums that inspire life application and that are faithful to the teachings of the Catholic Church
- Simplified schedule with a focused curriculum
- Mass Attendance as a significant component of formation, especially for sacramental preparation

Schedule and Curriculum

• **Family Catechesis**: We have adopted a Family Catechesis model with a relaxed format. Families will attend a monthly gathering at the parish, and children will complete simple, family-friendly activities at home with their parents. The sessions kick off on Catechetical Sunday with Mass, family breakfast, orientation and activities, and then are typically the first Monday of the month from October to May, from 5:45-7:30 (dinner is included.) Our team will be ready to offer support and encouragement to parents as needed. The curriculum: *Family of Faith* by Sophia Institute Press.

• **Youth in Grades 7 & 8**: 7th and 8th graders attend twice a month over a two-year period in preparation for Confirmation, which is typically at the end of 8th grade, or at a time the Pastor deems suitable. Teens attend the family session on the first Monday of the month from 5:45-7:30 and a second session, typically the third Monday of the month, from 6-7:30 pm. Confirmation Prep Year 1 focuses on the Bible, God's story of salvation, via *Venture: The Bible Timeline for High School Students* by Ascension Press. Confirmation Prep Year 2 follows *Chosen: Your Journey Toward Confirmation* by Ascension Press.

Mass Attendance

We are a Christ-centered people. Our Lord and Savior is truly present in the Blessed Sacrament. The Eucharist is not a "symbol" of Christ, but IS Christ Himself, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. He is our source of strength and grace. In addition, Mass is where the disciple "strength trains." If you want to become a skilled athlete, it's not enough to *read* about how to play. You have to pick up the ball and get in the game! The same is true with discipleship - it's not mastered by simply learning ABOUT it, but by LIVING it. Therefore, Mass attendance is a

crucial aspect of faith formation at Immaculate Conception Church, and we invite families to make this encounter with the living Lord a priority. It is also one of our most important measures for sacramental readiness for young ladies and gentlemen preparing for First Reconciliation, First Communion, and Confirmation. Without the context of Mass, children will not fully understand what they're doing when it comes to the Sacraments, and the experience will not be as fully authentic as it can be.

Mass Offering Cards

We will gauge Mass attendance in a loving and gentle way that encourages participation in the liturgy! Children will be provided with "Mass Offering Cards", upon which they may write their names, the date, and their prayer intentions, and they will be invited to drop their cards in a basket during the Offertory at Mass.

Sacramental Preparation

In order for a child to have context and understand what they are doing, several months (approximately 2 years) of preparation are required prior to receiving a sacrament. Immaculate Conception Church typically prepares children for First Reconciliation and First Communion in 1st and 2nd grade, with the children receiving their sacraments in the springtime of their 2nd grade year. Confirmation preparation is offered to youth starting in 7th grade, with the sacrament of Confirmation offered in the spring of the second year of their program (usually 8th grade or after), or when the Pastor determines they are ready.

****Mass attendance is an important gauge of sacramental readiness for young ladies and gentlemen preparing for First Communion and Confirmation, and will be gauged for children preparing for their sacraments (typically in grades 2 and 8). Children preparing for a sacrament should endeavor not to miss more than 8 Masses between October and May. Naturally, should there be any special circumstances impacting the family's ability to attend Mass, please notify us as soon as possible. We are understanding of circumstances involving illness, custody arrangements, etc.***

First Reconciliation and First Communion Classes

In addition to the monthly family sessions, children preparing for First Reconciliation and First Communion must attend special sessions (children only), 7 weeks in the fall semester and 7 weeks in the spring semester. The curriculum:

- **First Reconciliation** – 7 weeks, Signs of Grace "You are Forgiven" Curriculum
- **First Communion** – 8 weeks, Signs of Grace "You are Loved" Curriculum

- **Note**-Parents may drop their children off for these classes.

Family Prayer Book

There are certain “must know” prayers that every Catholic Christian should know, and every family will be provided with a Family Prayer Book to pray at home.

