



COVID-19 HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDANCE

Parish Faith Formation/Youth Ministry Programs 2021-2022 Catechetical Year

Office of Lay Ministry & Parish
Faith Formation
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2021 -2022 Catechetical Year
Introduction

**** This Guidance was originally published in September 2021. Text in red below reflects updates as of December 2021. See accompanying memo for complete details.****

With Catechetical Sunday (September 19th)** just two weeks away, one can sense the enthusiasm and excitement for new opportunities to share the message of Jesus Christ as it is lived and celebrated in our Catholic tradition. Over the past eighteen months, we have learned not to allow the ongoing pandemic to dampen our joy for sharing the Gospel. Rather, this time has given birth to so many new and creative ways to draw families, children, young people, and adults closer to Jesus and to our Catholic community!

The following guidance is intended to support parishes in offering faith formation/youth ministry programming, **specifically for any in-person sessions**, in a way that promotes the health and safety of all involved. Based on recent recommendations from multiple entities (e.g. NYS Department of Health, the Centers for Disease Control, and our own diocesan Catholic Schools), this guidance expands on, and more clearly defines, the initial guidance that was offered in the Memorandum of August 12th.

Before proceeding, it is important to note:

1. Parishes are expected to offer meaningful faith formation/youth ministry opportunities and programming during the coming catechetical year.
2. Parishes are free to decide on the best method for offering such opportunities and programs based on the needs of their local community (e.g. in-person, virtual, at-home, hybrid, etc.). Hybrid and virtual programs should observe [Guidelines on Use of Virtual Platforms in Faith Formation & Youth Ministry Programs](#).
3. For any in-person sessions, parishes are required to adhere to the guidance below.
4. Given the ever-changing nature of this pandemic, this guidance is subject to change at any time. **Therefore, it is most important to monitor your diocesan faith formation email on a regular basis.**
5. Great pastoral sensitivity should be exercised for those families in a faith formation program who express reservation about participating due to concerns about COVID-19. Alternative options should be explored and offered.

Wearing of Masks

- Masks are required to be worn at all times indoors by all parties regardless of vaccination status.
- Masks are not required outdoors provided appropriate physical distancing can be maintained.
- Depending on the length of a program or session, mask breaks with appropriate physical distancing should be considered.

Physical Distancing

- Physical distancing of at least 3-feet should be maintained in classrooms and/or other indoor locations, combined with mask-wearing. Every effort should be made to prevent excessive crowding, especially as participants arrive, depart, or travel throughout the facility.
- If participants are eating, they should maintain at least 6-feet of physical distancing.

Parents/Other Visitors/Large Group Gatherings

- Parents and other visitors are required to adhere to the policies regarding masks and physical distancing.
- It is recommended that parents/other visitors be limited to the most essential necessary, especially in areas where community transmission is moderate, substantial, or high.
- Larger group gatherings of a necessary nature (e.g. parent meetings) can be held provided the meeting space allows for at least 3 feet of social distancing along with mask wearing. Virtual options should be considered where appropriate.

Serving of Food

- Food and beverages can be served provided that it is done in such a way as to avoid excessive crowding and to provide appropriate physical distancing while eating as noted above.
- Current CDC guidance suggests that there is a very low risk of transmission from surfaces or shared objects. Usual food safety precautions should be employed.

Symptoms of Illness/Positive COVID-19 Test Results

- Anyone with signs of infectious illness, **such as influenza or COVID-19**, should stay home and be encouraged to consult with their healthcare provider for appropriate care and possible testing for COVID-19, **regardless of vaccination status**.
- **Catechists, volunteers, and families should be educated about when they and their children should stay home and when they can return.**

- Out of care for others, anyone associated with the program who tests positive for COVID-19, should alert the catechetical/youth ministry leader. Local health departments will advise the effected individual, the leader and/or any other parties about possible exposure and the appropriate protocols to be followed (e.g. quarantining, contact tracing).
- **In such situations, regardless of contact tracing by the local health department, it is recommended that the catechetical/youth ministry leader send a courtesy email to all who may have had contact with the positive case.**
- **A sample text such an email: *We have been informed that an individual who participated in our faith formation session on [day, date, time] has tested positive for COVID-19. Although we have been following all recommended prevention protocols, we encourage you to monitor for symptoms and consult your healthcare provider with any questions or concerns. In addition, you may wish to refer to current CDC guidance about testing relative to one's vaccination status. Let us continue to ask the intercession of Our Lady, Health of the Sick, for an end to this pandemic.***
- Designating a space to isolate anyone who falls ill with infectious illness symptoms during a session should be continued.

Cleaning/Ventilation

- Routine cleaning should be maintained with particular attention given to disinfect high-touch surface areas.
- If there has been someone with an infectious illness or who has tested positive for COVID-19 in your facility in the previous 24 hours, the spaces they used should be cleaned and disinfected, **though it is recommended that you wait as long as possible (at least several hours) before you clean and disinfect.**
- If **feasible and safe to do so**, use spaces that have windows and open windows and leave “classroom” doors open to promote natural air flow (weather permitting).
- In the event that the NYS Commissioner of Health issues an emergency declaration for an airborne infectious disease as presenting serious risk to public health, the parish’s *NY Hero Act Infectious Disease Exposure Prevention Plan* will go into effect. (Refer to Chancellor’s Memo of August 3, 2021 sent to all parishes.)

Handwashing/Hand Sanitizer/Respiratory Etiquette

- Regular handwashing and practicing respiratory etiquette should continue to be encouraged through reminders and signage. In addition, hand sanitizer should be readily available.

Health Attestations/Attendance Record

- Though anyone with signs of infectious illness, such as influenza or COVID-19, should stay home (see **Symptoms of Illness/Positive COVID-19 Test Results** above), unlike last year, health attestations are **not** required unless there is a directive from the county Department of Health.
- However, as always, attendance records should be maintained. This should include any adults who are in the facility for an extended period of time – e.g., catechists, other volunteers, parents.

Conclusion

As always, please know that you do not walk this journey alone. The staff of the Office of Lay Ministry and Parish Faith Formation stands ready to assist you. We thank you for your continued cooperation and pray that this new catechetical year will be filled with many blessings. Let us continue to pray for one another, for an end to this pandemic, and for all those who have endured loss and hardship due to it. ***Our Lady of Good Counsel, pray for us!***