



**Resumption of Parish Ministry  
Faith Formation and Youth Ministry Recommendations  
May 30, 2020 Revised on October 13, 2020**

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As we gradually open our doors to those we serve in our ministries, we remember that we do not do so alone – God is with us every step of the way. In Catechetical and Youth Ministry, we will continue to accompany all toward a closer relationship with God. During the pandemic, we have been given an amazing opportunity to focus on, grow, and support "the Domestic Church." The following are recommendations and guidelines to help in discussions and planning for the resumption of Faith Formation and Youth Ministry. We look forward to gathering once again for Mass and fellowship. May we be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and continue to pray with and for one another.

**GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Consider various scenarios according to distinct phases of loosening and tightening protocols by County public health, parish locations/physical environment, school collaboration, and resources.
- Consider various formation options, including digital and hybrid, combining traditional with digital, based on the above scenarios.
- Focus on "processes" (ongoing formation), not "programs" (which end eventually).
- Communicate the catechesis behind the protocol, policy, and guideline decisions whenever possible and appropriate.
- Communicate clearly within ministries and with the broader parish community
- Place special emphasis on fostering and supporting family catechesis and empowering individuals as missionary disciples. This is a great opportunity to re-imagine how we support and connect with our parish communities and how they connect with each other.
- Prepare and train members with the policy and guidelines they must follow before returning.
- Collaborate with neighboring parishes on best practices.

**In regard to public health protocols, faith formation and youth ministry groups need to follow [Santa Clara County \(SCC\) mandatory directives for programs serving children or youth](#).**

**GENERAL OPERATIONS**

- **Office**
  - Parishes Offices are closed to the public.



- Guidelines for parish office procedures, especially regarding gathering, sanitation, disinfecting, and social distancing protocols can be found in the Parish Office Reopening document.
- Plans for the resumption of Faith Formation and Youth Ministry office operations should follow the parish office procedures. They should consider various scenarios according to distinct phases of loosening and tightening protocols by county public health, parish locations/physical environment, and school collaboration and resources.
- **Volunteers**
  - Volunteers remain an integral part of Ministry. There will be a need to confirm who is available and continue to serve in the Ministry during the pandemic.
  - Recent graduates and high school youth have wonderful gifts and talents. They may be more readily available as volunteers for the Ministry.
  - Plans and schedules for volunteer training on gathering, social distancing, and cleaning and disinfecting protocols should be developed, especially for shared spaces.
    - If meetings/training for personnel must occur in-person, hold meetings/trainings outdoors, if feasible, and ensure everyone is wearing face coverings and is at least 6 feet apart at all times.
  - Absenteeism needs to be monitored.
- **Facilities**
  - Everyone at a business facility or worksite must wear a face covering at all times (except very young children, people for whom face coverings are medically inadvisable, or for communication by or with people who are hearing impaired).
  - Parishes must limit the number of people (volunteers, youth and parents) gathering indoors and outdoors based on county public health orders and the number that allows people to easily maintain six feet social distance from one another, whichever is fewer.
  - All parishes are encouraged to move as many activities outdoors as possible. Each parish needs to consider sanitizing and disinfecting protocols that will need to be met. See:
    - [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#)
    - [Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes](#)
  - Hand sanitizer and extra face coverings should be made available at each location.
  - For parishes sharing space with parish schools, we recommend faith formation and youth groups not to use the school facilities until we better understand the school protocols and what is needed for our programs to transition into the classrooms safely. School protocols are very stringent.



## SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

- **Infant Baptism Preparation**
  - As this may be the first point of contact with the parish for new parents and families, in-person meetings may still be the best way to learn more about the family and share about the parish. This may mean that initial meetings are held outdoors to maintain 6-foot social distancing, and everyone must wear face coverings.
  - Consider offering online Baptism Preparation in the initial phase of reopening and move to a hybrid of online and in-person preparation session(s) when possible.
- **First Holy Communion Preparation**
  - During the First Holy Communion celebrations, the Precious Blood is not being offered. Therefore, preparation should re-emphasize to children and their families that by receiving under one species, the whole Christ is sacramentally present, and we "receive all the fruit of Eucharistic grace."
  - Receiving under both species is preferred when the Precious Blood is once again offered.
  - Sacramental Preparation sessions for First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion for the upcoming year should be planned in alignment with the Children's Faith Formation sessions.
- **Confirmation Preparation**
  - Preceding the Confirmation celebrations, consider organizing session(s) or a mini-retreat, keeping in mind gathering limits, face covering requirements, and social distancing protocols.
    - A walk-through of the Confirmation ceremony, with a special emphasis given diocesan guidelines regarding the adaptations for the celebration of Confirmation.
    - A session (virtually or in-person) should be offered for candidates to reflect on their lived experiences this year and what it means for them to be confirmed and leading them to engage in the life of the Church.
    - An evening reflection (virtually or in-person) should be hosted for the sponsor and parents on the role of accompaniment.
- **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults**
  - Preparation of the Elect – Preparation of the Elect should adhere to gathering, face covering, and social distancing protocols. Thus, preparations of the Elect may need to be divided into smaller groups to celebrate the rites.
  - Even with provisions to celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation "Outside of Usual Times," consider how to celebrate the various rites necessary to prepare the Elect for initiation, including each of the Scrutinies.



- Plan other RCIA sessions considering gathering limits, face covering requirements, and social distancing protocols. Online or a hybrid of in-person and online sessions are options to consider.

## **SACRAMENTAL CELEBRATIONS**

**Celebrations should adhere to the diocesan guidelines for "Resumption of Public Masses and In-Person Ministry During COVID-19 Pandemic" released on May 26, 2020 (Revised on October 14, 2020).**

- **Expanded Recommendations**

- Consider how to include and incorporate the greater parish community in the sacrament celebrations. The celebrations should be celebrated in the community as much as possible.
- First Communicants and Candidates should not be lectors or read the Prayers of the Faithful.
- While recognizing that celebrating First Holy Communion is a significant milestone in the faith journey of children and their families, in these extraordinary times, we recommend that only immediate family members attend First Holy Communion Mass celebrations.
  - This includes parents, siblings, and the child who is receiving his/her First Holy Communion.
- Care must be taken in explaining these gathering limitations to First Communicants families as in many cultures, godparents play a special role in the child's faith journey.
- For Confirmation celebrations, the attendance should be limited to immediate family and one sponsor.
- Dependent on the gathering limits and social distancing guidelines, the number of attendees per family and/or household may expand to include other immediate and extended family members.
- Catechists and volunteers will need to clearly explain the process and spacing consideration between each child/youth. Mark line positions so participants will know where to go. Limit the number of volunteers to assist.
- Adaptation must be made for persons with disabilities according to their ability.

## **FAITH FORMATION PROCESSES**

- **2020-21 Registrations**

- We encourage families to register for formation sessions to continue growing in their faith and connect with the parish community. Registration formats include the following:



- Online Registration - Encourage online registrations where possible. Google Forms and Microsoft Forms are all programs that can be used. ParishSoft is also a viable alternative for offices already using the program for their faith formation database.
- Mail-in Registration - For families with limited access to a computer or printer, offer mail-in and in-person registration. Hard copies of the registration form can also be mailed to families.
- In-Person Registration - For In-Person registration, consider having families make an appointment with the office to plan for an outdoor meeting to connect with the family observing social distancing protocols.
- Registration forms must include the "Parental Virtual Consent" form for online sessions.
- **Session/Gathering Formats**
  - Parishes should consider having multiple formats for faith formation/youth ministry sessions. For example, parishes may begin with online and/or hybrid sessions and move to in-person sessions when possible and then back to online if the restrictions increase.
  - Based on space availability, gathering limits, and social distancing protocols, consider the following formats:
    - Online Format – Virtual gatherings, such as Zoom, recorded classes, or livestreams, should remain the primary and preferred format. Participants in any online sessions will need to have the Parental Virtual Consent form on file with the office.
    - Hybrid – Online sessions with physical gathering combination
    - In-Person Alternating Schedules – Alternating divided class biweekly, monthly sessions. For example, faith formation sessions are scheduled on Sunday mornings. Group A would meet on the first and third Sundays, and Group B would meet on the second and fourth Sundays.
    - In-Person with Family Formation Format – For example, families meet together once a month with parent and child breakout sessions. During the remaining weeks of the month, parents teach faith formation in the home.
    - In-person (physical) sessions/gatherings should be phased in based on gathering limit and social distancing guidelines permitted.
  - Each Ministry should evaluate which of its activities would benefit most from physical gathering; the rest should be maintained virtually.
  - Youth retreat necessitates an in-person encounter to make a significant impact. Alternatives should be considered:
    - Hybrid – Virtual and in-person
    - Day or multiday retreats instead of overnight retreats.