Attendance Policy

Because Immaculate Conception Church has a simplified course schedule with fewer meetings and a highly focused curriculum, attendance is *crucial* for an optimal experience and effective formation. A schedule will be provided early so families may clear and mark their calendars. If three sessions are missed, it may impact a child’s sacramental readiness, and we may recommend they attend an additional year prior to receiving his/her sacraments.

Epi-Pen Policy

In the event that a child/adolescent has the competencies necessary to carry and self administer the epinephrine with a pre-filled auto-injector the parent/guardian must complete the “Epinephrine Administration Form – Option B” and return it to the Parish CFD Religious Education Office. The parent/guardian must also provide the necessary documentation from their child’s physician. A medical professional or “designee” must be present during catechetical sessions in order to ensure that the necessary steps are taken following the self-administration of the epinephrine and to provide other assistance if needed.

Record Management

- **Permanent Records:** The parish will maintain a Permanent Record for each child. The Permanent Record contains all pertinent catechetical and sacramental records, including Baptism, First Reconciliation, First Communion, and Confirmation records. Parish staff may contact you to confirm or gather information.
- **Sacramental Registries:** Each child’s sacramental record is housed at his/her church of Baptism (if Catholic) or church where the child made his/ her Profession of Faith (if coming from a non-Catholic tradition.) Immaculate Conception Church will maintain Sacramental Registries for each sacrament a child receives at the parish, and is also responsible for sending sacramental information to the child’s original church of Baptism.
- **Management Software:** Immaculate Conception Church also utilizes specialized and secure software to maintain catechetical and sacramental information for each child.

Safe Environment

Immaculate Conception Church follows the Archdiocese of Newark Safe Environment Protocols as detailed by the Department of the Protection of the Faithful. Our catechists and volunteers are required to complete Protecting God's Children/VIRTUS training and recertification, a background check, and to maintain the Archdiocesan Code of Conduct. For additional information, please visit the Archdiocese of Newark website: www.rcan.org.

Photo/Video Release

Parents/Guardians will be provided with a Photo/Video Release Form to complete on behalf of their families. The optional release provides permission for photos/videos of their family members to be utilized by the parish and/or the Archdiocese.

Behavior Policy

We are a Christian community, and therefore, our behaviors are guided by the 3 R's:

- **Respect for Yourself and Others**
- **Respect for Property**
- **Respect for Authority**

As disciples following the teachings of Christ, these principles apply to adults and children alike. We very rarely have to be concerned about behavior management, but if an issue does arise, we will address the matter respectfully and quickly and maintain communication with parents/guardians in a timely fashion in order to develop an effective solution.

Communications

Our team will communicate with families by one of several means: email, cell phone, CFD webpage/parish website, social media, and Flocknote (a texting app). Families are responsible for being diligent about checking their emails and messages, as well as frequenting the website for all pertinent information.

Parish Events

Immaculate Conception Church is pleased to offer a variety of family-friendly events, including novenas/missions, Stations of the Cross, and more. You will be notified of optional upcoming events by email, the parish website, bulletin, and social media. We are open to creative ideas to nurture your family's faith, and always need volunteer support. All are welcome and encouraged to participate in as many events as possible!

Immaculate Conception Church 2025-2026 CFD Guidebook Acknowledgement Form

After you have carefully read and reviewed the Guidebook, please sign this form and return it to:

*Immaculate Conception Church—CFD
900 Darlington Avenue
Mahwah, NJ 07430*

I, _____, parent/guardian of *(list children)*

_____,
acknowledge that I have read the CFD Guidebook and understand what is requested of
and required by the parish's discipleship formation program.

Signature

Date

FOR PARISH OFFICE USE ONLY:

___ Baptism Certificates/Sacramental History	<i>applicable</i>	<i>not applicable</i>
___ Epi-Pen Policy (if applicable)	<i>applicable</i>	<i>not applicable</i>
___ Photo/Video Consent Form	<i>consent</i>	<i>no consent</i>