



Guiding Principles
for
in-person
Faith Formation
Sessions
during the
Coronavirus
Pandemic

Secretariat
of
Catechetical
Formation





To: Pastors and Catechetical Leaders

From: Gregory A. Coogan, Secretary for Catechetical Formation

Date: July 9, 2020

Re: Faith Formation Sessions during the coronavirus pandemic

Christ calls all the faithful to proclaim the Good News everywhere in the world and to hand his message on to successive generations by professing, living, and celebrating the faith.

National Directory for Catechesis (p. 41)

We are witnesses to a world that is drastically changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. No aspect of life has been unaffected. We have been witnesses to and agents in the abrupt move of church life from the in-person to the virtual with streaming of Sunday Mass, gathered faith formation into remote learning, including the connection with each other via social media, meetings via video conferencing, online conferences, and much more.

We are growing in the realization that the impact of the pandemic will not be a short term experience. We know that re-entry into our buildings for Sunday Mass requires great care and planning. Gathering people in medium or large groups may not be possible or safe in the short term, and the largest group that can be reliably gathered in-person for formation sessions will be reduced based on the size of your facilities. Parish School of Religion (PSR), intergenerational gatherings and large sacramental preparation sessions will need to adapt to our current public health requirements. *Regularly check for updates on the [diocesan website](#), your county health department website, the [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and the [Ohio Department of Health](#) websites.*

Great care will need to be taken should your parish look to host in-person sessions, for the health and safety of those of all ages including the most vulnerable. The enclosed checklist includes considerations that the Diocese of Cleveland's Office of Catechetical Formation makes available consistent with the State of Ohio and Governor DeWine's guidance to local school districts. This guidance acknowledges one size does not fit all. It also understands that effectiveness relies on the leadership of the parish who works closely with catechists and parents and you. Pastors and the parish team will make the determination on your parish's best path forward. These are considerations for your parish's discernment. Shared resources and best practices are available within the Digital Academy at <https://doc.digitalacademy.org/Curricula/Login>



In this package:

- A) General Safety Guidelines as you plan for in-person faith formation
- B) Approaches to Forming Disciples
- C) Guidelines for Virtual Catechesis Gatherings with Children and Young People
- D) Sample Parental Consent forms (parishes would put these on parish letterhead)
- E) Parish Readiness Checklist to Return to in-person Faith Formation Sessions
- F) Contact List for Questions

The Catechetical Team is here to be of assistance, support and a resource for you. Please contact us at any time.

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General Safety Guidelines as you plan for Faith Formation



The Catholic Church has an all embracing respect for the life, value, and dignity of every person. We have a responsibility to assure that ministry activities and environments are safe and conducive to growth and transformational encounters with Christ for all those we serve. Attention to this responsibility is an expression of our commitment to a consistent ethic of life.



Building

The location must be cleaned and sanitized before and after the faith formation session. (PSR, sacramental preparation, intergenerational gathering, etc.)



Masks

All present for the activity are required to wear masks. It is required that students in grades K - 12 wear a face mask unless they are unable to do so for a health or developmental reason. The catechetical leader or catechists should maintain the appropriate physical distance from the participants. Masks should be made available.



Make Space

The location being used for the activity must be able to allow for the 6 feet of physical distancing for all participants. Given the size of the room, parishes may have to limit the total number of students and families. Households may sit together.



Hand Cleansing

Hand sanitizer should be available at the entrance and in the room where the activity is being held.



Enter & Exit

Entry and exit doors are to be adequately designated, monitored and be propped open during entry and exiting. The doors should be opened at least 15 minutes prior to the start of the activity.



Know who's coming

Participants should be registered in advance.
Don't show up if you are sick.
When arriving for the activity the participants are required to maintain 6 feet of physical distancing when entering the building and meeting space.



