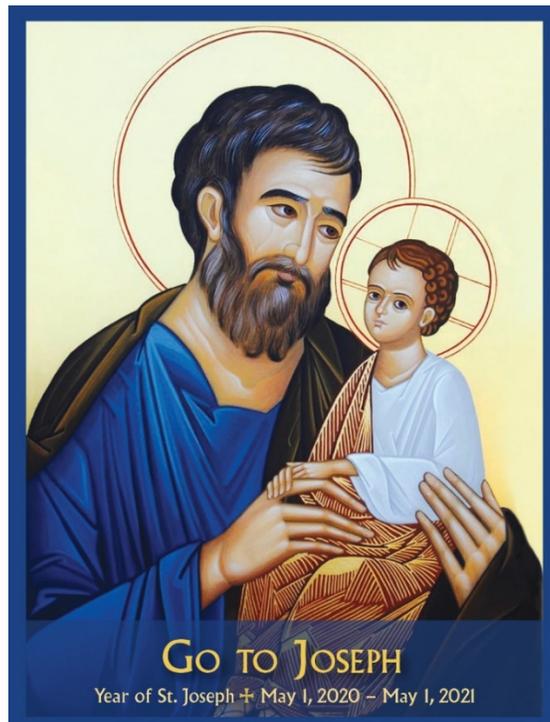




Diocese of La Crosse

Directives and Guidelines  
for Parish Catechetical Leaders and  
their Support Team  
to re-open Faith Formation Programs & Youth Ministry  
Fall, 2020



**St. Joseph, Pillar of Families, pray for us!**

July 31, 2020

On May, 1, 2020, Bishop William Patrick Callahan declared a year to St. Joseph. It is appropriate that we ask for the intercession of this very powerful saint. May his prayers, combined with our own, lead to greater understanding of how to faithfully form and lead the parents and their sons and daughters to Jesus Christ.

### **Why Go to St. Joseph?**

The year 2020 marks the 150th anniversary of Blessed Pius IX's decree naming St. Joseph as the Patron and Protector of the Universal Church. He is also our primary patron, and of course, the Cathedral of St. Joseph the Workman is named for him.

In this challenging time, we can turn to St. Joseph with great hope:

- We can turn to him as protector from harm and evil, as he protected Mary and the child Jesus from Herod's wrath. May he protect all of the members of families from anything that prevents them from growing in their love of Jesus Christ, His Church and each other.
- St. Joseph was worker and provider for the Holy Family, so to him we can entrust ourselves, the children and young people in the Parish Programs, and our nation in the face of unprecedented unemployment and economic distress.
- As model husband and father, we turn to St. Joseph at a time when good examples of both are so desperately needed. We can ask him to help strengthen our families – as well as the bonds of our “parish family” – at a time when these can be fragile.
- As patron of the dying, we can invoke the intercession of St. Joseph on all who are in their last moments of life, including the elderly and others with terminal disease.

# Table of Contents

Letter from the Director for Catechesis and Evangelization and Family Life	page 3
<b>Mandated Items</b>	<b>page 4</b>
<b>Guidelines</b>	<b>page 5</b>
Have a Vision and a Plan	
Holy Mass	
Recommendations from local County Health and Department of Public Instruction (only that from DPI which will be related to the Faith Formation Program)	
Hygiene and Cleanliness	page 6
New Procedures and Policies	pages 6-7
COVID-19 Case Procedure	
Social Distancing	
Visitors	
Drinking Fountains	
Shared Materials	
Illness and Absenteeism	page 8
Screening	
Physical Health	
Faith Formation closure due to absenteeism	
Human Resource Guidelines	page 9
Communication	page 9
Checklist	Page 10

July 31, 2020  
St. Ignatius of Loyola

Dear Catechetical Leader and Youth Minister,

Thank you for your continued service to the families of the parish. Some children around the Diocese are just now receiving their First Holy Communion and young people are being confirmed. Your perseverance and ongoing good work through these challenging times are greatly appreciated and inspiring.

