



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is an Executive Summary of the protocols and procedures, known as the Framework, that assist parishes in planning their fall programming for children and youth and allow for reopening of on-site elements of religious education and youth ministry programs within the Archdiocese of Chicago. This religious education and youth ministry program reopening Framework compliments the reopening plans for both Catholic Schools and Parishes which were both developed in consultation with national education experts, Chicago Public Schools, and state and local public health officials.

There are, however, significant differences between this framework and other parish and school reopening plans, owing to the unique challenges of gathering children and youth who attend multiple schools and consequently interact with student cohorts beyond the parish. On-site gatherings will be permitted less frequently and smaller in size, and virtual or at-home faith formation is encouraged to continue to the fullest extent possible. This Framework will be reassessed ahead of January 2021 in light of the evolving public health situation.

Guiding Principles

Five guiding principles guide our Plan to reopen religious education programs and mirror the principles behind the Archdiocesan Parish and School Reopening Plans:

1. Intentional planning needs to take place to ensure that religious education and youth ministry resume this fall in a safe, timely manner with quality, meaningful faith formation.
2. The current situation in Illinois remains dangerous and fragile. While much has been achieved, there remains the potential that the gains could be lost by a second more virulent wave of COVID-19. Therefore, flexibility and adaptability are necessary elements of any faith formation programming this year.
3. Trust needs to be established so that families can be confident that the top priority in any Framework is the safety and wellbeing of people. We cannot take for granted that students, parents, staff, and volunteer catechists will feel safe just because parish buildings are reopened. Ongoing engagement and communication with parents are essential; this is the ideal time to foster a sense of partnership with parents in the faith formation of their child(ren).
4. Calling people to exercise faithful citizenship will be key. Each family will need to take personal responsibility for the common good as well as their own safety. There is an opportunity also for parishes to encourage parents to re-evaluate their personal responsibility for their own lifelong faith formation as well as the formation of their child(ren).
5. Programs need to balance the value of building community and connecting to a parish community with safeguarding public health. Each parish will need to thoughtfully consider the necessary frequency of in-person program elements and augment with virtual and at-home alternatives.

With these principles in mind, a Framework to safely resume a broader scope of quality religious education and youth ministry programs in our parishes has been designed. The Framework outlines a set of required tasks and certification process to ensure parish religious education programs are prepared to operate under the option chosen by each parish (as outlined below). There will be an ongoing review of the Plan so that adjustments are made in accord with new data and guidelines.

The Plan was created in consideration of the **Reopening with Trust: Planning Framework** document created by the Office of Catholic Schools and the **Reopening of Parishes** documents created by the Archdiocese of Chicago and reviewed by a panel of medical experts.

Religious Education and Youth Ministry Program Options for Fall 2020

It is important to keep in mind that both the public health situation and Renew My Church call upon us to prioritize meaningful engagement that honors the needs and concerns of people today. During this time of ongoing uncertainty surrounding long-term planning, it is prudent to keep in mind that the following program settings for the upcoming pastoral year are fluid. Parishes will likely need to adjust programs according to current realities and governmental regulations; religious education programs may not exclusively be only on one of these platforms for the entire pastoral year. Pastors and catechetical leaders should be mindful of assessing and adapting religious education programming during the year based on needs and current realities.

Currently, parishes have three options for facilitating fall programming.

VIRTUAL PROGRAMMING

Each parish should consider incorporating virtual/at-home elements to its programming, for the following reasons:

- Some parishes may deem a return to the physical parish/school campus for religious education is impractical or unsafe.
- The public health situation may shift, resulting in a rollback of on-site programming.
- Some families may not be comfortable engaging in on-site activities or may be prohibited from doing should an instance of COVID-19 exposure occur in their families, school cohort or at the parish itself.
- Virtual settings have become a long-term reality for religious education programming, borne not only out of the current crisis but out of the complex, often hectic lives of families today.

Logistics and planning considerations for virtual settings include technology support, developing and delivering high-quality online instruction with interactive methodology, supporting Catholic Identity, and maintaining community.