Together we are stronger

Many parishes in our diocese do not have the capacity to gather in-person and maintain the safety requirements on their own parish campus. We ask those parishes blessed with large gathering spaces to consider ways that they might be of assistance to smaller Catholic communities.



Together, we can overcome this!

At all times the Diocese of Cleveland and parishes will adhere to the regulations established by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the Ohio State Department of Health and local county Departments of Health.

Return to in-person Faith Formation Sessions Parish Readiness Checklist



Communication with Families in Formation Programs			
Internal Preparation <i>We have given consideration to...</i>	Discussion on item	Exploring options	Plans are in place
Reviewing the faith formation (PSR) calendar for possible adjustments			
Updating the student and catechist handbook to reflect COVID-19 policies (physical distancing, health concerns, attendance policy...)			
Revising policies based on Learning Models; classroom expectations, remote learning responsibilities...			
Reviewing and updating Emergency Contacts for students, catechists and volunteers			
Review plans for any budgetary changes			
Transparency and Outreach <i>We have given consideration to...</i>	Discussion on item	Exploring options	Plans are in place
Surveying families to evaluate programming and faith support in order to provide growth in discipleship			
Creating a plan to communicate guidelines and procedures before start of ministry year learning process, access to building, attendance expectations			
Adjusting invitation and registration to include new families and maintain relationship with those newly enrolled			

Preparing the Learning Environment

Physical Distancing <i>We have given consideration to..</i>	Discussion on item	Exploring options	Plans are in place
Creating well defined entrance and dismissal protocols for students, catechists, and family members: standard routines for entry, holding areas, hand-sanitizing stations...			
Creating a plan for controlled access before/after parish school of religion (faith formation session)			
Developing practices for physical distancing in rooms. Measuring all classrooms and flex or outdoor space to determine how many people (students, catechists, aides,...) can fit in each classroom based on state guidelines			
Creating an alternative plan if capacity and student population doesn't meet the current physical distancing guidelines			
Developing a plan for physical distancing outside of the classroom in highly populated areas, such as hallways, restrooms, lunchroom/cafeteria, library, staff areas, playground, including a plan for Mass and other prayer experiences using current state and local guidance			
Displaying signage throughout the building to support physical distancing, directional flow in hallways/entry points and proper hygiene protocol			

Traditional Classroom and Other Learning Spaces <i>We have given consideration to...</i>	Discussion on item	Exploring options	Plans are in place
Spacing out seats in classrooms and allocated learning spaces to meet the requirements for physical distancing. Setting up partitions or barriers where distancing guidelines can't be met			
Disinfecting Procedures <i>We have given consideration to...</i>	Discussion on item	Exploring options	Plans are in place
Procuring the necessary supplies for hygiene, such as hand sanitizer, soap, wipes with bleach, etc.			
Creating a plan for cleaning facilities and high touch areas before and after Faith Formation sessions, in the case of evidence of positive cases deep-cleaning will be required, etc.			
Limiting shared supplies and equipment with sanitizing between student use (including tables or desks)			
Checking lavatories frequently to replenish sanitization supplies			
Determining staffing or volunteers needed to accommodate additional sanitization needs			

Notes

Health and Wellness of Parishioners

Physical Health <i>We have given consideration to...</i>	Discussion on item	Exploring options	Plans are in place
Encouraging family routines for daily health checks: status at arrival, illness during Faith Formation session, calling-in sick procedures, return to Faith Formation protocol			
Developing any necessary protocols for PPE including creating plans for students/catechists with allergies or sensory issues			
Creating a plan for students and catechists who are medically fragile or immunocompromised			
Establishing protocol for mandatory reporting of COVID-19 exposure and/or quarantine of students and catechists in line with state and local health departments			
Developing compliance policy based on state guidelines for returning to parish-school/work following quarantine			
Social/Emotional Supports <i>We have given consideration to...</i>	Discussion on item	Exploring options	Plans are in place
Establishing and building a <u>sense</u> of Catholic community in the faith formation session			
Creating and maintaining routines that support faith formation as a community			
Making your environment "Safe and Secure, Warm and Welcoming"			