As we look to the fall, it is Bishop Callahan's desire that the Parish Faith Formation and Youth Ministry Programs move forward with plans to open with in-person sessions. Bishop respects that this is a local decision to be properly made after receiving permission from your pastor, consulting with some stakeholders, and the parish is able to do so, according to safety protocols.

These pages are meant to assist you as you prepare to welcome children and young people back to the Parish Faith Formation Programs and Youth Ministry, with the necessary preparations that include mandates for all, as well as recommendations to draw from, as each parish has different situations. Our greatest desire is that you know that we are here to serve you, and have peace as you prepare for and open in the fall. Further, our hope and prayer is that all students, parents, catechists and volunteers feel safe and are at peace, while growing in their relationship with Jesus Christ throughout the entire 2020-2021 year.

It is important for parents to know that you are taking every reasonable precaution, with their help, to keep the catechetical environment safe and healthy. Many parents will gladly send their children to participate in the program so long as they know you have a plan that is being implemented effectively by parish staff, catechists, and volunteers. During these last months, there has been a tremendous impetus to help parents serve as primary educators of their children. While we broaden our focus to include parish catechetical and youth ministry program offerings, let's keep the momentum in communicating with parents and providing them with solid resources for them to continue to take an active part in their family's faith formation.

One of the most important aspects, and is a necessity, is your commitment to personal, daily prayer. Quiet time with Our Lord on a regular basis, and reading His Word for courage and guidance, will provide you with the needed strength to lead and remain focused on the goal at hand: leading others to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. May God guide your decisions and grant that your efforts bear good fruit, by His grace and mercy.

Thank you. Sincerely in Christ,

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## **Mandated items**

All Parish Catechetical Leaders and Catechists in the Diocese of La Crosse are to complete this list of items as part of the reopening process.

1. Before a Parish Faith Formation Program reopens the catechetical leader must receive approval from:
  - The Pastor of the Parish
2. The Catechetical Leader and Support Team needs to work with its local county health department to insure that the re-opening of the Parish Program goes smoothly.
3. Children and young people will be taught or review the importance of proper hygiene:
  - Washing hands often with soap and water for twenty or more seconds
  - Sanitizing hands when soap and water are unavailable
  - Keeping hands away from one's face - not touching one's face
  - When sneezing or coughing, to sneeze or cough into a tissue or an elbow
4. Students who do not feel well should stay home.
  - Documented instructions to parents and guardians about keeping their son/daughter home if they do not feel well must be communicated before the first day of Parish Programs. Symptoms of being ill include fever, stomach ailments, sore throat, a bad cough, difficulty breathing, headaches, etc.
5. The catechetical leader / catechists / adults who do not feel well should stay home.
6. All adults and students are required to follow Governor Evers's executive order to wear masks indoors. Unless a documented medical excuse from a medical professional is given, all adults and students five-years old and above are required to wear masks. Face shields are okay for catechists when students need to read their lips when teaching. Masks should be provided by families, but the parish program should also have a supply.
7. Parish Hall / the Religious Education building, school entryways, hallways, bathrooms, and classrooms need adequate signage to help encourage proper hygiene, such as a picture of washing hands. Go to <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/posters.html> for examples. Signage is to be placed on the entrance door reminding anyone with fever or flu-like symptoms not to enter the building.
8. The following plans must be on file, ready to use, and updated regularly:
  - Family-based catechesis and virtual learning (if possible) so that if the Program is shut down, there will be no lapse in Faith Formation.
  - Response to a student diagnosed with COVID-19
  - Response to a catechetical leader, catechist etc. diagnosed with COVID-19
  - Each parish must have a Security Plan, and those adults involved in the program are to be trained according to this plan.
9. Review, edit as necessary and understand the Student / Parent Handbook so that policies can be implemented and enforced.
  - Be consistent in doing what you say you will do. Follow-through is essential.

