



**COVID Guidance
for Parish Catechetical Programs
August 30, 2021**

As we begin the Fall, we continue to monitor evolutions in COVID variants, Massachusetts State mandates, as well as CDC guidance. Below are guidance and recommendations for parish catechetical programs in light of recent developments. Please continue to monitor our State and your local board of health's guidance, as they are subject to change. To this end, it is important to have ready and established means of communicating changes with families and participants.

Masks

Parish Catechetical programs are to utilize the Massachusetts State mask guidelines for schools, which requires all staff and students ages 5 and above to wear a mask while indoors, regardless of vaccination status. Masks are not required while outdoors or while eating indoors. Currently, this mandate is in effect until October 1, 2021, at which time the State will reevaluate.

Distancing

We recommend the following distancing guidance, issued by the DESE, DPH, and CDC, which advised that “because of the importance of in-person learning, schools where not everyone is fully vaccinated should implement physical distancing to the extent possible within structures, but should not exclude students from in-person learning to keep a minimum distance required.”

Sanitation

It is recommended that proper sanitation and hand washing should continue to be used as a best practice throughout programs. This aids in illness prevention as we enter flu season, which can mimic COVID symptoms. If an individual or volunteer is COVID positive, and was present in the facility, used spaces should be properly cleaned and disinfected.

Exposure or Exhibiting Symptoms

Families and individuals should be reminded that anyone feeling sick or exhibiting symptoms should not attend in person. Efforts should be made to pastorally accommodate those who are sick, symptomatic, at-risk, or who care for someone who is at-risk. At this time, neither contact tracing nor symptom checks of participants are required.

Current CDC guidance recommends the following for those who have had known close contact (within 6 ft for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hr period) to someone with confirmed COVID-19:

- Those who are unvaccinated should self-isolate and be tested within 3-5 days
- Those who are vaccinated should be tested within 3-5 days and wear a mask in indoor settings

- Those who have tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 3 months and recovered do not need to get tested following an exposure as long as they do not develop new symptoms

Live and Virtual Sessions

Maintaining in-person relationships and ministries is especially important now as we strive to call people back to Church and focus on the importance of Mass, as the wider dispensation from the Sunday obligation was lifted. Even when utilizing at-home formation options, consider ways to gather families and participants together throughout the year, so as to foster community and connect families to the liturgy and life of the Church.

If parishes choose to utilize virtual meeting platforms to gather with minors (such as Zoom, GoToMeeting, or Google Meet), parishes should follow the following guidelines:

- It is important to remember that all interactions, whether in-person or virtual, must adhere to the Diocesan Code of Conduct.
- Parental consent should be obtained with clear communication about the way students will engage in ministry, whether sessions are recorded for security purposes, and if recordings can be accessed by students not in attendance. Participants should be made aware that they are being recorded.
- Recordings must be managed by the faith formation staff and not publicly posted.
- The Rule of Two is still the best practice, whether in-person or virtual.
- Links to join virtual sessions should not be publicly posted, but rather sent to registered individuals.
- Utilize the security features available on the platform you use, such password, waiting room, and turning off share screen and private chat for participants.
- Leaders should review virtual meeting etiquette with all students, including being aware of background when on video and remaining on mute when not speaking.
- Screenshots of the class or participants should not be taken or shared.

For Safe Environment questions, including on virtual protocol, please contact:

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