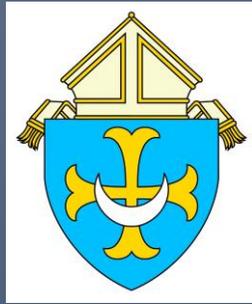


2020/2021



GUIDE TO PLANNING
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
2020-2021

The Catholic Diocese of Trenton
701 Lawrenceville Road Trenton, NJ 08648

TO: Pastors & PCLs
FROM: Denise Contino, Director of Catechesis
SUBJECT: Guidelines for Religious Education Opening 2020-2021
DATE: August 10, 2020

Enclosed are guidelines to assist the parish in determining the type of Religious Education (RE) program it will offer this year. All parishes **MUST** have a RE program to offer families this year, as in the past, yet the challenge of having in-person classes is extensive. These guidelines will help your parish make a well-informed decision on a program structure.

Making decisions for RE this year will include many factors, most importantly being the safety and health of students, parents, staff, and volunteers. Parishes that have a shared space with a Catholic School must follow the same guidelines and policies of the school in order to hold in-person RE classes. The Pastor, Principal, and PCL must dialogue about the possibility of in-person RE classes. Parishes need to be in tune with the guidelines for public schools, taking into consideration what the public schools are planning for this upcoming year in order to assist in making decisions for the structure of RE.

Parishes are unique and will choose various models of formation for RE. Summer programs for RE were forced to go virtual or cancel due to the pandemic; however, the results from those parishes that offered a virtual summer program have been nothing but positive. There is an abundant opportunity this year to meet individual families where they are and to provide them with a program that is accompanying, engaging, and flexible enough to meet their needs.

Each parish will be required to submit a plan to inform the Director of Catechesis of the structure of the RE program for 2020-2021 by **Friday, September 4th**. [Click here to acquire the link to submit the plan.](#)

If you have any questions or would like to discuss the possible plans for your RE program, please contact me.

+Peace in Christ



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Every parish must offer their families a Religious Education Program in 2020-2021. This guide is meant to assist Pastors and Parish Catechetical Leaders (PCLs) to make well-informed decisions about whether or not in-person classes are feasible at this time, and to be prepared for multiple scenarios for this upcoming year.

The guide is organized in sections in order to assist you in examining the many considerations involved in the reopening of Parish Religious Education Programs. To best prepare, it is important to assess the parish's readiness and to develop a plan for the return to Religious Education this fall. Each parish is required to submit a plan for Religious Education 2020/2021 by Friday, September 4, 2020. [Click here to submit the plan.](#)

Please read through the guide completely. Plan to collaborate with members of the parish staff and work with your team of catechists/volunteers to offer families a reasonable option for faith formation. With some flexibility, creativity, and out-of-the-box thinking, you can be confident that you will be able to successfully provide families a Religious Education Program, or set of Religious Education options, that are both engaging and practical.

The Coronavirus Pandemic has caused a great deal of disruption and feelings of uncertainty amongst Parish Catechetical Leaders (PCL), and the families that they serve. Parishes across the State of New Jersey had to make the tough decision to suspend public worship, while also shifting to remote learning to conclude the 2019-2020 School and Religious Education year. Many PCLs across the Diocese of Trenton had to pivot their programs to remote platforms, and that has already persisted into the 2020-2021 year with the start of the Summer Programs.

PCLs will be asked to employ flexibility, creativity, and exercise compassion in meeting the challenges presented by the current pandemic. This may include adopting formats for Religious Education that are initially challenging, with the assurance of support from the Diocesan Department of Catechesis and colleagues in the field.

PCLs are encouraged to make decisions based on the information currently available and to consider the circumstances of the parish:

- Capacity of your building(s) or meeting spaces
- Whether or not you have enough volunteers willing to serve to offer sessions
- Willingness of families to return to classes in-person / virtual
- Issues regarding shared space with the Catholic school or a Public School
- Overall ability to implement safety protocols required by civil authorities and ensure that all directives are met during class times

Parishes with a Catholic School or meeting in a Rented Venue: The Pastor, Principal and Parish Catechetical Leader must dialogue about the possibility of in-person Religious Education (RE) classes taking place in a shared school building. For the school protocol to be successful, the

Religious Education Program must follow the same guidelines and policies of the school when having in-person Religious Education Classes. The final decision is to be made on the parish level by the Pastor. If the Pastor decides it is not possible for Religious Education classes to continue to meet in the shared space during the Coronavirus Pandemic, another mode of Faith Formation must be adopted and implemented.