## **Guidelines**

### **Have a Vision and a Plan**

1. Are you taking time for personal, daily prayer and quiet reflection? Prayer is a necessity as you need the power of God's grace to be His witness and to do His work with charity.
2. What is your pastor asking of you?
3. Are you communicating with your catechists, parents and others in leadership positions? Do you have sense of what parents want from the Parish Program?
4. What is the Parish mission statement?
5. What are the Parish priorities?
6. Develop a team to put details into a general plan that you develop.
  - a. The team needs to recognize their role as servants called upon to assist in leadership.
7. Reach out to other catechetical leaders in the Diocese of La Crosse, especially those in the deanery. Discuss your plans with others and listen to their plans.
  - a. Every parish has a specific physical plan, schedule, etc. but there are similarities.

### **Holy Mass**

The source and summit of the Christian life is the celebration of Holy Mass. On May 14, 2020, Bishop Callahan provided the priests in the Diocese of La Crosse with guidelines for the public celebration of Holy Mass. We must follow these instructions from Bishop Callahan. Please talk with your pastor on the best way to stay within the Bishop's instructions for Masses celebrated during Parish Faith Formation.

### **Recommendations from the County Health Department and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI)**

Parishes in counties that issue regulations for school reopening will need to work with the regulations that apply to the Parish Faith Formation Program. It is the recommendation of the Diocese of La Crosse that when counties do not issue their own guidance or regulations, parishes should review the DPI information for safety, cleanliness of the facility, methods for teaching students, physical set-up of the room, etc. Parishes must determine their ability to comply with these recommendations. Some recommendations however, may not be feasible. Strict compliance with DPI guidance is not recommended nor is it possible in some areas, so parishes may need to be creative and imaginative as they determine how to ensure student and catechists safety. The following elements are key:

1. Communication and involvement of both parents and catechists in the decision-making process is essential. While no solution will work for everyone, new ways of operating will succeed only with parent and catechist support.
2. Consultation with the local public school districts, when school bus transportation is available to students in Faith Formation.
3. Flexibility in all things, most especially, to include formation at the parish and in the home during the year.

The link to the DPI's guidebook, *Education Forward*, for reopening schools (that is also helpful for reopening parish programs) is:

[https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/Education\\_Forum\\_web.pdf](https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/Education_Forum_web.pdf)

## **Hygiene and Cleanliness**

1. Parishioners are needed to help clean the building
  - a. Will parents need to help catechists clean their classrooms / gathering areas and other areas of the building?
2. All adults should wash their hands before entering the classroom / gathering area. Hands should be scrubbed with soap for twenty or more seconds.
3. Hand sanitizers and wipes should be readily available.
  - a. Adults must make certain younger students are using these properly. The high alcohol content of hand sanitizers means younger students cannot be licking their hands.
  - b. If a student, catechist, or aide leaves a classroom, he or she should sanitize his or her hands when reentering the classroom.
4. Public areas of the building, where people gather and illnesses are commonly spread, should be cleaned before the Program begins, if it is a Catholic school in operation, and after the Religious Education ends each week.
5. Each building, that is not a Catholic school, should be deep-cleaned often.
6. Parishes may consider using a fog chemical that is safe to accomplish this deep clean.
7. Catechetical leaders and catechists should try to limit physical contact with students. (no handshakes, high fives, fist bumps, etc.).
8. Children and young people need to be instructed that they should do their best to always cough or sneeze into their elbow or a tissue, that is then to be discarded. At all times, this needs to be modeled well by adults.
9. After blowing their noses, students should discard the used tissue and wash or sanitize their hands. Again, adults should model this practice.
10. Catechetical leaders and catechists should discreetly correct students who do not have good hygiene practices.

Note: Some parents will be very sensitive to cleanliness. Anything that even looks disorganized may appear to them as being unclean, and therefore, at risk for spreading the coronavirus. Therefore, the catechists' rooms and gathering areas need to be tidy and clean.

