



## DIOCESE *of* LACROSSE

### **Guidelines for Parish Faith Formation 2021 – 2022 School Year**

On behalf of Bishop William Patrick Callahan, the Diocese of La Crosse provides the following guidance for our parish Faith Formation Programs in their efforts to safely begin the 2021-2022 school year, due to the ever-changing needs caused by the spread of COVID 19 and the Delta Variant.

With the roll out of the various vaccines last Spring, we hoped that we would have been further removed from the cloud of COVID-19 protocols, however, community spread over the majority of the country, including the counties within the La Crosse Diocese, requires that the guidelines provided prior to the 2020 – 2021 school year remain relevant.

All catechetical leaders, including youth ministers, catechists and volunteers are commended for the extraordinary efforts that were made last year. Our parents, and parish communities are grateful for your continued efforts to support, guide and form our students safely.

All guidelines presented here, are subject to change. We shall communicate openly with all parish catechetical leaders within the Diocese of La Crosse, including maintaining and regularly updating the Diocese's Website. We shall also support each parish in answering questions and providing guidance and resources based upon local infection rate status, to ensure compliance with State, County and Municipality regulations and recommendations vs. mandates which may be issued from time to time.

Most importantly, it is our goal to support the spiritual, mental, and physical health of all parish staff, volunteers and children. Our hope and prayer is that all feel safe and are at peace, while growing in their relationship with Jesus Christ throughout the entire 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. During the last year, there has been a growing impetus to help parents serve as primary educators of their children. Together, let us 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 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. May God guide your decisions and grant that your efforts bear good fruit.

## **2021 – 2022 School year:**

A growing body of research confirms that the very best atmosphere for our students is to be in the classroom. It is our core belief that our children need to be connected to the priest, catechist and volunteers, and their parish community.

The guidelines provided here are subject to change depending on parish and local conditions, with ongoing review by the Diocese of La Crosse COVID-19 Committee, which will continue to meet on a regular basis.

All parishes are to offer some amount of face-to-face formation during the 2021-2022 school year, while including the parents, as the primary educators of their children, a role in the formation of their children.

Primary prevention strategies: (1) Hand washing & respiratory etiquette; (2) Continued focus on providing clean/healthy spaces; (3) Emphasize with staff and families / students to stay at home when sick; (4) Emphasize the importance of testing when COVID-19 symptoms appear.

Secondary prevention strategies: (1) Physical distancing as much as possible (primarily in grades K-5); (2) Contact tracing (as required by public health); (3) Wearing masks is optional, but **strongly** recommended for unvaccinated individuals.

All guidelines presented are subject to change, based upon the local conditions/community spread and hospitalizations associated with the COVID-19 virus. At any time during the school year, if the State of Wisconsin, and / or the appropriate County or Municipal government issues a regulatory order or mandate that requires additional steps/precautions must be taken, our parish programs shall abide by such legal requirement.

Example: Buffalo County issues a mandate that every person or a specific section of the population (i.e.: unvaccinated, under the age of 12 etc.) shall be **REQUIRED** to wear a mask in any indoor setting.

All schools in Buffalo County **SHALL** enforce the proper wearing of masks for all catechists and students during the entire time the County Mandate remains in effect.

## **2021-2022 Vaccines and Masks:**

The Diocese of La Crosse encourages vaccination, as the Church has opined the COVID-19 vaccine is morally acceptable. As of August 18, 2021, The Diocese will:

1). Not require our employees, catechists, volunteers, families, and eligible students to be vaccinated in order to enroll/attend our parish programs. The decision whether or not to vaccinate remains a personal decision.

2). Encourage face masks:

- Face coverings/masks are optional, but highly encouraged. We encourage families to be aware of CDC and public health recommendations and plan accordingly.
- All students, catechetical leaders, catechists, and visitors should have a clean mask readily available (e.g. in their backpack, or desk) just in case it would be needed. For example, if a

student becomes ill, they may be asked to wear a mask until they are picked up.

