



To: Pastors and Parish Catechetical Leaders

From: Gregory A. Coogan, Secretary for Catechetical Formation

Date: August 11, 2021

Re: Parish School of Religion and Faith Formation Sessions for 2021 - 2022

The Catholic Church has an all embracing responsibility to assure that ministry activities and environment are safe and conducive to growth and transformational encounters with Christ for all those we serve. Attention to this responsibility is an expression of our commitment to a consistent ethic of life.

Thank you for your cooperation, creativity and all the work you have done to keep children, young people and adults engaged in the ministry of catechetical formation successfully through in-person, virtual, family and home-school learning in the midst of the ongoing pandemic. We are looking forward to the gifts and blessing of this new ministry year, building upon the skills and relationships that were developed this past year.

We ask parish leaders and parents to thoughtfully and prayerfully read the most current information and recommendations from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) for your information and to inform your decisions. Throughout this past year and a half, much has been learned and yet we continue to learn as situations change.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>

<https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/resources/news-releases-news-you-can-use/odh-news-release-k12-07-27-21>

This guidance is for the Diocese of Cleveland's PSR and Faith Formation Programs for the beginning of the 2021 – 2022 ministry year. As COVID-19 seems to be resurging and new variants of the virus emerge in some parts of Northeast Ohio, it is necessary once again to offer recommendations and reminders based on the latest guidance of federal, state and local public health agencies.

Our plan for in-person PSR and catechetical sessions continues to be based on multiple strategies that work together to layer protection for children, young people and adults. Parish leaders will

also consider the guidelines of the facility where sessions take place. **Pastors and the parish team continue to make the determination on your parish's best path forward.**

Masks

Masks are strongly recommended by the Center for Disease Control, the Ohio Department of Health and the American Academy of Pediatrics to be worn indoors for all individuals fully vaccinated or not, including children older than 2 years old while indoors or at crowded outdoor settings, except for individuals who cannot safely wear a mask. Masks may always be worn, and are encouraged. To be effective, face masks should cover the nose, mouth, and chin of the student and catechist. Please note that the decision to mask or not is a decision of the student's parent or guardian; options for faith formation must be provided for families who do not want their children to wear masks.

Considerations

- Masks may be required for a period of time in the event of a parish COVID outbreak, or the local health department deems it to be a necessary step due to local circumstances.

As parents are deciding the masking choice best for their child, we invite you to also consider the following:

- There may be some children in your child's class or session who may be more vulnerable or whose family has suffered a loss due to COVID. These families may feel strongly about wearing masks as some feel about not wearing one. Respect for either parental choice should be shown.
- Consider the bigger picture when making your own masking choice. Parish leaders and catechists reported very little concern on the part of students last year; they were pretty adaptable. Particularly during an uptick in cases in the area, the more loving thing to do may be to wear a mask; especially if we come face to face with the delta or other variants.
- Whatever your decision, please speak with your children about your expectations that they are respectful of their other classmates, regardless of the mask choice of the family.

Vaccinations

Vaccinations for COVID are not required in the Diocese of Cleveland. Those who are eligible should seriously consider getting vaccinated to ensure their health and that of others. Parents are strongly encouraged to consider having their eligible children vaccinated when recommended by the child's health care provider.

Physical Distancing

Regular occupancy numbers in classrooms and other meeting spaces may resume, with adherence to the **three-foot physical distance** recommended by the CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics as much as possible.

Other Mitigation Measures: Continuation of these successful strategies from 2020 – 2021

- Frequent Hand-Washing & Use of Hand Sanitizer
- Intentional Cleaning and Disinfection
- Attention to Improving Ventilation

Health and Safety Assessment

Parents are asked to keep children home with any signs of infectious disease and seek advice from a health care professional for needed care and/or testing. Prior to coming to faith formation sessions (PSR), parents shall conduct a health check of their child, to assess whether the child is experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. Symptoms include, but are not limited to:

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| i. Fever of over 100 °F | viii. New loss of taste or smell |
| ii. Chills | ix. Sore throat |
| iii. Cough | x. Congestion or runny nose |
| iv. Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing | xi. Nausea or vomiting |
| v. Fatigue | xii. Diarrhea |
| vi. Muscle or body aches | xiii. Repeated shaking with chills |
| vii. Headache | |

For up to date information about COVID-19 symptoms and for an interactive symptom checker/self-assessment tool, parents and guardians should visit the website of the Center for Disease Control (“CDC”) at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>.

Contact Tracing and Exposure: Parishes will report any student or adult cases of COVID-19 as required to their local health department and follow their guidelines for quarantining and contact tracing.

Parish Faith Formation Options

Parishes may consider a hybrid approach to PSR sessions, parent meetings, and other gatherings.

Parish programs may use remote learning to continue religious faith formation when gathering in large groups is not possible or families may be reluctant to participate. Family-based catechesis in the home using remote learning engages families and students through a variety of learning opportunities which can be delivered online or offline.

Parishes using “live” virtual settings with children and young people (ages 13 – 18) are required to obtain parental or guardian consent for Virtual Faith Formation including Sacramental Preparation sessions. Please see the Parental Consent Form made available from the diocesan legal team and available in the Digital Academy.

Parish Catechetical Leaders, parish catechists and youth ministry leaders are required to be familiar with diocesan policies including the Diocese of Cleveland’s *Standards of Conduct for Ministry* as well as guidelines and best practices.

Shared resources and best practices are available within the Digital Academy at <https://doc.digitalacademy.org/Curricula/Login>

Links to local health departments

[Ashland County Health Department](#)
[Cuyahoga County Board of Health](#)
[Geauga County Public Health](#)
[Lake County General Health District](#)
[Lorain County Public Health](#)
[Medina County Health Department](#)

[Summit County Public Health](#)
[Wayne County Health Department](#)

[City of Cleveland Health Department](#)

The Catechetical Team is here to be of assistance, support and a resource for you. Please contact us at any time.

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