

Protocols for In-Person, Parish, Catechetical Programming, In Light of COVID-19

I. Preface

When returning to in-person catechetical sessions this fall, we must do our best to protect ourselves and others by following basic protocols, keeping shared spaces clean, and limiting the size of group gatherings.

It is impossible to develop a one-size-fits-all plan and guidelines that could be applied to all parish facilities. *Therefore, each parish will need to compose individualized plans, based on the size and layout of its facility and class spaces, and the numerical size of its program.* Our more rural parishes, for example, might not have to do as much adjusting, due to their smaller numbers and perhaps larger spaces. Some parishes, also, might already have some built-in social distancing at the ready, from their preparations for resuming in-parish meetings and gatherings, earlier this summer.

What follows here, then, is a list of quite generic and universal guidelines, principles, and practices that can apply to any and all parishes. They are intermingled with suggestions, too, for best practices.

We do not recommend beginning your programming until *Catechetical Sunday*, September 20th, 2020.

II. Previous Diocesan Directives

These protocols do not supersede or replace any COVID-related norms and guidelines already promulgated by the Diocese. And these protocols can be altered or overturned by the appropriate Diocesan authorities, at any time. All that follows is intended to be consonant with the Diocesan protocols relating to (1.) the return to public masses and (2.) the resumption of parish meetings and gatherings. Therefore, you are to continue adhering to all previously disseminated Diocesan mandates.

They can be found in the following Diocesan documents:

Bishop's Brennan's letter to the Faithful of the Wheeling-Charleston Diocese, dated July 28, 2020 <https://dwc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Racism-Covid-19-letter-to-faithful-July-2020.pdf>

Phase Two: Reopening of Churches for Public Worship - Diocesan Directives <https://dwc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Reopening-of-Parishes-for-Public-Worship-Diocesan-Directives.pdf>

Norms for Reopening Parish Facilities for Meetings and Gatherings, dated June 29, 2020 <http://thecatholicspiritwv.org/norms-for-reopening-parish-facilities-for-meetings-and-gatherings-announced/>

Confirmation celebrated in the time of COVID-19 <file:///C:/Users/dmaul/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/IJR1CQPR/Confirmation%20celebrated%20in%20the%20time%20of%20COVID.pdf>

III. CDC And Other Healthcare Experts and Jurisdictions

We are, also, continuing to follow the advice, suggestions, and mandates of the CDC, local health officials and experts, and the governor of West Virginia. We must strictly adhere to the national guidelines from the CDC.

IV. Guidelines for Returning to In-Person Catechetical Sessions This Fall

Access (limited) to the buildings

Admittance

In addition to the students, only the catechetical leaders, catechists, aides, and essential volunteers should be allowed in the building(s) during class sessions. No visitors are allowed.

Parents

Unless the parish is offering family catechetical programming, no parents may enter the building(s), not even at the times of dropping off and picking up their children.

Processing to classrooms

Students must get to their classrooms in a controlled manner. It would be best for students to go directly to their classrooms, whereupon they will immediately be seated, rather than wait in large groups and proceed to class in large groups.

Signing-In and attendance

It is not necessary to have all of your students sign in, upon entry of the building, but you must know who is in the building, at all times. Thorough and accurate attendance must formally be taken, on program-issued attendance sheets. These sheets must be collected and maintained by the DRE or catechetical leader.

Air circulation (enhanced)

If your parish has the means and understanding, it is recommended to inquire about making improvements to existing heating, air conditioning and ventilation systems to remove the coronavirus. This process involves checking a system's "minimum efficiency reporting value," and ensuring its filters have the highest compatible rating with the system, to improve filtration capabilities. Other enhancing steps include increasing the amount of outdoor air pulled into the system, reducing air recirculation, frequently checking filters, and running the system longer.

Field Trips/Experiential Learning

All off-campus experiential learning, such as a field trip, is not allowed. Leaders, catechists, and volunteers are not to travel off-site with students.

Food and Drink

None should be served. None should be brought in.

Gatherings (Less frequent)

You may want to consider meeting less often than you normally would. Some parishes meet with students and parents only once per month, at which time they instruct the parents how to work with their children at home over the course of the rest of the month. Regarding sacramental events, you may want to conduct them outdoor, when possible. Follow all previously disseminated diocesan protocols for mass and the sacramental rites.

Illness

Parents must be advised to check the health of their children on a daily basis.

No one who is sick can attend class; this includes leaders, catechists, volunteers, as well as students. Sickness includes any of the following: *a cough, shortness of breath, a sore throat, a fever (above 100.3) in the last 48 hours, abdominal pain, chills and shakes, headache, a new loss of taste or smell, and vomiting or diarrhea in the last 24 hours.*

Anyone who arrives sick must be sent home. Parents must be called, and they must come to retrieve their child.

Interaction (limited and prohibited – close) among catechists, students, parents, and volunteers

People are not to linger in or around the building or even in the parking lot before, during, or after classes.

No physical contact is permitted, including, but not limited to, handshakes, hugs, pats on the back, etc. This will be very difficult, of course, when working with our youngest students.