Parishes that rent space in a public school for their Religious Education classes must meet with the school administration to review all protocols that are expected for in-person classes in the building. It is imperative that the Religious Education Program adhere to the same protocols as the school and implement them successfully in order to keep Religious Education staff and students safe, and to maintain the integrity of school's health and safety procedures.

[The New Jersey Department of Education, Restart and Recovery Plan for Education](#) states the following: *“Extracurricular Activities and Use of Facilities Outside of School Hours – All extracurricular activities must comply with applicable social distancing requirements and hygiene protocol. External community organizations that use school facilities must follow district guidance on health and safety protocols.”*

Any decisions made regarding the return to in-person Religious Education Programs should be made with the understanding that they will be reevaluated at a regular interval of 2-3 months, or more frequently if new information is available. If a parish elects to provide in-person classes, it must also develop contingency plans should changing circumstances preclude gatherings.

To assist the Parish Catechetical Leader in planning for a Religious Education Program model, the guidelines include the following:

- Models of Faith Formation
- Curriculum
- Safety and Health
- PCL & Catechist Formation
- Permission Slips
- Reevaluate Plan

Models of Faith Formation

There is no one-size fits all model for Faith Formation. Each PCL, in consultation with their Pastor and community partners, will need to determine which model best fits their parish’s circumstances. This section includes a brief list of considerations to consider, a non-exhaustive list of Faith Formation models, and a sample of how a parish may determine the best model for their community.

Some Considerations:

- Do Parish facilities allow for social distancing and the safety of children and volunteers?
- Do the parish volunteers and parish families have access to the internet and devices?
- How many volunteers are available, and do they show a preference for remote or in-person education?
- Does the book series your parish currently uses support multiple forms of catechesis?

Faith Formation Models:

- A. **Supported Home-Study Model:** Either using technology, or other means, PCLs and volunteers offer parents support in the formation of their children.
 - i. Implementation Requires:
 1. Continuing support and formation of parents as they lead their children through the curriculum;
 2. A text series that provides both in-the-home support and guidance for those guiding families;
 3. An open line of communication with families either through web meeting or a phone tree;
 4. A limited number of “catechetical concierges” to offer grade specific support to families.
 - ii. Best Practices:
 1. Use of e-assessments or reviews to gauge the understanding of our families;
 2. The implementation of a digital class management system such as Google Classroom or Flipgrid to provide program texts and resources;
 3. Use of web-based meeting programs such as Google Meets, WebEx, or ZOOM to facilitate parent and student meetings.

B. Hybrid Model: A modified version of the supported Home Study Model that includes a limited schedule of in-person sessions to review progress and preview future content.

i. Implementation Requires:

1. Facilities that can safely accommodate select groups of students on a predetermined schedule (classes meet bi-weekly or monthly)
2. Volunteers that are comfortable with limited in-person service;
3. A clear set of expectations for the weeks where students do not meet.

ii. Best Practices:

1. PCLs may determine that this model can best be implemented for Sacramental years, opting for a Supported Home Study Model for all other grades.
2. Build a continuing support structure for the remote weeks will lead to best outcomes.
3. The use of an online class management system is highly recommended.

C. Family Catechesis: A hybrid model of catechesis that provides learning activities for the whole family, and in-person support to parents as the primary catechists of their children. Families will meet in-person on a monthly or bi-monthly schedule to receive guidance in instruction.

i. Implementation Requirements:

1. A system for determining which family attends during which session;
2. A reservation process that assures that social distancing is possible;
3. Catechists for the various grade levels for breakout sessions for students.

ii. Best Practices:

1. Use a textbook from a publisher that provides high quality support for home study and family catechesis.
2. Use a class management system to provide updates and materials in weeks where families will not be meeting or determine another distribution method.
3. Provide recordings of sessions for families unable to attend their session due to illness.