## **New Procedures and Policies**

1. The catechetical leader, in conjunction with the catechists, are to have a documented plan on how they will quickly move to parents teaching their children at home, along with possible distance learning provided by the catechists.
  - a. The plan is to include necessary student, parents and catechist material for use at home.
  - b. This plan should be on file with the catechetical leader.

## **COVID-19 Case Procedure**

1. A student or employee who is diagnosed with COVID-19 should receive documented permission from a medical professional (doctor, nurse practitioner, PA, etc.) to return to the parish program.

- a. The catechetical leader and catechists should make adjustments to work with students and parents who are unable to come to the parish program.
  - b. If a classroom(s)/gathering area is impacted by a student or adult diagnosed with COVID-19, the room should remain unused for three calendar days and be deep cleaned before it can be used again.
2. A student or adult who is directly exposed to a person who is carrying COVID-19 should quarantine for fourteen calendar days (or as recommended by your county health department.)
  - a. Parish programs should prepare for an entire class needing to engage in parents teaching in the home and/or distance learning (or a combination of both) for fourteen days.

### Social Distancing

1. It is important that social distancing be practiced by adults and should be encouraged among students. The recommendation is that this does not become a rule with consequences.
  - a. The current recommended standard for social distancing is 6 feet apart and 25% capacity of the space being used.
2. It is recommended that the parish program develop procedures to limit the amount of students passing in a hallway.
  - a. For some smaller programs this may be an unnecessary recommendation.
  - b. A possibility is to have staggered start and end times (by a couple of minutes) for multiple grades.
  - c. An alternative may be dividing the hallway in half and having students move in one direction on one side of the hall and the other direction on the other side of the hall.
3. Smaller rooms (bathrooms, offices, maintenance work areas, etc.) should not have more than nine people in them at one time.

### Visitors

1. People visiting the building where religious education is held should visit for essential Faith formation experiences or vital business only.
  - a. A speaker to present to the students on the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary is important.
  - b. A charitable parishioner who wants to help stuff classroom folders is nice, but this is probably not an essential visit.

### Drinking Fountains

1. It is recommended that drinking fountains be turned off. Students should be instructed to bring their own water bottles.

### Shared Materials

1. Unless they are sanitized between each use, students should not share books, materials, or equipment.

## **Illness and Absenteeism**

### **Screening**

1. Parish programs are not to screen students as they enter the building. To screen means to take temperatures or ask health related questions.
  - a. It is the responsibility of the parent (or guardian) to make certain a child is healthy and able to attend faith formation.
  - b. If, during Faith Formation, a student appears to have an illness, the parish will help the student and also proceed with a standard medical response like taking the student's temperature and isolate him/her. We need to be vigilant and not ignore possible symptoms of an illness.
2. Parishes will cooperate with county or municipal health departments if a student or employee is diagnosed with a COVID-19 or another serious illness.
  - a. You need to document well.

### **Physical Health**

1. Be prepared: Know local health clinic and hospital information.
2. Establish an "isolation room" for ill students. Sick students should wait in an isolation room until a parent or guardian arrives to take them home.
3. It is recommended that catechetical leaders strongly discourage travel for students and catechists.
  - a. If someone travels outside Wisconsin, the catechetical leader may ask for destination information to determine if it will be necessary for the returning student(s) or catechist(s) be kept out of the parish building for fourteen calendars after the date he or she returns.
4. Make certain all catechists, aids and other volunteers understand there are health risks to working with children and young people.
5. Invest in contact-free thermometers.
  - a. Students who have a temperature over 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit will need to be sent home immediately with a parent or guardian.
  - b. Catechists, aids, volunteers with temperatures over 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit need to be sent home.
6. The catechetical leader and catechist are encouraged to communicate with parents when their son or daughter are enduring a prolonged illness.

### **Closure of the Faith Formation Program due to absenteeism**

In the case of a widespread illness in the state, county, or community, the parish program could close for an extended time period out of concern for the health of all involved.

