



Guidelines for Faith Formation for the 2020-2021 Academic Year

updated 8/18/2020

As we prepare to begin a new academic year of faith formation, we recognize that the catechesis of young people and adults is of the utmost importance, and a call from Christ. In order to fulfill this mission, we must exercise prudence during this time of pandemic in order to keep our people safe. We also must follow the guidance issued by our state and local governments. Therefore, in consultation with Fr. James Bissonette, diocesan administrator, the Office of Catechesis issues the following guidelines and recommendations:

1. Throughout our Diocese, faith formation programs differ widely from parish to parish. The spread of COVID-19 also varies throughout our counties and the different geographical regions of our diocese, and will continue to throughout the coming months. As such, there is not and cannot be a “one-size-fits-all” approach to faith formation. It is up to the Pastor and Director of Religious Education from a parish to prudently determine a preparedness plan that will provide for the passing on of the faith in the parish while keeping their parishioners safe in this time of pandemic. Please refer to the [Guidance for Gatherings: Faith-based Communities, Places of Worship, and Ceremonies](#) from the MN Department of Health.
2. Individuals and families are under no obligation to attend faith formation sessions at this time. For those who do not attend in-person, it would be helpful for the parish to provide resources to families to continue their formation at home through various means (sending materials home, digital resources, etc). Parishes are encouraged to be creative in means of offering resources in order to foster the continued growth of faith of their parishioners, while remaining safe.
3. For parishes offering virtual opportunities for faith formation for minors, all safe environment policies and protocol must be followed.
4. Parishes should continue to monitor the spread of COVID-19 in their community, and adjust their plan for faith formation accordingly. It may become necessary, for example, in the case of a community outbreak, for a parish who starts the year with in-person instruction to suspend all in-person meetings for a temporary time. Parishes are encouraged to exercise prudence and may be able to find guidance in monitoring the spread in their community by looking to the action of their local school district.
5. All those who have tested positive for COVID-19, those who are symptomatic, and those living with them, are not to participate in in-person programs until they have self-quarantined as per [CDC guidelines](#). At-risk persons, those with pre-existing health conditions, and those over age 65 should stay home and not participate in faith formation programs at this time. If someone begins exhibiting symptoms or feeling ill during a faith formation session, they should immediately be isolated and sent home. If an adult, child or youth experiences symptoms of COVID-19 or tests positive following attendance at a faith formation activity, the pastor and head of faith formation should be notified immediately.



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6. Parishes are ***strongly urged*** to limit faith formation activities to essential instruction at this time. This would include sacramental preparation, RCIA, religious education, and Circles of Grace lessons. Other youth activities should temporarily be suspended. For those sessions that are considered essential instruction, care must be given to follow the below protocol:
 - a. Masks/face coverings are required to be worn by all staff, volunteers, and participants, as per [Executive Order 20-81](#). The [Minnesota Department of Health](#) provides further information on this requirement and legitimate exemptions.
 - b. *Every effort* should be made to maintain social distancing at all times; that is, keeping at least 6 feet of distance from other individuals who are not members of their household. Provide controlled flow of participants or place markings on the floor of your building to help ensure this distancing as people arrive, leave, or move throughout the building. Discourage the congregation of students, parents, and families (particularly as class begins or ends). This may necessitate the rearranging of faith formation spaces in the parish. Faith formation programs should have a plan in place to ensure bathroom procedures for children. Guidance can be found at [Considerations for Events and Gatherings](#).
 - c. Hand sanitizer should be made readily available and staff, volunteers, and participants should be encouraged to use it or wash their hands when they arrive and depart. Good hygiene (covering coughs and sneezes, regular washing of hands) should be practiced throughout the event.
 - d. As per the [Guidance for Gatherings: Faith-based Communities, Places of Worship, and Ceremonies](#), occupancy (including staff and teachers) must not exceed 50% of total capacity of the space being used for instruction (i.e. parish hall, gathering space, classroom, etc), with a maximum of 250 people in a single self-contained space. In outdoor settings, gatherings must not exceed 250 people. All gatherings – indoor and outdoor – require social distancing and the maximum occupancy must allow for social distancing to be maintained throughout the event.
 - e. No food should be served or consumed during faith formation sessions at this time. While hospitality is typically a feature of many faith formation programs, the serving or consumption of food or beverage poses a high risk at this time.
 - f. Classrooms and other areas that are used must be disinfected immediately after class. This should include door knobs, desks, chairs, and other high contact surfaces. If you are using a school for faith formation, consult with the school health and safety plan.
 - g. Attendance should be taken at all faith formation activities and maintained on file.
 - h. In the case of positive tests for COVID - A parish will need to review the situation surrounding the exposure and may need to cancel in-person sessions for a particular class or classes for two weeks. Be ready to exercise prudence and flexibility.
 - i. These protocols and the parish's preparedness plan should be communicated clearly to and understood by parishioners, parents, and families in advance.
 - j. Volunteers need to be properly trained on the parish's preparedness plan and understand their role in ensuring a healthy environment for faith formation. If a parish does not have adequate personnel or supplies to ensure these safe practices, the parish should suspend faith formation sessions until they can be enacted.