D. **Remote Learning with Video Instruction:** Weekly Lessons are provided by catechists either through web meeting or a disk.

i. Implementation Requires:

1. Volunteers or staff to provide video instruction to students;
2. A distribution method that is accessible to most of your families, either through a web-based system, postal distribution, or structured pick-up.

ii. Best Practices

1. Use an online class management system to distribute class materials and videos.
2. Use paper or e-assessments to track student comprehension.
3. Support and train parents regarding any technology or program being used.

E. **In-Person Catechesis:** The most familiar mode of catechesis, classroom or small-group instruction with catechists and students.

i. Implementation Requires:

1. That the parish meets and exceeds the health and safety guidelines set by the CDC, State of New Jersey, and Diocese of Trenton;
2. Enough catechists and volunteers willing to serve in the ministry;
3. Parish families are comfortable with this option and will participate;
4. Proper screening occurs, and the program is re-evaluated based on any cases within the community.

ii. Best Practices:

1. Have a contingency plan in place if parishes and schools are forced to suspend in-person classes.
2. Be flexible with parents that do not want to send their child to in-person classes. The parish must offer an alternate model of formation this year.
3. Parishes cannot penalize parents uncomfortable with having their children attend in-person classes.

Samples Decision Trees:

Case A:

A parish has facilities with ample space and resources to provide for the safe gathering of their families for instruction, and catechists comfortable in-person instruction.

Parish A may choose to offer In-Person Catechesis, a Hybrid Model, and/or Family Catechesis.

Case B:

A Parish has facilities that will allow a moderate number of people to gather safely; there is minimal access to technology, and few volunteers.

Parish B may choose to offer a Hybrid Model, Family Catechesis, or a form of Supported Home-Study Model with distributed materials.

Case C:

A parish does not have facilities where it is safe to gather. They have access to a high level of technology and home internet service, and several volunteers willing to serve remotely.

Parish C may choose to offer the Supported Home-Study Model and Remote Learning with Video instruction.

Conclusions Regarding Models of Faith Formation:

These guidelines do not make decisions on behalf of a parish community. Each community will have to consider their individual circumstances. However, it is suggested that PCLs along with their Pastor and community partners, intentionally reflect on the options that are available to them, and plan on implementing multiple models to meet the needs of their individual communities.

While PCLs always work hard to remain flexible and meet their families where they are, this year it is more vital. Above all, the parish must respect the parent's judgment in determining the return of their children to in-person activities and provide alternatives.

Curriculum

Regardless of the models selected, the parish plans for faith formation during 2020-2021 must continue to follow the [*Diocese of Trenton Elementary Religion Curriculum Guidelines*](#) and the Family Life curriculum (found at this link <https://dioceseoftrenton.org/catechesis-curricula>). When trying to be flexible this year in implementing the curriculum, keep in mind that most publishers use a spiral curriculum where topics are reinforced each year.

Virtual Learning Best Practices:

Students

It should be communicated to students and parents that expectations for virtual class meetings reflect the same requirements as for in-person class:

- Students must arrive on time and meet attendance requirements
- Students must be dressed appropriately and sitting up for class
- Student behavior must be respectful of the catechist and of classmates
- Students may not “mute” other students or the catechist
- Students should sign a consent form in which they agree to the above. PCLs should establish with parents and students’ consequences for disregarding any of these requirements and any additional requirements in place.

Parents

Parents are responsible for the overall task of ensuring that children are meeting student requirements for the program. Parental support includes the following:

- Ensuring that children have access to the equipment necessary for attending virtual classes and accessing any additional online materials or resources
- Providing a space in the home conducive to learning, taking part in virtual classes, and completing any additional Religious Education work
- Contacting the PCL as soon as possible if technical or other issues prevent the child from attending virtual class or accessing any other materials or resources necessary for participating in the program
- In the case when a parent would like to have the child utilize digital or technological equipment or resources provided by the child’s public school (for example, school-generated email address and/or laptop), it is the responsibility of the parent to contact the school and ascertain whether this is permitted by the district or not. **Please note that if a parent receives permission to use a school email address for Religious Education virtual learning, school security settings may still prevent the student from using the account to access the Religious Education classroom.*

PCLs

PCLs have the overall responsibility for choosing the virtual platform of the program, maintaining the platform and being vigilant with regard to any technical issues which might arise, providing basic training to volunteers with regard to best practices and use of the virtual platform within a specific catechetical context, and ensuring that expectations are clearly communicated to parents and students. PCLs should also provide information to parents regarding accessing the electronic version of the text, if available from the publisher.

