



# ARCHDIOCESE OF SANTA FE

The Catholic Center

OFFICE OF FAITH FORMATION

September 3, 2021

Dear Parish Catechetical Leaders:

The Archdiocese continues to follow the NM Public Health Order and those requirements listed in the August 24, 2021, *Policies for the Prevention and Control of COVID-19 in New Mexico* from the NM Department of Health and protocols from the New Mexico Environment Department. Archbishop Wester and the Rapid Response Committee of the Archdiocese encourage parishes to again consider and prioritize virtual or at-home Faith Formation through the Fall of 2021. Should a parish desire to continue with in-person/gathered Faith Formation, please comply with the following:

- Masks must be worn by all, when indoors, regardless of vaccination status.
  - Ensure each individual (catechists, children, youth, guests) wears a mask (3-ply) while at parish facilities. (neck gaiters, bandanas, masks with valves, or face shields should not be used in place of a mask)
  - Have appropriate sized masks for any children, youth, or adults who forget or lose theirs.
  - Those who are medically excused from wearing a mask should have accommodations made for them to use distanced learning/virtual options from home.
- If a catechist, assistant, other volunteer notifies you of a positive result of a COVID-19 test, you must report this to the NM Environment Department within 4 hours of notification.
  - Reports may be made via email: [NMENV-OSHA@state.nm.us](mailto:NMENV-OSHA@state.nm.us)
  - Via Phone call: 505-476-8700
  - Via Fax: 505-476-8734
- The NM Environment Department has directed that if you receive notice of a child or youth testing positive, it is the responsibility of the child's school to notify NMPED of this result. Your responsibility is to encourage the parent to notify their child's school if they have not already done so.
- For the above two instances of notification of a positive test result for COVID-19, if there was close contact\* with others in your program, you must notify the parents of the other children and any other adults that they may have been exposed immediately. For others who may have been in the same classroom but not necessarily considered 'close contact' you must also notify them of the potential of exposure.
  - See attached WORD template of letter to be sent out with further instructions
  - Caution – only speak of positive cases when making notifications and do not mention anyone by name.
- Care for cleaning the classroom and the building will need to be considered as well.
  - In addition to the sanitizing of spaces occupied by COVID-19 infectious individuals, parishes are to maintain a cleaning schedule prior to children/youth entering the facility, particularly for high-touch surfaces.

- Parishes must ensure safe and correct application of disinfectants and keep them out of reach of children. See CDC guidelines for cleaning facilities: [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility | CDC](#)
- All catechists who will be providing in-person Faith Formation should be vaccinated against COVID-19. If there is a catechist who cannot receive the vaccination or has chosen not to do so, they are to be tested weekly for COVID-19 and that test result must be given to the Program or Parish Administrator no more than 48 hours after the result and prior to entering a classroom with children.
  - It is recommended that those who cannot or choose not to be vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus should not participate as an in-person/gathered catechist this year.
  - Those who are not vaccinated can certainly continue to help parish Faith Formation/Religious Education programs via computer or telephone. Parish Catechetical Leaders are encouraged to find areas in which this is possible.
  - If a parish decides to allow unvaccinated catechists/volunteers to lead sessions in a classroom setting with children, parents must be notified of the situation and allowed to make the decision whether to allow their children to attend Faith Formation session with an unvaccinated catechist. Families may not be penalized for refusing to allow their children to attend sessions with an unvaccinated catechist.

All pandemic related policies and protocols are subject to change as the situation of COVID-19 positive cases changes. Current protocols and any changes will be posted on the Archdiocesan website in the very near future.

**OTHER REMINDERS:**

- It is important that every Parish Catechetical Leader (Pastor, Parochial Vicar, Deacon, D.R.E., C.R.E., Youth Ministry Coordinator, RCIA Coordinator, etc.) obtain and read the new *Directory for Catechesis* and share this information with the catechists with whom they minister and/or lead. This is the Magisterium's guidance on the direction, method, and most pressing issues for ministering as a catechist today.
  - Use the Catechumenal model as a guide
  - You can evangelize those who have not been catechized. You cannot catechize those who have not been evangelized. St. Pope John Paul II stated, "[T]he definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity." (*Catechesi Tradendae*, #5, *General Directory for Catechesis*, #80, *Directory for Catechesis*, #75)
- Parishes are required to use materials/curriculum found on the current USCCB Conformity List (<https://www.usccb.org/resources/Current%20Conformity%20List.pdf>) in Faith Formation/Religious Education programs.
  - Contact the Office of Worship ([dthillet@archdiosf.org](mailto:dthillet@archdiosf.org)) for those materials for RCIA, RICA, and RCIA adapted for Children.
  - Contact the Office of Faith Formation ([mesquibel@archdiosf.org](mailto:mesquibel@archdiosf.org)) if you have questions regarding using supplemental resources for Faith Formation sessions.
- Parishes may not present information for any *Theology of the Body* program or retreat, chastity program, or other information relating to sexuality to any Elementary, Middle School or High School aged child without first informing the parent of exactly what will be covered and obtaining written permission.
  - Age-appropriate material must be used.

