

Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis
Guidelines for Faith Formation Events and Activities (Children, Youth, and Adult)
2020-2021

Pope Francis' Prayer to the Virgin Mary for Protection from the Coronavirus

O Mary, you shine continuously on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope. We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick. At the foot of the Cross you participated in Jesus' pain, with steadfast faith. You, Salvation of the Roman People, know what we need. We are certain that you will provide, so that, as you did at Cana of Galilee, joy and feasting might return after this moment of trial. Help us, Mother of Divine Love, to conform ourselves to the Father's will and to do what Jesus tells us: He who took our sufferings upon Himself, and bore our sorrows to bring us, through the Cross, to the joy of the Resurrection. Amen.

We seek refuge under your protection, O Holy Mother of God. Do not despise our pleas – we who are put to the test – and deliver us from every danger, O glorious and Blessed Virgin. Amen.

A. Introduction

As baptized Christians, we have an obligation to proclaim the Gospel. Saint Paul VI reminds us that

“Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection” (Evangelization in the Modern World, 14).

People are hungry for the Good News that Christ lived and died for our salvation. Saint Paul admonishes us to “preach the word; be urgent in season and out of season” (2 Tim 4: 2) and we must use all the gifts, creativity, wisdom, and prudence we have to continue to answer that call now, more than ever. Jesus Himself had to contend with the obstacles of His day in preaching the Gospel and so must we. These guidelines are intended to facilitate our fulfillment of that mission to which we have been called.

COVID-19 has reshaped many plans and priorities and we have had to adapt in serving the formation of our Catholic people. Current trends indicate that these new and unique challenges are not going away anytime soon and the 2020-2021 faith formation year will be altogether different for everyone.

Below are three Options (A, B, and C) to guide the approach to faith formation during these difficult times:

- A. Onsite/in-person faith formation activities and events including family formation at those parishes that utilize such an approach (following guidance below, including participant limits in Section D)
- B. Virtual/Online/Remote faith formation activities and events

C. Hybrid approach, combining both virtual and in person elements of faith formation

Parish faith formation programs should plan for Option A, provided they can follow the guidance in this document. If unable to follow all the guidance at this time, please select Options B or C, depending on local circumstances. Parishes utilizing Option A should also have preparations in place to quickly pivot to Options B or C as needed.

B. General Principles

- “Faith formation” is used in this document as an all-inclusive term referring to adult formation, youth ministry, family formation, and programs of systematic catechesis and sacramental preparation for children.
- Parishes must have adequate personnel and supplies to implement these guidelines, and ensure that everyone is sufficiently trained and ready. Parishes offering faith formation either on-site or off-site should have a Preparedness Plan, which can be developed from the [Guidance for Gatherings: Faith-Based Communities, Places of Worship, and Ceremonies](#).
- Communicate the Preparedness Plan for faith formation to all parishioners, including parents. It is important that everyone understand what the parish is doing to keep people safe at faith formation activities and events.
- Policies and practices for the 2020-2021 faith formation year should be flexible in responding to new information and developments. A willingness to adapt and refine approaches when specific practices are not working will be needed.
- Local parish faith formation policies for the 2020-2021 year should possess the ability to be adapted based on the level of viral transmission that may become present in the local community.
- Special considerations should be made to best provide for the needs of individual children and families. This is especially true of more vulnerable populations.
- Special considerations should be made to best account for the needs of individual children, and those of each family. This is especially true of more vulnerable populations.
- As the primary educators and catechists of their children, accommodations should be made and parish support given if parents and caregivers decide to homeschool their children’s faith formation program this year rather than participate in any onsite activities.
- All activities involving children and youth must follow [Office of Ministerial Standards and Safe Environment child-protection protocols](#).
- All COVID-19 positive persons, those who are symptomatic, and those living with them, may not participate in programs until after they have self-quarantined as [per CDC guidelines](#).
- At-risk persons and those with preexisting health conditions should consider staying home and not attending in-person faith formation activities at this time.
- 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.

- If the parish has a Catholic school that shares facilities with faith formation and in-person school classes are suspended due to an outbreak of COVID-19, in-person faith formation activities and events should be suspended until the Pastor, in consultation with the Office for the Mission of Catholic Education, determines it is safe to resume.
- If faith formation children and youth attend school in a local public school district(s) that closes an individual school or schools due to an outbreak of COVID-19, the Pastor, in consultation with the Office for the Mission of Catholic Education, will determine whether in-person faith formation activities and events will be temporarily suspended.
- If faith formation children and youth attend school in a local public school district(s) that chooses not to hold in-person classes at one or more schools to begin the school year, the Pastor, in consultation with his faith formation staff, will determine whether in-person faith formation activities and events will occur following the guidance in Sections C, D, and E of this document.