When making the decision to create a virtual catechetical program, PCLs must be committed to remaining current with best practices in online learning as they evolve with technology, and to regularly research new digital resources for inclusion in the program. As the nature of the online environment is ever evolving, it is vital that PCLs make their best efforts to remain aware of any changes which may impact their faith formation programs.

Adult presence in virtual classrooms

- Each class should have at least two Safe Environment Program (SEP)-compliant volunteers.
- All volunteers should be provided with basic guidance and training on virtual learning practices, both technical and catechetical.
- PCLs should frequently “visit” classes in order to be present to students and to generally understand how classes are being taught.
- Additional volunteers should be sought to substitute on an as-needed basis in case one adult is unable to attend a virtual class

Virtual Classes

If classes are to be recorded, the following should be observed:

- Parents will be asked to sign a permission slip for the recording of classes in advance of classes beginning
- At the beginning of the class, the catechist must remind the children that class is being recorded
- Class recordings should only be made via an account for which the PCL is administrator, i.e. recordings should not be made or stored on a catechist’s personal account or device
- If classes are being recorded, the PCL should communicate to parents the reason for recording the classes, for example, to allow students who could not attend a meeting view it later.
- Virtual class lengths should be appropriate to the age of the child. In general, children are not able to remain engaged in online learning for as long a period as they are during in-person classes, and this must be taken into consideration when creating schedules.
- PCLs should strive to schedule class meetings at staggered times in order to accommodate families who may be limited in the number of devices available, and to accommodate catechists who have their own children in the program.

Permission Slips

The Permission Slips for virtual learning should include the following:

- Expectations of parents and students about requirements for participation
- Expectations of students about the virtual classroom and the completion of assignments
- Responsibilities of the program about providing a quality virtual catechetical program utilizing a safe and secure virtual platform

Safety and Health

Prior to the start of in-person Religious Education classes the following items must be considered:

1. Screening

Keeping a safe environment will include adopting temperature and visual screening upon arrival for symptoms and potential exposure to Covid-19. It is important that ALL volunteers and students be screened.

One or more of the following screening techniques should be implemented.

- **A Parent Questionnaire/Survey:** Religious Education Programs will provide a questionnaire/survey for each family which will include the following:
 - Questions to parents:
 - Have you checked your child for symptoms; including a temperature check?
 - Have you been exposed to COVID-19?
 - Have you recently traveled to a COVID-19 hotspot?
- **Visual Screening:** Each person entering the building is screened by a volunteer/staff member for symptoms. Staff/volunteers will also verify that each person entering the building is wearing a proper face covering with the mouth and nose covered.
- **Temperature Screening:** A volunteer/staff member will check the temperature of each person entering the building with a noncontact thermometer. (100.0 degrees Fahrenheit or greater is considered to have a fever).
- **Symptoms to be screened for include:**
 - Cough / shortness of breath / difficulty breathing
 - Chills / repeated shaking with chills
 - Muscle pain
 - Headache
 - Sore throat
 - Loss of taste / smell
 - Diarrhea
 - Temperature greater or equal to 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit
 - Contact with a person who is lab confirmed to COVID-19

Programs should develop a plan for when a student or volunteer presents with symptoms to Covid-19, whether from the questionnaire, visual screening, or if a parent/volunteer notifies you to tell you of exposure.

All screening information is to be kept confidential and be documented.

2. **Face Coverings**

- All staff/catechists/volunteers/students must wear face coverings while in the building for the Religious Education Program.
 - All Staff / Catechists / volunteers / students will be asked to provide their own masks. If anyone arrives without a mask, the parish should have a supply of masks to provide to those without.
- If an individual cannot wear a mask for health reasons:
 - If a student is unable to wear a mask due to health reason, a virtual or a home study model must be provided for that student.
 - If a catechist / volunteer is unable to wear a mask due to health reasons, they will not be able to volunteer for in-person classes but can volunteer to assist in implementing the home study or virtual model.

3. **Social Distancing**

Implementing social distancing practices in all instructional and non-instructional spaces is critical to ensuring the health and safety of students, staff and volunteers.