### Continuing Guidelines

1. Ensure adequate staffing to clean the building
2. All employees should be minimally washing their hands throughout the day, and using hand sanitizer when soap and water are not readily accessible. 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.
    - i. The high alcohol content of hand sanitizers means younger students cannot be licking or chewing on 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. All areas of the building used by parish Faith Formation are to be cleaned on a weekly basis.
5. Each building used by the parish program should be deep cleaned once a month. Parishes may consider using a fog chemical that is safe for schools to accomplish this deep clean.
6. Catechetical leaders, catechists and volunteers should try to limit physical contact with students and other adults. (no handshakes, high fives, fist bumps, etc.).
7. Students need to be instructed that they should do their best to always cough or sneeze into a tissue (discarded) or their elbow. At all times, this needs to be modeled well by parish employees and volunteers.
8. After blowing their noses, students should discard the used tissue and wash or sanitize their hands. Again, adults working in the building should model this practice.
9. Catechetical leaders and catechists should discreetly correct students who do not have good hygiene practices.

Be aware: Some parents and employees will be very sensitive to cleanliness. Anything that even looks disorganized or dirty will translate to unclean in their minds, so everyone's classrooms and work areas should be tidy and spotless. Plus, all employees should be conscious of their personal appearance; an employee who appears messy risk being judged as unhealthy.

### Catechist Distance Learning Plans

1. Every catechist should have a plan on how he or she will quickly move to distance learning or blended learning as may be necessitated by increased illness or county health orders.
  - a. The plan should document necessary student and catechist materials.
    - i. What will the students and catechists need in their homes?
  - b. This plan should be discussed with the catechetical leader.
  - c. Parents /guardians need to be informed that there is a plan in place in the event that the Parish Faith Formation Program is shut down.

### COVID-19 Case Procedure

1. A student or catechist/volunteer who is diagnosed with COVID-19 must follow the County Health /CDC guidelines for returning to the Parish Faith Formation Program after all symptoms have cleared.

- a. The catechetical leader and catechists should make adjustments to work with students and adults who are unable to come to the parish building.
  - b. If a room(s) is impacted by a student or catechist / volunteer diagnosed with COVID-19, the room should be deep cleaned before students/catechists return to that room / area.
2. A student or catechist/volunteer who is directly exposed to a person who is carrying COVID-19 should quarantine as recommended by your county health department.
    - a. Parish programs should prepare for an entire class needing to engage in distance learning during a required / extended quarantine.

### Social Distancing

1. With the continued spread of the Delta variant of Covid-19, it is important that social distancing is practiced by adults and should be encouraged among students. The recommendation is that this not be made into a rule with consequences.
  - a. Discuss with students the ideal of personal space, each person's circle of grace.
  - b. When possible, rooms should be arranged to allow students to socially distance themselves.
  - c. When it is not possible to arrange a room so students can socially distance, students and catechists are highly encouraged to wear masks or clear shields.
2. It is recommended that parish programs develop procedures to limit the amount of students passing in a hallway.
  - a. For some smaller parish building/school this may be an unnecessary recommendation.
  - b. Possibilities:
    - Have different start and end times for multiple classes
  - 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.
  - d. Students are highly encouraged to wear masks in hallways.
3. Smaller rooms (bathrooms, offices, maintenance work areas, etc.) Efforts must be taken to ensure that no rooms have more people enter, than are able to maintain proper social distancing.
  - a. Review meeting size, and utilize larger conference rooms
  - b. Allow scheduled bathroom breaks to ensure no overcrowding

### Visitors

1. People visiting a parish building /school should visit for essential education experiences or vital business.
  - a. A national speaker to present to the students on a matter of faith will be considered essential.
  - b. A charitable family friend who wants to make copies or prepare resources for an activity is nice, but is 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. Students should not share books, materials, or equipment.

## Extracurricular Activities, Field Trips

1. Extracurricular activities will return as normal with the option for individuals to wear masks.
  - There will not be screening, and physical distancing will not be required. (This is subject to change dependent on health department recommendations, or venue rules.
2. At this time, facilities and extracurricular activities will be open to visitors and spectators as normal at 100% capacity; however, please note that attendance is at your own risk and disease transmission is possible. Additionally, at any time, the local Health Department, and parishes may implement changes to the current advisory. All parishes will follow any and all Federal, State, County or Municipal regulation that may be issued / put in place during the course of the school year.
3. Field trips will generally be permitted but may be limited at the discretion of the individual or catechetical leader, taking into account current public health recommendations. Rules and restrictions of field trip venues will be respected.