Using voice and expression so as to speak with joy and enthusiasm to students and each other, especially if wearing a mask			
Providing frequent feedback surveys with students and caregivers to assess sense of belonging and comfort in the class (connectedness)			
Taking advantage of opportunities to socialize with families through emails, phone calls, messaging, use of technology and gathering at Mass			
Creating an on-boarding plan for all students to orient them to any new procedures in meeting space before the sessions begin			
Creating ways to mitigate stress responses including silence and a variety of prayer forms for students, catechists, and families			
Creating a vehicle for two-way communication with parents and catechists			

Notes

Building Our Catholic Faith Community

Authentic Community <i>We have given consideration to...</i>	Started reflecting on these ideas	Exploring options	Plans are in place
Providing opportunities for prayer for students and families			
Maintaining rituals (personal greetings, gathering and concluding prayer, announcements, etc.)			
Inviting parents, families and parishioners to join in virtual prayer and faith life activities			
Creating explicit service activities that can be completed in a virtual community or in a manner that meets state safety and distancing guidelines			
Creating a plan for Pastor, parochial vicars and other pastoral staff to be present and visible			
Community Building <i>We have given consideration to...</i>	Discussion on item	Exploring options	Plans are in place
Facilitating community and connection with students, catechists, and families			
Creating an onboarding plan for students to orient new realities of their faith formation setting			
Developing a personalized onboarding plan for students that are new to faith formation			

Notes

Faith Formation Curriculum and Sessions

<i>We have given consideration to...</i>	Discussion on item	Exploring options	Plans are in place
Including various teaching models (e.g. looping, co-teaching)			
Creating year-long plans to facilitate more meaningful faith formation units that can be delivered face to face or remotely			
Utilizing frequent and varied ways to determine students' growth and understanding			
Developing lesson plans that include a variety of catechetical methods			
Meeting in small groups or one-on-one as needed for connection, pastoral care and accompaniment with proper physical distance			
Ensuring meaningful support to the families who need translation tools, including the catechists, students, and parents			

Notes

Faith Formation and Use of Technology

<i>We have given consideration to...</i>	Discussion on item	Exploring options	Plans are in place
Surveying families to determine equity in devices, and internet access			
Determining parish faith formation platforms			
Choosing best communication vehicles/platforms for reaching parents and guardians			
Identifying a technology point person/IT person who can assist in piloting programs and ongoing questions for catechists			
Involving parents and inviting feedback			
Establishing a catechist development and formation plan for technology topics reflecting needs and skill levels.			
Revisiting faith formation safety policies and acceptable use policies, including training of all device users			

Notes

Approaches of Forming Disciples

“Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people, and adults in the faith which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life.” (*Catechesi Tradendae* No. 18 and p. 6 *National Directory of Catechesis*)

The goal of remote learning is to ensure religious faith formation continues even though school and parish religious education buildings are closed or gathering in large groups is not encouraged. Recognizing that schools are planning for opening in the fall these considerations are designed to help faith communities prepare. Remote learning engages families and students through a variety of learning opportunities, which can be delivered online or offline. Remote and non-gathered learning does not just mean online learning. Technology certainly is a supportive tool for remote learning, but powerful remote learning can occur through thoughtful offline lessons that encourage students to explore the good, the true, the beautiful found within the natural world and engage in interdisciplinary and artistic hands-on learning.

Working in partnership with your parish or Catholic school publishers, a parish or school catechist might deliver instruction by using a device and checking in with families regularly. Remote learning also can include video or audio instruction delivered online or via television, video, telephone or another method that relies on computer or communications technology. It also may include use of printed, paper-based materials that incorporate assignments that engage and seek feedback from young people and families.