VIRTUAL PROGRAMMING WITH IN-PERSON KICKOFF

Some parishes may not be able to safely facilitate ongoing on-site programming but be able to safely facilitate one-time in-person events so that students may build community before embarking on a fully virtual fall program. Parishes will not be required to complete a certification process for in-person kickoff events, but do need to follow detailed policies as outlined in the Health and Safety portions of this document.

MODIFIED ON-SITE OR HYBRID PROGRAMMING

If your parish plans to incorporate on-site elements to its programming, it must adhere to requirements and certification process as detailed in the Framework. The maximum number of gatherings for each student cohort is one time per month through the remainder of 2020. It is recommended that parishes set a minimum of fifteen hours of required instructional programming, allowing for smaller cohorts which meet less frequently.

Basic requirements of the Framework on parishes

1. Review the Framework and determine whether fall programming will resume in a virtual, virtual with in-person kick-off or a modified in-person format.
2. Provide robust communication to inform families of the Framework and any updates to it.

Basic requirements for in-person kick-off events

1. Review the Framework health and safety guidelines for in-person kick-off events and assemble a team to fully implement these guidelines.
2. Plan kick-off events across multiple days to allow for reduced numbers of participants and increased social distancing.

Basic requirements for modified in-person programming

1. Recruit non-vulnerable volunteers at the parish level to assist the pastor and parish catechetical leader in implementing the Plan (when restarting any on-site programming).
2. Members of the Health & Safety Reopening Team are to complete training by way of a webinar. The training will be available in early August (date is TBD) and will be recorded if team members are unable to attend live.
3. Each parish is to complete a Reopening Requirements Checklist to the AOC Certification Team confirming completion of all action steps.
4. The AOC Certification Team will provide confirmation that a program has been approved/certified for an in-person program. A certification of readiness to reopen will be required of each religious education program. Once the parish catechetical leader has completed the Reopening Requirements Checklist, they can submit a certification of preparedness (signed by the pastor, parish catechetical leader, and members of the Health & Safety Reopening Team) for approval to reopen. The Checklist will then be reviewed by the AOC Certification Team, which will grant the certification to the religious education program. Certification will occur between the dates of August 17 and September 4. *Certification is contingent on school certification if school space is to be used.*
5. Through ongoing discussions with pastors, catechetical leaders, principals, health care professionals and civil authorities, there will be an ongoing review of the Framework with an eye to making adjustments in accord with new data, guidelines, or developments.

Specific Note on Parish Youth Ministry Programs

While youth ministry is distinct from religious education, parishes must be able to fully implement the health and safety guidelines of the reopening policy to ensure that all gatherings of youth are safe and responsible. Pastors, parish catechetical leaders, and school principals should support parish youth ministers in applying these policies to their programs as applicable, and must be certified to resume gatherings of all minors, regardless of whether they participate in religious education, sacramental preparation, youth ministry or another distinct ministry.

Parish and religious education program Health & Safety Reopening Teams should include the youth minister if possible and be available to assist parish youth ministers in implementing these protocols in their on-site sessions.

The procedures for reopening religious education programs outlined in this document that are applicable to parish youth ministry include (but are not limited to):

- space-sharing
- general facility cleaning and sanitizing
- guidelines for masks, PPE
- social distancing, including arrival and dismissal procedures, student movement and behavioral considerations, special events, program events and meetings
- outbreak protocols
- gatherings only to occur on campus (not in homes or public spaces)

Clear communication strategies between parish catechetical leaders, school principals, and parish youth ministers regarding procedures in this Framework are to be in place **before** fall programming begins.

The “Pre-Opening Requirements Checklist” at the end of this document is to be utilized and adapted, as needed, for the use of parish youth ministers to ensure that on-site programming related to youth ministry is safe for all those participating.

Hereafter, “religious education” also refers to relevant youth ministry considerations.

Questions? Please contact ReopenREYM@archchicago.org.