If there is potential for seasonal or pandemic illness affecting your parish community:

1. Monitor daily attendance and reasons for absences.
2. If student absences reach a level of 20%, alert the county or municipal health department.
3. If absences go beyond 20% of the students, consider closing the program.
  - a. The decision to close the parish program due to high absenteeism is serious; you must have the permission of your pastor or dean to close.

## **Human Resource Guidelines**

These H.R. guidelines should be seriously considered as they were developed in consultation with Jessica Kirchner, the attorney for the Diocese of La Crosse.

### Illness among the catechetical leader and catechists

Employees who are (1) ill or experiencing any symptoms of COVID, including, limitation, fever, cough, shortness of breath, and excessive fatigue, (2) have a suspected or diagnosed/confirmed case of COVID, (3) have been exposed to any person with a suspected or diagnosed/confirmed case of COVID, (4) returning from outside the United States, any cruise, or any domestic location that has been identified as a viral hotbed by the local county department of health, or (5) have been exposed to any person returning from outside the United States, any cruise, or any domestic location that has been identified as a viral hotbed by the local county department of health are prohibited from teaching in the parish Faith Formation program for a period of not less than fourteen (14) days from the occurrence of illness or exposure.

### Communication

1. Make certain you are always honest, sincere, and understood when communicating. Short, succinct communication is usually better than overly descriptive communication.
2. Make certain you are effectively communicating with catechists, parents, students and all volunteers. Communications should be on a regular basis, but not overdone so as to overwhelm.
  - a. During the first two to three weeks of the school year check with them:
    - Are they receiving your communications?
    - What do they understand was communicated?
    - Do they need more information?
  - b. Make necessary changes or adaptations if you are not effectively communicating. The Offices for Catechesis & Evangelization and Family Life (which includes Youth and Young Adult Ministry) are here to serve you.
3. All catechists must know how to conduct themselves if approached by media.
4. Make sure you have the contact information for:
  - a. County health department
  - b. Local clinics and hospitals
  - c. Local schools
  - d. Diocesan offices
5. Effectively communicate with all stakeholders regarding reopening, crisis, and health plans that impact them.
6. Plan together with office employees how to communicate effectively when challenged with difficult comments and / or questions.
  - a. Practice!
7. Politely, but strongly, communicate with parents and guardians the expectations regarding student attendance.
  - a. Guardians need to be made aware that sending children with obvious COVID-19 symptoms is unacceptable

## Checklist

This checklist allows each parish to identify all areas that need to be considered when anticipating reopening the Faith Formation Program in the fall. Each catechetical leader should review this checklist with his or her re-opening team.

### FULL OPENING OF FAITH FORMATION PROGRAM

- Safe Environment Training of all students, parents, catechists, volunteers
- Spacing within the building
  - Signs for safe distancing
  - Use of specified doorways
- Classroom occupancy – seek to keep grades together, only dividing them as a last step
  - Consider lay-out of classroom, spacing of desks, etc.
  - Scheduling
- Removal of non-essential items in classrooms
  - Discourage sharing of items
  - Keep individual belongings separated
- School Sanitizing
  - Hand Sanitizer - at entryways
  - Playground
  - Public areas (office, halls, bathrooms, etc.) partitions, spacing
  - Non - use of drinking fountains
- Masks (catechists, students and / or visitors)
- Limiting building access to visitors
- Field Trip alternatives
- Screening: Parents are to take temperature at home
- Automatic paper towels, soap, and hand sanitizer dispensers
- Automatic faucets, toilets, and light switches
- Plan for sick students or adults
  - At Faith Formation
  - Calling in absent
  - Monitor absences
  - Assign a point of contact for response
- Discussion to help students process the situation since spring
- Mass and Worship plans
- Communication process for the parish, including families, catechists, etc.
  - Clarify and re-communicate personnel expectations, i.e. attendance, etc.
- Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible.
- Catechist training for distance and virtual learning in preparation for possible closure
- Training of students for online platform usage in preparation for possible closure
- In-service parents for online platform usage in preparation for possible closure

It is important to always refer to suggestions / directives given by the CDC and DPI.