- Programs must allow for social distancing within the classroom to the maximum extent practicable. This can be achieved by ensuring students are seated at least 6 feet apart. If programs are not able to maintain this physical distance, additional modifications should be considered. These include using physical barriers between desks and turning desks to face the same direction (rather than facing each other) or having students sit on only one side of the table, spaced apart.
- Review this link for sample socially distant classroom diagrams.
<https://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/reopening-schools/the-socially-distanced-school-day.html>
- Consider providing physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs on walls, to ensure that staff and children remain at least 6 feet apart in lines and at other times (e.g. guides for creating “one-way routes” in hallways).

4. **Facilities Cleaning**

- Presuming that the population is not the same all day, cleaning must take place prior to a RE session and after each session.

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces (e.g., door handles, sink handles, drinking fountains) within the school/parish at daily and between use.
- Develop a schedule for increased, routine cleaning and disinfecting.
- Ensure safe and correct use and storage of cleaning and disinfecting products, including storing products securely away from children. Use products that meet EPA disinfecting criteria.
- Cleaning products should not be used near children, and staff should ensure that there is adequate ventilation when using these products to prevent children or themselves from inhaling toxic fumes.

5. **Disinfecting and Handwashing Procedures**

Prepare and maintain hand sanitizing stations with alcohol-based hand sanitizers (at least 60% alcohol):

- In each classroom (for staff, volunteers and older children who can safely use hand sanitizer).
- At entrances and exits of buildings.
- Children ages 5 and younger should be supervised when using hand sanitizer.
- For classrooms that have existing handwashing stations, prepare stations with soap, water, and alcohol-based hand sanitizers (at least 60% alcohol).
- Students should sanitize or wash hands for at least 20 seconds upon entering the classrooms, after using the bathroom and coughing /sneezing.

Health and Safety Inventory:

- Confirm the parish has an adequate supply of soap, disinfectant, hand sanitizer, paper towels, and tissues; and a source from which to replenish supplies.
- Disinfecting and handwashing procedures must be established for buildings.
- Confirm a supply of gloves and other protective gear.
 - Touchless thermometers on-site for employee and student screening if applicable

6. **Restroom**

- A communication sent to parents encouraging children to use the restroom at home before/after class to limit number of students using parish/school restrooms. (No child should be denied permission to use restroom).
- Station hall monitors outside of restroom areas to help maintain social distancing guidelines.
- One student at a time in restroom.
- Six feet distance must be maintained in restroom waiting lines.

- Limit shared bathrooms.

7. **Tracing**

If a member of the staff, volunteer, or student tests positive for COVID-19, they should immediately notify the PCL. The PCL is responsible to notify the Pastor, staff and families of a possible or confirmed case while maintaining confidentiality.

The infected adult person or guardian of a minor with a positive diagnosis, should contact local Health officials. Be prepared to provide the following information to assist with the process of contact tracing:

- The identity of the person with COVID-19 or probable COVID-19 as well as their address, phone number and e-mail.
- The date the person with COVID-19 or probable COVID-19 was last in the building.
- The date the person developed symptoms.
- Types of interactions the person may have had with other persons in the building or in other locations.
- How long their interactions were with other persons in the building.
- If other persons in the class have developed any symptoms.
- Provide the name, address, e-mail address, and phone number of the individual.
- Any other information to assist with the determination of next steps.

8. **Nurse/Isolation Station**

Religious Education Programs should establish an isolation space. Students, staff and volunteers with symptoms related to COVID-19 must be safely and respectfully isolated from others. Students should remain in isolation with continued supervision and care until picked up by an authorized adult.

Once the staff, volunteer or student arrives at the isolation room, immediately provide them with a mask and gloves. Explain that this is to help protect others from spread of the potential virus.

- The PCL or staff member attending to a suspected infected person, should wear a protective mask and gloves while working with the suspected infected person.
- The PCL must identify persons who may have come in contact with the suspected infected person.
- The isolation area and suspected staff/volunteer or student's work area/classroom must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected, in addition to all other common surfaces recently touched by the staff/volunteer or student.

9. Arrival/Dismissal

- Stagger arrival and drop-off times to limit contact between cohorts and direct contact with parents as much as possible.
- Establish one entrance where screening will take place.
- Establish exits for an orderly dismissal and to be able to properly social distance.
- Add staggered dismissal times to assist with social distancing procedures.
- Additional exits should be available for emergency access.

