



Roman Catholic DIOCESE of SYRACUSE

Reopening for a Healthy, Happy, and Holy Faith-filled Year

Letter from the Office of Catechesis 2

Reopening for a Healthy Year 3

In-person Instruction 3

Physical Environment 3

Cleaning and Sanitation 3

Physical Distancing 4

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) 4

Screening and Monitoring Symptoms 4

Contact Tracing 5

Shared Objects 5

Snacks 5

Diocesan Updates 5

Online and Hybrid Sessions 5

Reopening for a Happy & Holy Faith Formation Year 5

Fifteen Suggestions to consider for a happy and holy faith-filled year 6

Accommodating for a Faith-filled Year 7

Catechetical Leaders' Professional Development 7

Models of Catechesis 7

Social Media with Students 8

Video Conferencing and Streaming Apps 8

Digital Tools for Communication 8

Easy to use Family Resources during Covid-19 8

Other Resources 8

Appendix 9

Sample "Home Screening" Covenant 9

Sample Daily Sign-In Sheet 11



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ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE
OFFICE OF CATECHESIS

Letter from the Office of Catechesis

Over the past several months, we have become familiar with the term, a “new normal”, describing our daily life to which we have now become accustomed. This new normal means that we continue to carry out our daily tasks, but with care and modifications. For us as Church, it means to carry out the mission by continuing the work of Jesus Christ on Earth, but now with even more care and adaptations.

Since March, the Office of Catechesis has been providing support and resources for adapting to the new normal. Keeping in mind the possibility that catechetical programs may not be able to gather this fall, we provided a “**Publisher’s Showcase Day**” in which publishers had an opportunity to highlight the digital formats of their programs as well as the family formation components offered. The archived webinars and resources are available for all parish leaders to view at RCfaithquest.syrdio.org (See Publishers’ Showcase tab).

During the months of June, July and August, our office has provided bi-weekly “**Focus on Fall**” webinars to continue preparing for the fall. These webinars provide suggestions, considerations and training for online, blended and traditional formats for faith formation programs as well as providing information on implementing various models of catechesis including family, intergenerational and whole community catechesis. We highly recommend that these webinars be viewed at RCfaithquest.syrdio.org (See CLs only tab).

As parishes finalize plans for re-opening catechetical programs, we hope to provide guidance for a healthy, happy and holy year of faith formation. With re-opening, it is important to note that every parish has its own circumstances and must be sensitive to those while planning. A one-size fits-all approach will not be given in this document. A healthy, happy and holy year will require the parish plan to consider pastorally the following:

- Keeping children, families and staff physically safe;
- Caring for the social, emotional and spiritual needs of the parish community;
- Keeping faith formation consistent by creating strategies that align with the parish, state, and national efforts to minimize the spread of COVID-19 virus in public settings.

Encouraged by the love of God, we can face the required changes to our programs, knowing that despite the hardship and challenges they present, “all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28).

Our staff is committed to accompanying individuals and families on their faith journey while at the same time creating a safe and secure environment. We look forward to the return of in-parish formation, but also recognize that virtual formation and hybrid programs incorporating both methods may be the best option for a parish. Catechetical programs may look very different this year, but our commitment to serving you and your parish will remain constant.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ fill you and guide you as you proclaim the Gospel and accompany the children and families of our Diocese. Thank you so very much for your hard work and dedication to spreading the Good News!

Reopening for a Healthy Year

Above all else, we want our families, catechists, staff and community to be healthy this year. The Office of Catechesis, in complying with the New York State Department of Health's *Interim Guidance for In-Person Instruction at Pre-K to Grade 12 Schools During the Covid-19 Public Health Emergency*, has outlined the following requirements for planning necessary precautions to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Please use this outline as a checklist as you plan for your re-opening.

A. In-person Instruction

- a. A combination of in-person instruction and remote learning to facilitate a phased-in approach or hybrid model, which may be necessary at various times throughout the 2020-2021 catechetical year, should be planned.
- b. Alternative spaces for instruction and/or adjusting schedules with additional hours or staggered schedules may maximize space and decrease student density for maintaining social distance requirements.