## Illness and Absenteeism

### Screening

1. Catholic Parish Programs will not screen (take temperatures or ask health related questions) students as they enter the parish/school building.
  - a. It is the responsibility of the parent (guardian) to make certain a child is healthy and able to attend school.
  - b. If, during the parish Faith Formation Program, 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)
    - i. We need to be vigilant and not ignore possible symptoms of an illness.
2. Catholic Parish Programs will cooperate with county or municipal health departments if a student or catechetical leader or catechist or volunteer is diagnosed with a COVID-19 or another serious illness.
  - a. You need to document well.

### Quarantine Guidelines

1. When the parish program has received notification that a student or employee, catechist or volunteer has received a positive Covid-19 diagnosis the following procedures will be followed:
  - a. Contact Tracing will be conducted pursuant to local health department guidelines
  - b. Those fully vaccinated will monitor for symptoms

- c. Unvaccinated individuals / vaccinated who develop symptoms must quarantine pursuant to CDC and/or local guidelines
2. Remote learning shall be available to any quarantined student
3. When a catechist must quarantine, an in-person substitute may fill in, or a room proctor if the individual catechist is able to provide online instruction.

### Physical Health

1. Make certain all student and employee health files are complete and up-to-date.
2. Be prepared and know local health clinic and hospital information.
3. Continue utilization of an “isolation room” for ill students. Sick students should wait in an isolation room until a parent / guardian
4. arrives to take them home.
5. Continue using/making available contactless thermometers.
  - a. Students who have a temperature over 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit will need to be sent home immediately with a guardian.
  - b. A catechetical leader, catechist or volunteer with temperatures over 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit need to be sent home.

### Emotional Health

1. Use the power of prayer to work through difficult situations and problems.
2. All proper crisis plans should be up-to-date, and catechetical leaders, catechists and volunteers trained according to the plans.
  - a. Communicate with other local schools and county or municipal services to make sure support is readily available if needed.
3. Without violating HIPAA laws, make priests and social workers aware of families in need or at risk.
4. If a student, parent, or adult is particularly anxious, consider having another individual be his or her “buddy.”
5. Monitor the emotional health of the catechists and volunteers. Offer retreats and in-services that help adults stay strong spiritually, mentally, and physically. A recommended resource is Franciscan at Home online learning system with workshops that the spiritual life of each person as the highest priority.

### When Students are Absent

1. We must work with parents to promote healthy practices within each parish Faith Formation Program and family.
2. Guardians should keep a child home when the child has obvious symptoms of being ill (fever, stomach ailments, severe running nose, a bad cough, difficulty breathing, headaches, sore throat, etc.).
3. Teachers need to prepare for prolonged student absents. Every teacher needs a plan to work with individual students who miss many days of school in a row; simply having the student “catch-up” is not an option.
4. Administrators and administrative assistants need to monitor student absenteeism closely. Administrators must communicate well with families who are dealing with prolonged illnesses.

### Faith Formation Program closure due to absenteeism

In the case of a widespread illness in the state, county, or community, the Faith Formation Program could close for an extended time period, out of concern for the health of students, catechists/volunteers and community.

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

1. Monitor weekly attendance and reasons for absences.
2. If student absences reach a level beyond 20%, alert the county or municipal health department.
3. If absences go beyond 20% of the students, consider closing the parish program.
  - a. The decision to close parish program due to high absenteeism is serious; you must have the permission of your pastor or dean to close.
4. The pastor and catechetical leader will need to locally decide what the threshold is for catechist absenteeism to consider closure of the Faith Formation Program.

### When Catechists are Absent

1. Each catechist must have a plan for working from home.
  2. Adults who are obviously ill should not come to the parish.
  3. The Faith Formation Program will need a plan to minimally supervise an absent catechist's classroom.
    - a. If the catechist is quarantining but is strong enough to teach virtually from home, this option should be explored. (Thus, a responsible adult could monitor the absent catechist's classroom.)
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