10. Readmittance Procedures

- Catechists, volunteers and students suspected of having COVID-19 should complete a 14-day quarantine and have a test performed.
- They may be asked to complete a questionnaire to state that they are safe to return.
- Those who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and recovered need to be medically cleared to return by a physician.

11. Catechist / Volunteer Trainings

All Catechists / volunteers are to be brought together for a training to practice safety guidelines that are in place for the parish Religious Education Program, especially if a parish chooses an in-person model. The parish or Catholic School guidelines need to be thoroughly reviewed by all members of the program. Ample time for questions and answers should be given.

12. New Jersey Department of Education:

- [The Road Back Restart and Recovery Plan for Education](#)
- [Executive Summary](#)
- [Full Plan](#)

Classroom Best Practices:

- Students will social distance staying six feet apart.
- Everyone must wear a mask at all times.
- Prayer/reading circles are NOT permitted.
- NO group work should be assigned.
- Supplies:
 - Students are NOT permitted to share any supplies.
 - Books, supplies, worksheet are not be shared between students.
 - The parish can supply each student with a supply box/bag to be kept in the parish or school for classes.

- Catechist bring their own supplies; the parish can reimburse their expenses.
- Desks must be left the way they are arranged. No repositioning of desks.
- Students must hang up jackets, coats, sweaters and such on the back of their chair. Absolutely no use of the classroom coat hooks, closets, or cubbies.
- Limit all movement in classroom. Students should remain in their seats during class instruction.
- Only one student allowed in bathroom at a time.
- Catechist must check at the end of each class that no student has left anything behind.
- No Visitors.
- No mixing classes.
- Cannot bring classes together to celebrate Mass.
- Minimize large groups.

PCL & Catechist Formation

As we journey through this unprecedented time, we all need continuing formation as we hand on the faith to others. Be attentive to your own spiritual life. Be especially attentive to the catechists in your parish, tend to their formation and encourage growth in their relationship with God.

Whether a parish is choosing in-person classes or virtual learning, think carefully about your catechists. Are they in a high-risk category for contracting the virus? Or do they have the skill set to lead a class on a virtual platform? These are practical questions that you must consider when planning out the year. Many of you will find spots that need to be filled; new catechists and classroom aides will be needed for certain grade levels.

Why not recruit new qualified catechists and classroom aides during this time? With programs adapting to the needs of the current situation, this could be an opportunity to build an expanded team for the program. There may be members of the community that are able to teach virtually this year when in the past they were not able to volunteer their time due to scheduling conflicts. You are looking for someone who has a desire, awareness, commitment and generosity to share the faith. A personal invite is always the most effective way to invite someone into ministry, though recruiting through a bulletin or social media announcement is a great place to start.

Sample Bulletin/Social Media Advertisement Template:

Pass on the Good News!

What good news? – The Good News of Jesus Christ and our Catholic faith! This year, over 800 children and young people, grades 1-8, will sign up to learn more about Jesus and the Catholic faith. You can help them learn and grow in faith by joining our team as a catechist or an assistant to the catechist. Classes will be offered virtually, this can work into your schedule, the time is more flexible. As you nurture the faith of our young, you will learn and grow as well! We will provide you with training, materials, and support. Classes are set to begin this October.

For more information, contact....

Regardless of what type of program you offer this year, the catechist will need direction and support throughout the process of offering formation. If in-person classes are part of the plan, you will need more than an orientation to effectively train the catechists to understand the importance of all the guidelines that will need to take place. Support will also be needed for catechists that are teaching virtually.

Catechist formation is necessary as well. Have you invited your catechists to obtain the Certificate in Catechesis? This is the perfect opportunity to encourage catechists to take the Theology class toward the Certificate of Catechesis.

Continue to check PCL Updates for new opportunities for the PCL and Catechists.

Permission Slips

If you are providing virtual learning or a hybrid model, parishes will be required to obtain permission slips from parents.

Templates can be developed in upcoming weeks as programs begin to decide on their program model. Customizing these templates for your program are necessary.

Two kinds of permission are typically needed from parents/guardians: photo/video permission and virtual learning permission.