Our programming must now be as “contact-free” as possible, amongst all people present on our properties.

Mask-wearing (facial coverings)

Everyone, upon entry into the building, must wear a facemask (or facial covering) and continuously wear it until their departure from the building.

These facial coverings must completely cover the person’s mouth and nose.

Parishes must have an ample supply of masks on hand, to provide them to those who arrive without one.

If the parish provides plastic barriers or facial shields to its students, when they are seated, the students may remove their facial coverings while seated.

Materials

If paperwork is distributed, it must not be shared, and it must be taken home by the students.

Each student must have his or her own supply of necessary materials, nothing being shared.

Do not collect anything that has been distributed to the students.

Allow your students to take home their textbooks.

Outdoor programming

If the weather is conducive, and your catechists feel comfortable doing so, allow and encourage them to conduct their classes outside.

Sanitation (thorough) and cleaning measures

Cleaning supplies

They should be generously distributed and frequently used throughout the facility.

Hand sanitizers

Have everyone use hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol) at the door upon entry to the building. You must make it available for you students, catechists, and volunteers.

Handwashing

Please be sure that all of your bathrooms are fully stocked with hand soap and that the sinks provide warm water. Students should be reminded to wash their hands frequently with soap and water, for at least 20 seconds.

Sterilization

All surfaces and items used, e.g., desks, tables, chairs, phones, microphones, etc., should be wiped down both before and after being used.

Screening

If you are going to screen all catechists, volunteers, parents, and students prior to entering the building, you may want to use the following questions:

1. Have you been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19?
2. Are you experiencing a cough, shortness of breath, or a sore throat?
3. Have you had a fever of 100.4 or higher, in the last 48 hours?
4. Have you had new loss of taste or smell?
5. Have you had vomiting or diarrhea in the last 24 hours?

Screening is not strictly required. However, screening could be done in conjunction with a temperature check prior to entry.

Social distancing

Bathroom Usage

Classes should not be allowed to go to the bathroom as a group. Send the students out, one-by-one, as they request to use the restroom. This will require more hall and bathroom monitors, i.e., adult supervision outside the classrooms.

Desks/seating/tables

The more distance put between each seated person (up to six feet) the better. At the very least, every other seat must be kept empty and every other row should not be used. Desks should be separated and spread out, trying to maintain three (3) to six (6) feet of separation.

Groupings

No individual groupings, seated or standing together in one room or space, can be larger than twenty-five (25) people. This includes separated groupings even in larger spaces, such as an auditorium or gymnasium.

If you need to hold larger events (e.g., parent and catechist meetings), perhaps you could hold them in the church, thereby affording yourself more room for social distancing. Please see above: “Phase Two: Reopening of Churches for Public Worship Diocesan Directives.”

One-way foot traffic

To the greatest extent possible, we must try to establish one-way foot traffic. This is most easily done by having one and only one entrance to the building – which everyone must use – with a separate exit, at a distance from the entrance. Using a different exit, other than the doors used as the entrance, is a best practice.

Plastic barriers

If your parish has the means, please feel free to purchase and make use of plexiglass barriers, to separate the students in class. For use at student desks and tables, you can purchase clear, tri-fold shields called “hygiene” barriers. Perhaps the catechist’s desk could be behind one. If the DRE intends to meet with people in his or her office, perhaps a plastic barrier could help facilitate those meetings in the safest-possible manner. However, these are not strictly required, in contrast to mask-wearing.

Six-foot distance

Everyone should do their best to maintain at least six feet of distance from others, especially when moving about the building. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the CDC define “appropriate physical distancing” as three (3) to six (6) feet apart.

Smaller class sizes

Some classes might need to be much smaller than 25 individuals, depending on the size of the available classroom spaces, in order to maintain appropriate physical distancing. This might require having more than one session of classes. We might have to ask our catechists if they would teach their classes in two shifts, to create smaller classes, allowing for proper social distancing. Or, we might need to try to recruit more catechists, in order to have smaller classes.

Temperature checks

If it is possible, we do recommend that a person’s temperature is taken before entering the building. Anyone with a temperature above 100.3 is not to be allowed in the building. Temperature checks can be done in conjunction with screening prior to entry.

V. Codes of Conduct and Liability Waivers

You may want to have parents sign a kind of “Code of Conduct” stipulating that they will adhere to these policies and procedures, requiring their children to do so as well, especially in regard to wearing face masks and socially distancing. The form should include an acknowledgement that they have read and understand the expectations and potential sanctions for not adhering to the parish policies. Parents should be instructed that they must let the parish catechetical leader know as soon as they, their children, or any member of their households have either contracted COVID themselves or have had close contact with a confirmed case of COVID. In such a case, the family must have no contact with the parish program for at least 14 days, and they must prove that they have tested negative for COVID.

You may want to have parents also sign *waivers of liability* concerning the risk of coronavirus infection. By choosing to send their children to parish classes, parents are accepting the risk that their children may be sickened by coronavirus at the parish. Parishes cannot guarantee that parents or students will not contract COVID-19.

If you have any questions about these protocols, please contact the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis at 304-233-0880.