- **Attendance Requirements**
  - Follow the [SCC mandatory directives for programs serving children or youth](#) regarding health screening.
  - Emphasize the need for parental screening of children/youth according to county health questionnaire before attending in-person sessions.
  - Consider revising attendance policies to accommodate the absences of children/youth who may show symptoms of illness or with limited access to online sessions.
  - Consider readiness or assessment policies for moving forward, especially with children/youth in Sacramental Preparation.
- **Children's Liturgy of the Word**
  - Even with the resumption of Masses, Children's Liturgy of the Word is still suspended.
  - Consider providing a link by e-mail and on the parish webpage to the Lectionary for Masses with Children for parents to use until the sessions resume.
- **Adult Faith Formation**
  - Many of our parishes have been creative in offering Adult Faith Formation resources and opportunities during the pandemic. These have included online retreats, parish missions, and small group communities.
  - Continue to offer online options, especially for parishioners who may be nervous about attending parish events in the initial reopening phases or unable to because of being in a high-risk group.
  - Consider a hybrid option when possible for in-person gatherings following social distancing protocols.
  - Consider hosting a series of small group virtual gatherings to enable people to connect and talk about their feelings, fears, and questions about the past several months. Reflect on the following questions: What is there in Scripture and our tradition that will help us get through these challenges to our lives today? What does this mean for my life as a disciple? What can I do? What can we do together? Additional participants may be added via phone or online options.
  - Adult Faith Formation resources and best practices will continue to be added to the Diocesan webpage.

## PROTOCOLS FOR ONSITE GATHERINGS

- **Gatherings**
  - Children may meet **outdoors** on church property. The maximum of participants ages six and over is 12 per group and 2 adults, until further guidance from the County/State.



- Ensure students and adults remain in stable group cohorts by keeping the same students and adults together each session.
- Stable groups must be kept apart from each other (if indoors, in different rooms or, if outdoors or in very large indoor spaces, at least 25 feet apart). Maximize social distancing six feet or more.
- Use the outdoor gathering spaces for meetings adhering to County and State orders as much as possible.
- Limit the number of groups of children/youth with which each staff member comes into direct contact. This reduces transmission risk and reduces the number of personnel and children/youth who would have to be tested and quarantined in the event that someone in the Program tests positive for COVID-19.
- All adults picking up or dropping off children/youth shall wear face coverings and pick up their child in the designated area.
- Parents or other individuals dropping off or picking up older children or youth by car should be encouraged to remain in their vehicles to the extent possible. If in-person drop-off or pickup is necessary, only a single individual should drop off or pick up the child/youth.
- Program participants shall not share but use their own materials, and any toys/materials used by multiple children should be cleaned between uses. Programs shall limit use of supplies and equipment to one group of children/youth at a time, clean and disinfect between uses pursuant to CDC guidance.
- **COVID-19 Testing and Reporting**
  - Please see Section 2 regarding monitoring, health screening, and COVID-19 testing and reporting pages 8-13 of [SCC mandatory directives for programs serving children or youth](#).
  - A designated staff person from the parish must keep the records of all groups that use the facilities for contact tracing following the SCC guidelines.