C. Staff, Volunteers and Training

- The Director of Faith Formation (or equivalent) is a focal point for raising concerns or questions that any program participant (catechist, learner, parent) might have regarding procedures and/or incidents. It should be clearly communicated that any information, feedback, suggestions etc. from parents, learners and your catechetical volunteers is welcome.
- Ensure that volunteer catechists are properly trained on the Preparedness Plan and understand their critical role in ensuring a healthy environment for faith formation. Keep records of the training provided.

D. Events and Activities

- Faith formation events and activities generally fall into three categories:
 - Static – A structured situation such as a talk or presentation on some aspect of the faith. Attendees arrive, sit and listen or pray, and then depart. This would also include faith formation classes for children and youth, provided all participants except the catechist face the same direction.
 - Static+ – Gathering in a larger group and then breaking into small groups. Other examples would be bible studies or small groups where participants are facing and talking towards each other and all events held outdoors.
 - Dynamic – An unstructured situation such as a social gathering that involves high levels of movement throughout one or more indoor spaces.
- Static events and activities are considered low risk, Static+ are considered middle risk and Dynamic are considered higher risk.
- At this time, it is recommended that faith formation events and activities remain primarily Static or Static+ in nature, with no more than 50% of room capacity utilized, to a maximum of 250 people.
- If a planned activity must be Dynamic in nature, participants must be limited to 10 or fewer indoors and 25 or fewer outdoors. Activities that cross over from Static or Static+

to Dynamic should follow the Dynamic participant limits and maintain social distancing requirements.

- Attendance should be taken at all faith formation activities and maintained on file. Parents should monitor the symptoms of their child(ren) and not send those who exhibit symptoms.
- There is no evidence that COVID-19 is spread by food. However, people sharing utensils and congregating around food service areas can pose a risk.
 - If a cafeteria or group dining room is used, serve individually plated meals or grab-and-go options, and hold activities in separate areas.
 - Avoid offering any self-serve food or drink options, such as buffets, salad bars, and drink stations. Consider having pre-packaged boxes or bags for each attendee.
 - Further guidance on food service can be found under [Considerations for Events and Gatherings](#) from the CDC.
- If home meetings take place for Youth Ministry, they should meet outdoors when possible. Face coverings and social distancing are strongly recommended but not required for indoor private gatherings, per the [Minnesota Department of Health: Face Covering Requirements and Recommendations](#). All spaces must be sanitized before and after use and food service should follow the rules outlined above.
- Group travel for off-site activities, including service projects, should be limited and only occur if the mode of transportation can accommodate appropriate social distancing. Participants should wear face coverings while traveling.
 - Off-site activities, including service projects and retreats, must follow the same procedures as on-site activities, depending on the category (number of participants, social distancing, face coverings, personal hygiene, etc.)
 - See further information on group travel at [Guidance for Bus Transit Operators](#) and [Considerations for Schools](#) from the CDC.
- Parishes that utilize Catechesis of the Good Shepherd should follow the [Considerations for Opening CGS Atria in Light of COVID-19 Concerns](#) from CGUSA.

E. Social Distancing

- Per [Minnesota Executive Order 20-81](#), face coverings are required at this time for all participants over the age of five (adults, children, youth, faith formation staff, and volunteers) during indoor activities. The [Minnesota Department of Health](#) provides further information on this requirement and legitimate exemptions. Face coverings may be worn for outdoor activities at the discretion of individual participants.
- Off-site events and activities that are indoors must also follow Minnesota Executive Order 20-81, with the noted exemptions from MDH.
- Face coverings should not be worn by children under age two, per Minnesota Executive Order 20-81 and CDC guidelines.
- A minimum of six feet of social distancing should be maintained during both indoor and outdoor activities. This may necessitate the rearranging of faith formation spaces in the parish.

- Physical contact between individuals should be avoided (i.e. handshakes, hugs).
- Parishes should have a plan in place for arrival and dismissal of children and youth from formation activities in order to maintain social distancing guidelines.

F. Disinfecting and Cleaning Measures

- Following each event or activity, all occupied areas must be cleaned and disinfected.
- If faith formation events and activities will use space in a Catholic school, the head of faith formation must coordinate with the school principal to develop a plan to ensure those spaces are appropriately cleaned and disinfected prior to the subsequent school day.
- Personal belongings (phones, writing utensils. etc.) should not be shared. Plans should be developed to limit the sharing of common supplies.
- 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](#) from the CDC.
- Personal hygiene – All participants should:
 - Disinfect their hands upon entering the church building with provided hand sanitizer. They should wash their hands frequently with soap and water (especially before and after eating).
 - Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
 - Avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.