- As with all Faith Formation/Religious Education, Middle School and High School aged children must be gathered with their own age group and not be mixed so that discussions may also be age appropriate.
- The *Circle of Grace Safe Environment Program* is still required to be taught in the parishes that will be having in-person/gathered Faith Formation/Religious Education. Parents are to be notified in writing of the content and dates of this teaching and those who do not want their child to receive this information must sign the form found in the 2021-2022 Protection of Children Guidelines sent out by the Safe Environment/Victim's Assistance Coordinator to every parish.
- For those parishes who will continue to use a virtual or at-home platform there is an alternative *Circle of Grace* information that should be sent to the parents for their assistance in teaching this Safe Environment lesson to their children.
  - Age-appropriate material must be used.
  - As with all Faith Formation/Religious Education, Middle School and High School aged children must be gathered with their own age group and not be mixed so that discussions may also be age appropriate.
- Retreats required prior to Confirmation, per the Sacramental Policies of the Archdiocese, are the responsibility of the Parish. The Office of Faith Formation will not be providing these retreats; but will assist in training and providing materials for parishes to use to meet the *Guidelines for Adolescent Retreats* which was promulgated on August 1, 2016.
  - Depending on the status of the pandemic, in-person retreats [and Community Service opportunities] may be suspended or amended. Virtual retreats and creative non-gathered Community Service opportunities are recommended this year.
  - Those parishes who will be joining together for the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation are encouraged to also gather their candidates for the retreat as well.
  - Any religious order, youth organization, etc. contracted to provide retreat or other formation event for a parish must follow all protocols to ensure Archdiocesan approved and vetted speakers/presenters. For more information, go to: <https://archdiosf.org/speaker-singer-approval>
- Every paid or volunteer staff of every parish must renew their VIRTUS certification every five (5) years.
  - You may request a list from the Victim's Assistance Coordinator, Annette Klimka, to see if you or your catechists are due to take the VIRTUS training again by emailing [aklimka@archdiosf.org](mailto:aklimka@archdiosf.org).
  - Everyone who takes the VIRTUS training to minister or work in the Church acknowledges that they will follow the published Code of Conduct (<https://d2y1pz2y630308.cloudfront.net/17613/documents/2017/12/VIRTUS%20Model%20Code%20of%20Conduct.pdf>, <https://d2y1pz2y630308.cloudfront.net/17613/documents/2017/12/VIRTUS%20Model%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20Spanish.pdf> -or- see attached).
    - If you have not read this in some time, I urge to do so again and familiarize yourself with what is expected of you.
      - You may find it helpful to use it as an examination of conscience on how we treat one another as ambassadors for or disciples of Christ.
- By virtue of your baptism, vocation as a Lay Ecclesial Minister, and co-worker in the vineyard of the Lord, are called to be an advocate for the children and families with and to whom you minister. Let empathy and compassion be your guide for interactions and issues that arise from parents juggling multiple responsibilities or who are concerned about the health and safety of their child, family, etc.

- The Archdiocese has a long-standing policy that allows home based catechesis. You may review the policy here: <https://archdiosf.org/policies-for-home-based-religious-education>.
- It is imperative that you work to help those families who are concerned and vulnerable due to underlying conditions or have trepidations about in-person Faith Formation/Religious Education without penalty. Work with your pastor to find a solution for the children in those families to continue their formation.
- Just a reminder that under the directive and authority of Archbishop Wester, the current weekly Mass attendance dispensation remains in effect.

Sincerely in Christ,

SM Edna Pearl Esquibel, CSSF  
Director of Faith Formation

*\*Per the CDC – “Close contact is defined as someone who was within **6 feet** for a total of **15 minutes or more** within **2 days prior** to illness onset, regardless of whether the contact was wearing a mask.”*