

Michigan Phase 4 Opening of Faith Formation Programs

Guidelines for the 2020-2021 Program Year – Highlights Before the Year Begins

Parish faith formation programs should begin in the coming weeks. Bishop Gruss prefers that parish faith formation programs open in-person if possible. Providing that Michigan and/or the region in which the parish is located is in Phase 4 or higher as determined by appropriate authorities, in-person faith formation should be possible, even if using adapted methods and approaches. At the same time, parents'/guardians' decisions regarding the health of their child(ren) must be respected. Therefore, non-gathered methods (online or otherwise) of faith formation which allow the parent to fulfill their role as the primary catechist of their child must also be in place. It is also possible that some movement between in-person and non-gathered catechesis may need to occur as the circumstances change.

These guidelines are offered as an aid to parish faith formation leaders, pastors and directors of parish life as they prepare for the start of the program year in faith formation. It must be noted, however, that as the guidelines from local and national health officials continue to change, so may these guidelines.

Before the faith formation program year begins

General

In all of the faith formation communications whether written or verbal, it is critical that there be a focus on lifting up the parents/children/families during this time and sharing the love of Jesus with them.

Parish faith formation leaders should have a pre-arranged and well-communicated method of communicating with parents and catechists so that any changes to the program plans can be quickly and reliably shared with them.

Develop and send faith formation opening communications with all relevant plans to any stake-holders (i.e., families, catechists, parish staff) and include updates regarding all policies and procedures.

All catechists must be Virtus-trained regardless of the format that catechesis takes (online or non-gathered).

All faith formation participants and catechists must wear masks at in-person sessions.

Regarding medically vulnerable children and catechists, non-gathered options (online or otherwise) must be planned and communicated to the families and catechists.

Snacks should be suspended unless extenuating circumstances exist. If snacks are provided, they should be pre-packaged and given out, and social distancing guidelines should be met for adequate distancing while eating.

If possible "cohort" students from the same schools (keep participants who attend the same school together and minimize contact with students from other schools) thereby reducing additional contacts and hopefully reducing parents'/guardians' anxiety about sending their children to the faith formation program. This may result in having to consider additional session times or different use of space.

Spacing and Movement

Any class gathering must take place in a space large enough to accommodate appropriate social distancing.

Masks must be worn by all attending.

For any faith formation session, adequate social distancing (according to CDC guidelines currently a minimum of 6 feet apart) and mask-wearing must be observed regardless of type of space utilized.

The parish church may be used to accommodate larger groups, especially if using a family-based approach to catechesis.

Assess all classrooms/locations for sessions with a focus on:

- How many classrooms are available;
- The size of each classroom;
- Additional spaces that are available (e.g., gym, lunchroom, auditorium);
- The ventilation in each classroom.

Assess security protocols to decide if any process changes need to be implemented.

Determine any additional facilities that the parish may have access to that could be used for sessions.

If all children enrolled cannot be safely distanced in the current physical space and schedule of the faith formation program, alternative or additional spaces and/or session times should be considered. Non-gathered and/or online could be considered.

Space desks/work spaces at least six feet apart in classrooms. Class sizes should be kept to the level afforded by necessary spacing requirements.

In classrooms where large tables are utilized, space students as far apart as feasible, 6 feet at a minimum.

As feasible, arrange all desks facing the same direction toward the front of the classroom (cluster-style seating is highly discouraged).

Efforts should be made to keep six feet of distance between people in the hallways.

Flow of foot traffic should be directed in only one direction, if possible. If one-way flow is not possible, hallways should be divided with either side following the same direction.

Entrances and exits should be kept separate to keep traffic moving in a single direction if possible.

Develop a plan to monitor arrival and dismissal to discourage congregating and ensure students go straight from a vehicle to their classrooms and vice-versa.

Hygiene and Safety

Work with custodial staff on any changes in typical cleaning process and schedule, based on local health department and CDC guidelines.

Procure hand sanitizer, cleaning and disinfection supplies. (Any hand sanitizer utilized must have safe levels of alcohol above 60%.)

Set up hand sanitizing or washing stations throughout building, especially at entry and exit.

Set up hand sanitizing or washing station in each space utilized by children, catechists or staff.

Determine how you will remind (or educate) catechists and participants how to cough and sneeze into their elbows, or to cover with a tissue. Used tissues should be thrown in the trash and hands washed immediately using proper hand hygiene techniques.

Keep in mind that participants who attend faith formation programs from districts that have opted for fully online learning may not be as familiar with proper hygiene and safety guidelines and may need intentional education regarding procedures.

Post signage to indicate proper social distancing and hand washing/sanitizing. (See <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc> for downloadable signs.)