Ultimately, students and families should be positioned to independently extend their learning with direction and guidance from their catechetical leaders and catechists. Special considerations need to be made for our parishes' most vulnerable students, including students with disabilities, students for whom electronic mediums might not be developmentally appropriate (for example, PreK and early grade students), students who are English learners and students who might not have access to technology.

Across the Diocese of Cleveland, remote learning can be viewed as a continuum, as shown in the graphic below, depending on the unique circumstances of a parish faith formation program, its faith formation partners and the connectivity, abilities, disabilities and ages of students. If possible, remote learning plans should include an array of learning opportunities that are both online and offline to accommodate these unique circumstances.



Figure 1

Following is a summary of each component of the continuum:

1. **Catechist – students & families interaction through online learning platform:** This option, when available, enables faith formators to engage with students consistently using an online learning platform or learning faith formation system. Examples of online learning platforms include Google Classroom, Schoology, Canvas, Zoom, etc. Catechists can assign lessons while engaging with and supporting students and families through discussions, online lessons and the completion of assignments.

2. **Online lessons for families and students to work on at home:** This option allows catechists to present students with lessons they can complete independently or with the help of an available family member or caregiver outside of an online learning platform.
3. **Offline lessons and instructional packets for students:** Remote learning plans can include thoughtful instructional faith formation packets (virtual or paper-based) and appropriate hands-on activities. Screen time, if an option, should be balanced with learning that occurs offline and encourages student curiosity, prayer, discovery, writing and journaling. Parish faith formation programs might have to exercise creativity when it comes to distributing instructional packets—perhaps a pickup at grab-and-go sites or through safe meeting sites. Parish Catechetical Leaders should have some form of communication loop with students and families.

Across components 1-3, catechists should arrange regular check-ins with families & students—either in small or large groups—to provide ongoing feedback about the faith development process.

Additionally, catechetical leaders and catechists should

- Consider the needs of their families and students, including those with disabilities and individualized education program (IEP) services, when deciding the appropriate mode of faith formation. The National Catholic Partnership on Disability may be a resource available to you and your families (www.ncpd.org).
- Consider, when necessary, use of communication tools that work across different devices and include features that enable interpretation and translation to help ensure equitable access for English learners.

Action: Apply a range of options, including online and offline, to the extent practicable, in remote learning plans. Plan and coordinate lessons to build on the faith formation already underway. Try to consider equity and the age and needs of each child when planning, including the needs of any students with disabilities, students who do not have internet access and English learners.

Adapted from Ohio Department of Education’s website
Accessed on May 26, 2020 <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Student-Supports/Coronavirus/Ohio%E2%80%99s-Remote-Learning-Resources>
Diocese of Cleveland | Office of Catechetical Formation
June 2, 2020

Guidelines for Virtual Catechetical Gatherings with children and young people (ages 13 – 18 and in high school)

Know the Diocese of Cleveland's Standards for Ministerial Behavior. There are important and necessary standards: <https://www.dioceseofcleveland.org/files/resources/standards-of-conduct-2019-04-25.pdf>

If your parish is using live platforms (Zoom, Go-to-Meeting, Google Classroom, etc.)

Be sure that you and your catechists are following the below best practices:

- Think always to have 2 adults (over the age of 21) in a live session
- Adult leaders must be in diocesan safe-environment compliance (attended Protecting God's Children, Virtus and fingerprinted)
- Always communicate with the parents and invite them to participate.
- Possibly focus your outreach to parents directly – listen to their needs, equip them to live and teach the faith in the home.
- Children under 13 are not allowed online without adult supervision (this is the Children's Internet Protection Act).
- Children should not have personal emails, in schools they may have an intranet account – if not, You must communicate via parent email.
- Must be sure whatever platform that is being used is kept as a private meeting space.
- Share invite directly to parents, never post link on a public forum such as web site or social media page.
- Make sure that neither catechist nor any of the students is using Facebook to log in.
- Don't use personal cloud storage to store recorded videos (download the file locally).
- Recorded sessions should not be shared on social media or websites for the public.
- Make sure that what is in the background does not contain anything questionable.
- If a parish catechetical leader, youth minister or catechist record, make sure, they let parents know they are recording the presentation ahead of time and get consent.
- Even when talking to kids/parents 1-on-1 it might be a good idea to not discuss any truly sensitive information using the platform.
- Be sure chat between students is turned off.
- Church personnel and volunteers shall carefully compose appropriate communication, especially communication that is intended for minors, to eliminate any wording that could be interpreted as sexually suggestive and copy an adult who is a ministerial supervisor on the communication so that it is public and verifiable.
- Here is a [document](#) to provide to teachers, catechists, or anyone setting up meetings to keep your meeting private.
- Parent | Guardian Consent form from the Diocese of Cleveland (see the attached document) and [Zoom guidelines](#) for teachers.

May 19, 2020

Diocese of Cleveland | Catechetical Formation

(To be put on parish letterhead)

Parent/Guardian Consent Form: Virtual Catechesis

Description of Parish program or activity: _____

Name of Parent(s) / Legal Guardian(s): _____

Name of minor child: _____

I give permission for my child to participate in parish sponsored virtual catechesis sessions in connection with the program or activity listed above using audio and/or video conferencing services such as Zoom and _____ [list other platforms where applicable]. I understand and agree that any such session may be recorded by the Parish in the Parish’s sole discretion (“Recordings”), and that the Recordings will be viewed by individuals who missed or were unable to attend the session and that the Parish cannot control who may view the Recordings along with the individuals who missed or who were unable to attend the session. I further understand and agree and that the Recordings may, in the Parish’s sole discretion, be shared with Parish staff, used for future catechesis or educational purposes, or shared in connection with an investigation of any alleged misconduct. I agree that the Recordings will be made without further notice and without compensation, and I agree that the Recordings shall constitute the sole property of the Parish.

I agree to supervise my child’s participation in any virtual or online catechesis sessions. I further agree to ensure that my minor child’s use of any software or other online platforms complies with the terms and conditions of such software and/or platforms.

By signing below, I acknowledge that I am the parent or legal guardian of the above named minor child, that I have authority to sign this agreement on my minor child’s behalf, and I have read, understand, and agree to the terms and conditions stated above.

Parent/Guardian: _____

Date: _____

Parent/Guardian: _____

Date: _____

Who do I contact?

For questions regarding the Protection of Children and Youth
(Virtus, Protecting God's Children and Safe Environment)
Sharon Minson, Director, Office of Protection of Children and Youth
Phone: 216-696-6525 ext. 1157
Email: sminson@dioceseofcleveland.org

For questions regarding Youth Ministry
Jackie Vigneault, Office of Youth Ministry
Phone: 216-696-6525 ext. 2333
Email: jvigneault@dioceseofcleveland.org

For questions regarding Worship and/or the celebration of the sacraments
Jeanne Marie Miles, Director, Office of Worship
Phone: 216-696-6525 ext. 4120
Email: jmiles@dioceseofcleveland.org

For questions regarding maintenance or supplies
<https://www.dioceseofcleveland.org/forward-with-christ/facility-resources>

Resources from the Secretariat of Parish Life

Guidelines for Parish Ministries during the Coronavirus Pandemic
(<http://dioceseofcleveland.org/pandemic-guiding-principles-for-ministries>)

Best Practices for Youth Ministry in a Pandemic Environment
(<http://dioceseofcleveland.org/general-YM-safety-guidelines>)

Youth Ministry Going Forward: Ministering in a COVID-19 Pandemic Environment

- *Part 1. A Small Communities Model of Youth Ministry* (<http://dioceseofcleveland.org/YM-guidelines-small-communities>)
- *Part 2. Retreats and Service Opportunities* (<http://dioceseofcleveland.org/YM-guidelines-retreats-service>)