



ARCHDIOCESE OF SANTA FE

The Catholic Center

OFFICE OF FAITH FORMATION

January 7, 2022

Dear Parish Catechetical Leaders:

The Archdiocese continues to follow the NM Public Health Order and those requirements listed in the November 18, 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. As noted in the letters of July 9, 2021 and September 3, 2021, parishes are **highly encouraged** to consider and prioritize virtual or at-home Faith Formation. Should a parish, however desire to continue with in-person/gathered Faith Formation, all diligence and prudence with regard to the protocols must be followed in order to keep everyone safe.

- Well-fitting 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.
- In the instance 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.
 - 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 regular 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.

Remote learning (non-gathered/virtual) methods are to be made available to the families, particularly if parents have concerns or are fearful about sending their child to in-person/gathered classes.

- Children may not be required to attend in-person/gathered formation classes against the parents' wishes or be penalized for their parents' decision.
- 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.

Under the directive and authority of Archbishop Wester, the current weekly Mass attendance dispensation remains in effect.

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.

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.”*