Post signs on the doors of restrooms to indicate proper social distancing and hand hygiene techniques.

Provide social distancing floor/seating markings in waiting and reception areas.

Place floor tape or other markings at six foot intervals where line formation is anticipated.

Health Concern Procedures

Check with your local county health department for their applicable recommendations and requirements in regard to the following:

A child who exhibits possible COVID-19 symptoms should be immediately separated from the other children and sent home. Ensure that the child is wearing a mask.

Procedures for children who have possible COVID -19 symptoms in your program.

Positive COVID test results for anyone (child or adult) who has participated in your program.

Symptomatic children and catechists sent home from the faith formation program should be kept home until they have tested negative for COVID-19, or have been released from isolation according to CDC guidelines.

In the event of a lab or clinically diagnosed case of COVID-19, please refer to "Response Action Plan for Possible Exposure to COVID-19 at a Parish Faith Formation Program." (Provided separately.)

Families should be notified of the presence of any laboratory positive or clinically diagnosed cases of COVID-19 in the classroom and/or school to encourage closer observation for any symptoms at home.

Catechists and any other designated volunteers must have temperature taken immediately before or upon entry to the faith formation facility (if non-contact infrared thermometer is available) and fill out a self-monitoring form for COVID-19 symptoms each time they are present for faith formation. (Form will be provided.)

Families are asked to check their child's temperature before bringing a child to faith formation. Students with a temperature of 100.4 or greater should stay home and consider coronavirus testing if symptoms of COVID-19 are present.

If possible, utilize a non-contact infrared thermometer to take participants' temperature on their way into the session. If utilized, please operate only according to manufacturer directions and review FDA information at <https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/general-hospital-devices-and-supplies/non-contact-infrared-thermometers>.

Families are asked to monitor their children for symptoms of COVID-19. The presence of any symptoms, including cough or shortness of breath, should prompt the family to keep the student home from school and to follow up with a primary care provider.

A catechist who develops a fever or become ill with COVID-19 symptoms while at faith formation should notify the formation leader, wear a mask, go home and follow the advice of a health professional. *(Note: catechists should be reminded about confidentiality standards with regard to any positive test results. Even if a family/ student acknowledges and publicly discloses a positive test, staff, catechists and volunteers must not participate in non-essential discussions about a positive test.*

Regarding the possible closure of a faith formation classroom/location

Participants' parents/guardians are asked to inform the parish faith formation leader and/or pastor if their child's public or non-parochial private school classroom moves to a virtual environment due to a COVID-19 exposure. The faith

formation classroom/location should be closed as well and formation should move to a non-gathered (online or otherwise) approach.

(Note: Due to the variation between school districts in approaches to school learning formats, one school district's actions do not necessarily provide an adequate gauge for the need to temporarily shut down a parish faith formation classroom or move a whole program to non-gathered. Given this circumstance for virtually every parish program in the diocese, the input for faith formation program decision-making in this regard must be more direct than "doing what the schools are doing." Therefore, we should rely on direct input from our parents/guardians and communicate this clearly to them. However challenging this may seem, faith formation leaders will need to remain well-informed about the schools represented in their parish programs and should be readily available and open for communication from parents/guardians.)

Mental and Spiritual Health

Contact local health department to inquire about community resources available for families experiencing difficulties.

Assemble resources that can be offered to parents and catechists regarding spiritual wellness.

Catechetical Engagement

Finalize in-person and non-gathered formats to be utilized in various scenarios. Incorporate virtual learning strategies into in-person sessions so that, if the need to move to virtual arises, all will be prepared.

Assist catechists in becoming comfortable with hybrid or virtual methods that include best practices for blended or remote learning.

Clearly communicate with parents and guardians regarding faith formation plans for all potential scenarios and state-determined phases of reopening before the start of the program year.

Plan how to monitor and assess the following:

Connectivity and Access: Ensure that all students and families have adequate connectivity and the devices necessary to successfully engage in and complete Faith Formation lessons.

Attendance: Develop approaches to monitor and track students' online engagement (for example, online check-ins following social media guidelines, phone calls to/through parents, socially distant in-person check-ins, etc.).

Student's engagement in learning: Catechists should engage and provide feedback to students and families. Students should be given opportunities to pray, discuss and reflect, in an age-appropriate manner, material.

Organize and centralize helpful online and non-gathered resources that were created, published, or distributed during the closure period for easy access.

If a faith formation participant's public school classroom has to move online due to a confirmed case of COVID-19 in that classroom, the participant's faith formation class should also move to a non-gathered approach until able to return to in-person faith formation according to local health department guidelines.