

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
BEST PRACTICES TO CONTINUE PARISH BASED RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
FOR THE 2021-2022 CATECHETICAL YEAR

The below are recommendations for safely resuming in-person formation classes.

In-person (classroom) Faith Formation:

- Set up rooms with a minimum of 6' distance of individual space for catechists, children/youth
 - Children/youth should all be facing the same direction (i.e. desks, tables & chairs, mats, etc.)
 - Use a larger facility if the classroom space is too small to social distance (i.e. parish hall, church, gym, etc.) for faith formation classes.
- Train catechists and volunteers with regard to safety and health protocols regarding distancing, cleaning, disinfecting, etc.
 - Catholic Mutual offers advice on their website for this
 - Symptoms of COVID-19 and what to watch for in themselves and children
- Schedule cleaning and disinfecting of spaces used
 - Know whose responsibility it will be to ensure cleaning/disinfecting happens
 - Parishes may have janitorial staff taking care of the church; but, they may not be responsible for other parts of the parish plant (i.e. classrooms)
 - Ensure there are sufficient supplies and materials needed (disinfectant, gloves, masks, etc.)
 - Be aware that parishes with large groups of children and multiple other formation ministries who share a common space may find this task more complicated and may require greater effort in planning.
 - Identify frequently touched areas (door handles, tables, desks, chairs, light switches, copy machines, etc.)
- Limit non-essential visitors and that all visitors wear a mask and maintain social distancing guidelines.
- Provide CDC approved hand sanitizer for every classroom for older children. Allow handwashing with soap and water for all children
- Stagger arrival/dismissal times, bathroom visits, etc. to avoid congregation of groups
- Avoid instances where masks would have to be removed such as meals, snacks, etc. indoors
- Provide or recommend children bring bottled water rather than using water fountains or sinks
 - Water should be consumed outside of classroom
- Ensure each individual (catechists, children, youth, guests) wears a mask (3-ply) while at parish facilities. (neck gaiters, bandanas, masks with valves, or face shields may not be used in place of a mask)
 - Those who are medically excused from wearing a mask should have accommodations made for them to use distanced learning options from home.
 - Have appropriate sized masks for any children, youth, or adults who forget or lose theirs.
- Encourage those who are ill to stay home
- Ensure that books and other materials are not shared by children.
 - Each child should take possession of and be responsible for bringing books or materials to class each session.
 - If possible, text books or workbooks, folders, etc. may be stored at the parish facility if each child has a specific location where their materials may be kept separately (cubby, desk, etc.) and only the individual child accesses the materials.

- Avoid any activities that include contact between participants (i.e. games, holding hands, etc.) Social distancing should be maintained
- Provide alternatives or accommodations to in-person catechesis for parents who are concerned about their child attending class.
 - Let empathy and compassion be your guide for parents concerned about the health and safety of their child, family, etc.
 - No “mandatory” in-person classes, community service, projects, etc.

Hybrid (gathered/virtual/at home) Faith Formation

- The Office of Faith Formation for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe advises Parish Catechetical Leaders to have a contingency plan for distanced, at-home, or web-based Religious Education (Faith Formation, Catechism classes) **should the need arise once again.**
- Obtain, recently signed, parent /legal guardian permission for student to use web conference/internet based platform (safe environment protocols) which includes recognition that classes will be recorded and stored for a time.
- Obtain, recently signed, parent/legal guardian permission for parish to post photos or screen-shots on parish website, official Facebook, Instagram etc.
- Have two (2) safe environment certified adult catechists or youth ministers present for on-line or phone conference classes at all times
- Ensure adult catechists stay connected/on-line (“in the room”) until every child logs off the platform so children are not left on the platform unsupervised.
- Know the protocols for the platform being used to keep participants safe and protect them from on-line predators
- Be aware of family limitations to technology and scheduling conflicts based on school requirements or parent work requirements and be flexible when mandating attendance
 - Provide alternatives for those without Wi-Fi access, those who have data limits on smart phones or have limited shared devices.
- Check in regularly via phone, video chat, email, Flock Note, etc. with parents/guardians/grandparents who will not be participating in gathered, in-person session to see how they are doing, if they need help or prayers, if they have questions, etc.
- Provide a Code of Conduct for those opting to participate in virtual classes.
 - Code of conduct would apply to parents, grandparents, godparents who join in the class discussions
- Address bad behavior of the child with child and parents as soon as possible (a parent or guardian should be in the vicinity of the area the child is connected to the class)
- Learn what resources Catholic publishers offer for on-line learning.
 - Most have on-line components that complement text books for faith formation as well as worksheets, etc.
 - Religious Education publishers offer webinars on “how to” use their on-line services and any associated costs.