



FAITH FORMATION PROGRAMMING GUIDE

This portion of the Framework is intended to assist parishes in planning quality, relevant faith formation programming as we navigate a rapidly shifting reality in our world, nation, city and communities. Through Renew My Church we are called to make disciples, build community and inspire witness. Especially during this time of great uncertainty and turmoil for the individuals, families and communities served by our Church, we must seek new and creative ways to lead them closer to Christ and one another and to share the Gospel as a light to our world.

This document will serve as a guide toward continuing to build a stronger sense of missionary discipleship through your approach to religious education programming. By continuing to creatively engage your students and families in their own faith journeys, actively building community the Lord intends for your parish, and witnessing the Kingdom of God in the midst of a lost and fearful world, you are helping your parish move forward in answering the call to renew the Church of Jesus Christ.

A few important notes:

- If any physical gatherings are to be utilized in your fall programming, it must comply with the Health and Safety Requirements in coordination with Health and Safety Reopening (HSR) Team, as outlined in previous sections of the Framework.
- Given the unique challenges faced by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, programming should be discerned and designed by a Faith Formation Programming (FFP) Team, as outlined in previous sections of the Framework. This portion of the document should be reviewed by the FFP Team.

ROLE OF THE FFP TEAM

Assist the parish catechetical leader and/or youth minister in planning a flexible and adaptable faith formation program for the 2020/2021 pastoral year.

ROLE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM BOARDS

It is recommended that the parish catechetical leader engage their religious education program board, when possible and appropriate, on the key provisions of the Faith Formation and Programming Plan. The religious education board should be enlisted as advocates within the parish community for the successful implementation of the Faith Formation and Programming Plan.

ROLE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM CATECHISTS AND VOLUNTEERS

It is recommended that the parish catechetical leader engage a select number of catechists, and volunteers when possible and appropriate, on the key provisions of the Faith Formation and

Programming Plan. The selected volunteers should be enlisted as advocates within the religious education and youth ministry programs for the successful implementation of the Faith Formation and Programming Plan.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM CATECHISTS

For additional information for supporting volunteer catechists during the COVID pandemic, refer to the Outbreak Protocol section of the Health & Safety Requirements for reopening on-site religious education programming which provides information for how to handle specific outbreaks of COVID. Please be sure to refer to this section on a regular basis as the situation is extremely fluid and subject to updates.

CATECHISTS IN AT-RISK GROUPS OR WHO FEEL ANXIOUS ABOUT TEACHING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Parish catechetical leaders should ensure open communication with catechists takes place early and often in this time of uncertainty which has the potential of forcing abrupt changes to religious education programming.

- Catechists should inform their parish catechetical leader if they are part of an at-risk group for COVID or have an immediate family member who is part of an at-risk group.
- Catechists in a vulnerable population who are unable to volunteer at this time should be encouraged to talk about their concerns.
- Some catechists may express anxiety about returning to the religious education program, even if they (or one of their immediate family members) are not part of an at-risk group.

If such situations are brought to the pastor or parish catechetical leader, the pastor/parish catechetical leader should demonstrate appropriate empathy and recommend that the catechist prioritize their personal emotional and physical health and not teach religious education in-person at this time. If possible, catechists should be given the option of teaching (or co-teaching) a religious education class virtually.

For those catechists who have discerned to no longer teach religious education (in-person and/or virtually), parish catechetical leaders should remain in contact with them and update them on future opportunities for involvement if/when they feel more comfortable.

FAITH FORMATION AND PROGRAMMING

In addition to implementing health and safety protocols, parish religious education programs should consider what adaptations will be necessary for reimagined programming that is flexible while providing meaningful faith formation for children and families. With uncertainty comes opportunity – the time is ripe to re-seed faith in the home, strengthen partnership with parents to grow their faith and that of their families, and adapt programming to modern life (e.g., busy, hectic, virtual) to make it more comforting and relevant.

This section is meant to guide the **FFP Team** on specific guidelines for creating and supporting community, organizing instruction, considering e-learning options, providing for social-emotional care, supporting Catholic identity, and other important areas.

CREATING AND SUPPORTING COMMUNITY IN THE NEW REALITY

The possibility exists that the new religious education programming year may begin on-site but quickly shift to remote learning, or that the year may begin with a full remote learning program and incorporate on-site gatherings later. With this in mind, special care must be given to prioritizing means of creating and supporting community (virtually and in-person) with religious education program students and families. A central question to consider is *“How will we build a sense of discipleship community in our religious education program?”*

- Develop an on-boarding plan for all students and families to orient them to any new procedures.
- Catechists can consider scheduling a series of one-on-one or small group sessions to get to know students and parents.
- Establish a classroom meeting routine which includes greeting, prayer, sharing, and ice breaker activities. This routine can continue throughout remote learning.
- Take advantage of opportunities to socialize with students (during arrival, break periods).
- Take advantage of opportunities and create plans to engage parents in at-home activities that will help them be witnesses of faith at home.
- Maintain the activities that are unique to your parish community and create new opportunities to develop and enhance the feelings of community. Sometimes in the rush of creating the *learning* aspect of program, the *community* aspect can be overlooked.
- Programs should consider creating an inventory of the unique rituals and look for ways to translate them to new formats to help maintain community.

FACILITATING ONGOING CONNECTIONS

With the new configurations for faith formation programs that are anticipated, connections that the parish community has with each other is vitally important.

- Strengthen current avenues and create new approaches for communication (i.e. virtual “Coffee with the Pastor,” parent meetings, etc.).
- Develop new ways for parents to connect with one another for socialization and support.
- Create opportunities for informal connections among catechists and staff.
- Identify channels of communication with catechists so parents know how to reach out to them.
- Consider the implications of scheduling decisions on families; keeping children in a family on the same schedule should be a priority to lessen the burden on families.
- Utilize frequent feedback surveys with students and parents to assess their sense of belonging and comfort in the class/program.