1. Permission for photo/video

Sample:

I consent to the use of any digital recording and/or photographs in which my child may appear by the Diocese of Trenton and/or the parish. I understand that these materials are being used for promotion of the parish Religious Education Programs and/or activities, which may include recruitment and fundraising efforts.

2. Consent for Virtual Learning

Sample:

I consent for my child to participate in virtual learning for religious education. I understand that these virtual sessions may be recorded. My child will abide to all Religious Education policies in the parish RE handbook. (Add information regarding the platform your parish is using)

Diocesan Policy for Catechists / Volunteers / Parish Staff:

The [Diocese of Trenton Social Media Policy and Resource Guide](#) is to be provided to all catechists, volunteers, and all parish staff members of Religious Education Programs. Please note attention to the section of this policy that addresses “Policy for Communicating with the Youth.” The policy states that all people communicating virtually must have a Criminal Background Check and attend a Virtus class. All catechists and volunteers are still asked to follow the Safe Environment Policy of the Diocese of Trenton Office of Youth and Child Protection.

All Catechists/volunteers are asked to sign the [Revised Guidelines for Internet Virtual Classroom use](#).

Reevaluating Religious Education Programs During Pandemic

While PCLs are always called to evaluate Religious Education Programs to ensure that the catechetical needs of the children and families are being met, the current pandemic requires us to do so within a new and unique context. A commitment to reevaluate programs every two to three months will allow you to make decisions based on current information, and to avoid the impossible task of planning an entire year during unpredictable circumstances.

Reevaluation should happen with two main areas of focus: the quality of the faith formation experience, and the ability of the parish to ensure the safety and well-being of children, families and volunteers following all State and Diocesan directives

- Questions to consider in reevaluating the faith formation experience:
 - Are catechists able to engage children and families effectively to help them grow in faith?
 - What feedback is the PCL is receiving from parents and volunteers about the program?
 - Do all families have the necessary resources to engage in the program as needed? This is especially important for those parishes utilizing remote learning models.
 - Are there resources being used that have been especially helpful?
 - Are additional resources needed in order to make the program more effective?
 - If changes need to be made, does the PCL have the necessary support of others to bring those changes to the program? (Technological changes typically require support from colleagues, parish and Diocesan staff, volunteers, etc.)
- Questions to consider in reevaluating the ability to ensure safety and well-being of children, families and volunteers:
 - Have the health and safety protocols associated with in-person classes been sufficient to provide a safe environment for catechesis?
 - How have the directives and restrictions affected the faith formation experience?
 - In general, is the parish able to meet the directives as necessary? Are additional volunteers or resources (i.e. cleaning company, additional supplies) needed to attain those goals?
 - Are parents and volunteers being asked to provide feedback about these experiences for the benefit of the PCL's understanding?
 - If sharing space, what is the experience of school staff regarding the challenges of sharing the building?
 - Is the parish able to continue to provide faith formation using the same format or do changes need to be considered?
- If there are in-person classes, are the established procedures being followed by the entire staff, all volunteers, students and their families?
 - Do you have an adequate amount of supplies (masks / hand sanitizer)?
 - Is everyone practicing the guidelines to continue to keep the safety and health a priority for all in the program?
 - Is everyone still sanitizing their hands as they enter and re-enter the classroom?

- How is the screening process being handled?
- Is everyone still wearing masks?
- Are some of the precautions not being followed?
- Being honest with the quality of in-person classes is necessary to continue.

Additional considerations regarding reevaluation:

- Consider creating a reevaluation committee to help advise you, even if it is informal. This committee can be comprised of individuals who are catechists, parents, parishioners, public or parochial schoolteachers, and others who may be able to offer good perspective on the realities of learning concerns during the pandemic.
- Regular communication with your pastor and school principal (if applicable) is essential. Keeping them apprised of how the program is running, and any issues you are encountering. This is key to them being able to help, or to anticipate any changes that may be needed as a result of reevaluation.

Helpful links

- [CDC](#)
- [NJ Department of Health](#)
- [NJ Department of Education](#)
 - [Restart and Recovery Plan for Education](#)
 - [Updates and Supplemental Guidance](#)
- [Diocese of Trenton](#)
- [The CDC plan for schools during the Coronavirus pandemic](#) is a one-page document to assist administrators in making (re)opening decisions regarding K-12 schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a valuable graphic to keep handy while making decisions.

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