B. Physical Environment

- a. Hand sanitizer is made available in all classrooms and offices in the program's building.
- b. Desks or chairs are spaced as far apart as possible and facing one direction. If tables are used in the classrooms, students are to be separated as much as possible.
- c. Ventilation and airflow have been checked prior to reopening and where possible increased throughout the building.
- d. All groups/organizations that wish to use the building where faith formation programs are held, are to follow all health and safety procedures, including social distancing, contact tracing procedures, and sanitation. Cleaning schedules are to be coordinated with the parish. Documentation of cleaning is recommended.
- e. Parishes utilizing an operating school building need to do the following:
 - Be familiar with the Diocesan School Reopening Plan and work with pastors and principals to ensure compliance with all applicable regulations.
 - Maintain clear and timely communications about procedural and health policy updates.
 - Retain the classroom seating arrangement deemed appropriate by the school administration.
 - Coordinate cleaning and sanitation expectations and efforts with the school.

C. Cleaning and Sanitation

- a. Disinfecting spray and wipes are available and used in all areas of the building.
- b. Touchpoints throughout the building are regularly sanitized, including restrooms.
- c. Program spaces and classrooms are cleaned regularly before each use.

D. Physical Distancing

- a. Covid 19 Safety signage and traffic plans are posted throughout the building.
- b. Traffic patterns will most likely change and therefore need to be communicated before sessions.
- c. When possible, students, staff, and visitors will be required to enter the program building from one entrance and exit through another.
- d. Signs are posted throughout the building directing the flow of foot traffic entering and leaving the program building.
- e. All individuals must wear face coverings in common areas, such as entrances/exits, lobbies, and when traveling around the building.
- f. Modify or reconfigure spaces and areas, so that individuals can be socially distanced (e.g., side-to-side and when facing one another), and are not sharing workstations, desks, tables, or other shared surfaces without cleaning and disinfection between use.

E. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- a. Individuals are recommended to wear face masks at all times.
- b. Individuals are required to wear acceptable face coverings when social distancing cannot be maintained and when traveling in common areas.
- c. Adequate supply of face coverings, masks, and other required PPE are available should any volunteers or staff need a replacement, or a student be in need.

F. Screening and Monitoring Symptoms

- a. Mandatory health screenings, including temperature checks, of students, faculty, staff, and, where applicable, contractors, vendors, and visitors to identify any individuals who may have COVID-19 or who may have been exposed to the COVID-19 virus.
- b. Remote screening may be done at home. Provide a screening checklist and expect parents, volunteers, staff and visitors to adhere to daily screening and watch for symptoms. This may be included with registration information as a separate document and/or added to your parish website. If any of the following is exhibited, the parish leader should be notified and the child must not attend further gatherings for two weeks:
 - Knowingly been in close or proximate contact in the past 14 days with anyone who has tested positive through a diagnostic test for COVID-19 or who has or had symptoms of COVID-19;
 - Tested positive through a diagnostic test for COVID-19 in the past 14 days;
 - Has experienced any symptoms of COVID-19, including a temperature of greater than 100.0°F, in the past 14 days;
 - Has traveled internationally or from a state with widespread community transmission of COVID-19 per the New York State Travel Advisory in the past 14 days.

G. Contact Tracing

- a. Attendance records must be kept accurately.
- b. Attendance of all persons in the building at any one time must be kept accurate for contact tracing purposes. This includes all staff, volunteers, students and visitors.
- c. Sign-in sheets with date and time must be kept on file. Sign in sheets are to list and confirm symptoms of Covid-19 are negative.

H. Shared Objects

- a. Plans or measures to limit the sharing of objects, such as cubbies, laptops, notebooks, touchscreens, writing instruments, chalk and dry erase boards, etc, as well as the touching of shared surfaces, such as tables and desks; or require students, faculty, and staff to perform hand hygiene before and after contact are developed and communicated to all stakeholders.

I. Snacks

- a. Snacks are discouraged from being served during catechetical sessions.
- b. If snacks are to be provided, they must be individually wrapped items. Food must be covered to prevent contaminations and may not be handled by anyone except the server.
- c. Servers must adhere to hygiene guidelines and wear protective gloves.
- d. Drinks must be individual servings such as cans or juice boxes. Otherwise, only a designated server will be allowed to serve drinks.

J. Diocesan Updates

- a. All diocesan leaders are to pay attention to Wednesday Emails and/or the diocesan website at syracusediocese.org for Covid-19 updates.

K. Online and Hybrid Sessions

- a. Parishes choosing to move faith formation programs online or as hybrid sessions must follow all Safe Environment policies for using social media with children and teens.