MITIGATING STRESS RESPONSES

The community (students, families, catechists) will undoubtedly have stress reactions from the last year, coupled with potential anxiety about new variables this fall. Most likely for many families, there will be complicating factors related to economic obstacles and potential health concerns. There is comfort in the stability that a religious education program has to offer which may be disrupted. Moving into the fall, parish catechetical leaders will need to give strong consideration to creating methods to help dissipate feelings of stress and anxiety among their religious education program students, families, and catechists.

- Develop an “early warning system” to identify students who are struggling academically and/or behaviorally.

- Organize existing and new resources related to faith formation and developmental/emotional health to support students, parents, and families.
- Create an anonymous process for families to access financial and food support and mental health services.

PRIOR TO STARTING AND THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

Technology and E-Learning Preparations

Identify a platform that will be used as a virtual learning platform for all grades.

- Check the potential of sharing a platform with your parish school
- Recommended options for parishes are **Zoom** or **Microsoft Teams**

Identify a single video conferencing tool that should be used in remote learning for all grades.

- Examples include **Zoom** or **Microsoft Teams**

Identify tool for ongoing communication with parents and catechists

- Examples include **Flocknote** or **Mailchimp**

Determine technology training plan for staff, catechists, students and parents.

Plan for professional development on blended learning strategies, virtual learning platform integration, instruction with video, e-methods and interactive methodology, etc.

Review building infrastructure and connectivity: Consider amount of bandwidth and access points in buildings for additional devices.

Plan for remote learning: specifically, class schedules and expectations, and additional technology tools that catechists may need.

Update Digital Safety Tools as needed

- Educate parents and students on cybersecurity and digital citizenship expectations.
- Ensure the parish's firewall is updated and activated.
- Review the parish's Safety Policies/Acceptable Use Policies.

Socio-Emotional Learning

Review and update parish religious education program policies that teach and address safety within a supportive faith formation environment.

Connect with each catechist to check in and discuss their hopes and concerns for the upcoming year. Preview safety guidelines with them.

Ensure that the parish crisis plan includes preparing for and responding to a pandemic and accounts for the needs of the religious education program.

Intentionally build structures that promote supportive catechist student relationships and a sense of belonging.

Plan continuous check-ins with staff and catechists to monitor impact of safety practices and burn-out.

Establish weekly classroom meeting routines which includes greeting, prayer, and sharing, activities.

Catholic Identity

Partner with pastor, principal, and vicariate LFC to complete sacramental reception for First Communion and Confirmation candidates held over from Spring 2020 (if applicable).

Review your calendar with the pastor and discern how to celebrate religious education program prayer events in-person and/or remotely.

- Consider the parish's technological capabilities in the planning of prayer. For example, is there a way to live stream program wide Mass, prayer, etc. so students and families can participate from home?
- Consider adjusting experiences for program-wide prayer according to Archdiocesan guidelines for liturgical and non liturgical gatherings.
- Think about the sacramental and cultural events for the entire program year. Work with school and parish staff to plan important events in advance, and outline plans for community celebrations if they must be held in-person, virtually, or at a later time.

Collaborate with the pastor and school principal to articulate practical, ongoing sacramental preparation that benefits students and their families for First Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Confirmation in a remote learning environment.

- Consider creating a video resource in which the pastor, parish catechetical leader, and principal give a walk-through about how sacramental preparation and celebrations will take place in the church moving forward through the pandemic.

Include the creation of a Catholic, online presence as part of the parish's remote faith formation plans.

- Ensure that the parish's social media sites are well organized and centered on Catholic values in regular parish postings during remote learning.
- Coach catechists about how to effectively use Catholic imagery, prayers, language, and multi-media to create an e-learning homepage for religious education classes.
- Consider designing a unique virtual space dedicated to student sharing about faith and Catholic values in remote faith formation.

Encourage catechists to hang a crucifix or have other Catholic images visible in pictures and/or recordings of remote lessons. Support catechists to create a prayer corner or prayer wall for students to see and utilize as part of remote learning lessons.

Curriculum Planning

Review and prepare curriculum e-learning platforms (with the assistance of your religion textbook publisher if needed).

- Identify curriculum training and support webinars and provide those for your catechists.

Review both the Director's and Catechist's Guides of your religion curriculum.

- Provide assistance to catechists who need support with creating adaptable lesson plans.
- Explore family and parent components of your religion curriculum and prioritize implementation of those components into your religious education program year.

Consider not having perfect attendance awards, not assessing students based on absenteeism, and offering virtual learning options, if feasible.

Policy Documents

Review student/family handbooks and other policy documents to ensure that health and safety procedures, attendance expectations (should be modified or deleted for this year) and grading practices are adapted for this year in ways that are student-centered, family-centered, and flexible.

- Examples such as hard deadlines and excessive penalties for late submissions should be removed and replaced with proactive policies.

Clearly communicate all updated policies and procedures to parents and catechists.

Tuition and Fee Guidelines

Tuition collection should continue as normal during the religious education program year.

Parish catechetical leaders may need to review tuition costs/fees as related to in-person and virtual programming and should adjust tuition accordingly.

Collection procedures and payment due dates may need to be adjusted to reflect the current realities of the local area and sensitive to family situations.

Where financial issues present challenges, parish catechetical leaders should respond to concerns on a case-by-case basis (vs. sending out a mass communication to all parents).

Parish catechetical leaders and/or other staff (e.g. pastors, business managers) should talk individually to each family that raises concerns regarding tuition.

Pastors and parish catechetical leaders should work hard to ensure that no family is forced to leave a religious education program due to legitimate financial hardship created by the coronavirus outbreak.