Reopening for a Happy & Holy Faith Formation Year

"I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Jn 13:34-35

This year will be very different from other years, not only for our faith formation programs, but also for our students, families, catechists, and schools. With so many challenges facing our families, our plans for catechetical programs should incorporate and witness compassion, love, and patience. Pope Paul VI said, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." (2 October 1974)

Fifteen Suggestions to consider for a happy and holy faith-filled year

The following are suggestions to consider as parishes plan their catechetical programs.

1. This can be a **relational and pastoral year with our families**. Building relationships with families, being sensitive to their needs and situations, and helping them see God in their daily lives through prayer, worship and witness can take a primary role in catechetical programs.
2. A **delayed start may be helpful** for your families, as well as for the program itself to be established this year. Consider starting in October.
3. The **“30 contact hour” guideline is being suspended** this year only. However, parishes should still plan for a full curriculum and schedule. Parishes that implement a delayed start might not be able to schedule 30 hours. Remember, the relational piece with families takes time and intentional effort!
4. It may be beneficial to **have two or more models of catechesis** running parallel in your parish. For example, those catechists and families that are comfortable with onsite catechesis can gather in a traditional manner while those catechists who are comfortable in leading online learners can work with students using a digital platform.
5. Family catechesis is not just “homeschooling” lessons. **Family catechesis requires an ongoing relationship between the parish and the families** so that the home becomes the “domestic church” where faith is practiced and shared in daily life.
6. **Teach parents simple but profound methods of prayer and reflection** to use in the course of their day to see that God is present in all things, at all times. Prayer is the foundation to encountering a relationship with God. "True prayer," wrote St. Augustine, "is nothing but love." Praying with Scripture, rote prayers, devotionals, prayers of forgiveness, praise, adoration, petitions, etc. forms the loving relationship with God. The *Catechism* defines prayer as a "vital and personal relationship with the living and true God" (CCC, no. 2558). Prayer is Christian "insofar as it is communion with Christ" (CCC, no. 2565), and a "covenant relationship between God and man in Christ." (CCC, no. 2564)
7. Help parents to **see the holiness that surrounds them in their daily life** together as a family.
8. Take great care to **journey with parents during parents' sessions, sacramental meetings, parenting workshops, and more**.
9. **Be sensitive to family situations, especially if the program has to be moved totally online**. Accountability and expectations may need to be modified as family members share computer-time, internet bandwidth and family space. Family relationships may be strained as school work and office work has to be done at home.
10. **Provide simple ways parents can share faith with their children** - car chats, meal conversations, morning and nighttime prayers or blessings, etc.

11. **Engage families in liturgical preparation** and ways to celebrate the Gospel message at home.
12. **Make intentional connections with parents** via phone calls, emails, surveys, newsletters, workshops, parent sessions, etc.
13. **Do not break copyright laws to save money.** “Thou shall not steal!” Work with your publisher representatives to settle on a payment plan or discount that your parish can afford. Please use USCCB approved curriculums. If you are unsure of what each publisher offers, visit our diocesan “Publishers’ Showcase” at RCfaithquest.syrdio.org.
14. **Communication with all stakeholders is imperative.** Keep open lines of communication with parents, catechists, other ministry leaders with any updates regarding Covid-19 guidelines that may impact lessons and procedures.
15. **Witness faith!** The initial focus this year should be more building relationships with families and accompanying them in the catechetical process.

Accommodating for a Faith-filled Year

We are all in this together! We are a community of faith and we are all in solidarity with the world during this pandemic. As we prepare and plan for this upcoming catechetical year, the critical stakeholders for carrying out the mission of the Church may need resources and support. From Catechetical leaders to parents, to catechists, here are some useful resources that have been gathered for you:

Catechetical Leaders’ Professional Development

[Publishers’ Showcase](#) - “Integrating Digital Approaches” (Archived webinars from 9 publishers) The password for the showcase page is **Catechesis2020**
[Moving Faith Formation online](#) - Vibrant Faith Webinar, John Roberto
[Focus on Fall Series](#) are all archived with video and notes:

June 18 - Office of Catechesis Staff: **“Programs, Considerations, & Recommendations”**

June 25 - Andrea Chavez-Kopp **“The Basics of Blended Learning for Catechists”**

July 9 - Andrea Chavez-Kopp **“Building Community and Engagement in a Distance Learning Environment”**

July 23 - John Roberto: **“From Pivoting to Innovation - Designing Faith Formation in 2020-21”**

August 6 - Office of Catechesis Staff: **“Sacramental Preparation in Covid 19 Times ”**

August 13 - **Bishop Lucia Addressed Catechetical Leaders**

August 20 Office of Catechesis: **“Final Planning for Fall 2020”**

Models of Catechesis

[Document by the Office of Catechesis](#), PDF (Describes the various models of catechetical programs and recommended guidelines for implementation)

[Sending Faith Home. A Guide for Catechetical Leaders amidst the Coronavirus Shutdown](#) -The Pastoral Center, PDF

Social Media with Students

[Social Media Policy for Webconferencing Link](#) (This is the diocesan web-conferencing policy for teens)

[Virtual Online Learning Permission Form](#) (You must use the diocesan created Permission Form created by the Safe Environment Office.)

Video Conferencing and Streaming Apps

[Zoom Tutorials](#)

[Parents' Ultimate Guide to Zoom Common Sense Media](#)

[Facebook Live](#)

Digital Tools for Communication

[MailChimp](#) marketing platform

[Constant Contact](#)

[MailChimp vs Constant Contact](#)

[FlockNote](#) Smarter email and texting for your church

[Remind](#)

Easy to use Family Resources during Covid-19

[Taking a Family Faith Inventory](#) NFCYM, Strong Catholic Families

[Ten Ideas for Family Faith Formation](#) John Roberto, PDF

[Creating Sacred Space in Your Home](#) Diocese of Lansing

[How to hold a prayer service at-home](#) Archdiocese of Washington

[Saint of the Day Franciscan Communications](#)

[Ideas and Recommendations for Families with Children who Have Diverse Learning Needs](#) USCCB, PDF

[Catholicfamilycrate.com](#): Offers paid monthly and seasonal subscription boxes containing books and activities to do within the home. They also provide free resources, including coloring pages and emails with prayers for the family

[CatholicMom.com](#)

Other Resources

[Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy during the Covid-19 Pandemic](#) USCCB, PDF

[BuildingFaith@HOME](#) - Weekly family catechetical pages from the Office of Catechesis, Syracuse

[New York Department of Health - Interim Guidelines](#)

[New York Sample COVID-19 Symptom Screening Tool](#)

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Appendix

Sample “Home Screening” Covenant

The following is a sample of how a parish may implement at-home screening. This is not the only way screening may be conducted, however. Parishes may choose to implement onsite screening and temperature readings. In that case, please let parents/guardians know what that process will look like.

PARISH NAME

COVID - 19 Personal Home Screening and Personal Protection Covenant

As part of our commitment to preventing the spread of Covid-19, all students, volunteers, staff and visitors are required to take daily temperature readings and acknowledge any symptoms or recent contact with others who may have been infected with this virus before entering the building when faith formation sessions are scheduled. Any symptoms should be reported to your own healthcare provider and adhere to any health and safety requirements provided at that time.

All students, volunteers, staff and visitors are required to wear masks when traveling in common spaces throughout the building and when in areas where social distancing and ventilation requires additional protection.

Please keep this page at home and answer the following before sending your child to a scheduled faith formation session:

Have you or has anyone in your home had contact within the last fourteen days with any person under screening/testing for COVID-19, or with anyone with known or suspected COVID-19?

Does your child currently have any of the following symptoms?

- o Fever (100.4°F or higher), or a sense of having a fever.
- o New cough that you cannot attribute to another health condition.
- o New shortness of breath that you cannot attribute to another health condition.
- o New sore throat that you cannot attribute to another health condition.
- o New muscle aches (myalgias) that you cannot attribute to another health condition, or that may have been caused by a specific activity (such as physical exercise).

If YES to any of the screening questions, your child is excused from the session until further notice.

If NO to all of the screening questions, your child can be permitted into the facility and should be instructed to practice strong infection control strategies: maintaining social (physical) distancing of 6 feet, wearing a cloth face covering, washing hands (soap and water for 20 seconds or hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol), covering coughs and sneezes with an elbow, avoiding touching their face, and cleaning surfaces frequently.

Parish Name

COVID - 19 Personal Home Screening and Personal Protection Covenant

I agree to adhere to the at-home screening guidelines before sending my child to each scheduled faith formation session.

I understand that any health and safety requirements provided by my healthcare provider are followed in the event of being tested positive for Covid-19.

Name of child _____

Parent Name _____

Parent Signature _____

Date _____

