

June 17, 2020

Dear friends,

Many of you have contacted me in recent weeks asking for thoughts related to what Atria will look like in the fall. I am very grateful for all of the resources the National Office has sent out regarding both parameters, which form clear boundaries for us, and also considerations and guidelines, which will need to be applied on a diocesan and an individual parish/school basis. I think there is great prudence in looking at the upcoming year as a year of many possibilities and having and communicating a plan which both acknowledges and provides for such will help bring unity to catechists and families. The resources needed for this conversation are well laid-out by CGSUSA; I would recommend reading their document (also attached to this email) before this one. In this letter I am sharing my personal thoughts, based on my Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, as I begin to plan for the fall.

The schools in our Archdiocese seem to be planning to proceed on campus as usual, although extra safety precautions will be in place for cleaning, sanitizing, etc. There will also be protocols to be utilized if an adult or child or family member tests positive for COVID-19 at any time during the year. Plans for masks, temperature checks, numbers of children in a space, and even whether or not children can move through the hallways to a new space are things that each parish will need to consider. At this point I am planning for no masks, relatively normal numbers of children (8-10 in Level 1, 10-15 in Levels 2 and 3 depending on the size of the Atrium), and the use of the Atrium by separate groups with time for intentional cleaning between the groups. If you are in an area where children will not be able to leave their classroom, consider the possibility of having key materials on a shelf in the back of the classroom for follow-up work. We cannot present a material to the children without giving them the opportunity to work with it. This is not fitting to our method. However, presenting a material outside of the Atrium space and then leaving it out for the children to use would be a possibility.

Children would wash hands or use hand sanitizer when entering or leaving the Atrium. Grace and Courtesy lessons would be given for this as well as for how to wash hands when needed during the session. Within the Atrium, consider a shelf or table on which to place materials which have been worked with by a child who has coughed, sneezed, or has had his fingers in his mouth while working with it. This shelf or table would be a "holding place" of sorts for the material until it has been cleaned by an adult during the session or after the session and has then been returned to its regular place on the Atrium shelves in order to again be available as an option for the children. It is likely that Practical Life (EPL) materials will need to be limited or assigned to particular children for each session. For example, if children are given individual tables for their work time in the Atrium (a possibility to consider), a new three-year-old might have three EPL materials at the back edge of his table from which he could choose during that Atrium session in addition to the other materials that would be available for his use.

Because there is a real possibility of needing to shift to limited enrollment capacity or home catechesis during the winter months, I have been pondering how best to prepare the children for this.

1. Consider the possibility of having children come to the Atrium every other week in order to have smaller numbers in the Atrium. Ideally this would follow a period of time in which they are in the Atrium every week so that the children will have consistency in moving towards normalization early in the year.
2. Prepare the Level 2 and 3 children for the possibility of time at home by focusing on planning prayer early in the year in a way that leads them to doing so independently. This would include utilizing resources in the Atrium which would be easily transferrable to the home in the event of a shift at some point later in the year: prayer planning sheets, Scripture charts, Psalm verse Scripture cards, looking up Scripture in the Bible, singing, etc.
3. As the year progresses, consider setting aside extension works that would be possible to send home with children if that need arises. In my mind this would primarily be for Levels 2 and 3 and, in addition to prayer planning supplies, could include:
 - a. Level 2: The Books of the Bible paper chart, the text for the Blue Unity Strip, card packets for the Land of Israel, a list of Maxims and the Summary of the Law, a copy of the City of Jerusalem control chart, the words for the Gestures booklets and the text cards for the Missal, a list of the Altar Articles and Baptism Signs and Gestures.
 - b. Level 3: Additionally, Parousia Scripture citations, the Level 3 Maxims, the Virtues material, and possibly the complete rite of one of the sacraments to copy at home.

If we do shift to learning at home at some point over the school year, I will be looking at implementing the following:

1. Level 1: Offer periodic online gatherings with the children for short periods of prayer including pondering prayer cards, Psalm verses, and a time of singing with children and families. For the parents, we could offer periodic online opportunities in which to share information on the religious needs and capacities of children at different developmental stages and to provide additional support for the building of the domestic church as National has done so well this past year.
2. Level 2: Consider what sort of Bible Study might be possible for older Level 2 children where you could gather virtually to read a Scripture passage, ponder it together, then encourage time for ongoing work through copying text and/or illustrating. In terms of the liturgy, focus on the words of a particular moment of the liturgy, pondering gestures and verbal prayers, then provide ongoing work through copying texts and/or illustrating. The True Vine, the Maxims, and the History of the Kingdom of God are themes that appeal most to the heart and soul of the child of this age. Considering how to revisit and extend these themes through online interactions would be appropriate, always keeping in mind that we are not teaching but merely assisting the children in their continued pondering.

3. Level 3: It is possible that Typology could continue through an online format. Scripture studies on the Prophets or the Parables are also possibilities. At this age it might be most fitting to look at the upcoming Sunday readings, particularly the Gospel, and lead a modified *lectio divina* as part of a weekly or bi-weekly virtual prayer time.

As with all things in this time, there is a need to be flexible and responsive to the current reality which may change quickly at any moment. Conversations about what your school/parish plan will be should begin now and may take some time to lay out. Communicating your plan to the parents of the children in your Atrium is also very important so that parents will then be able to make the best decisions for their families.

In the past few weeks I have been blessed to work with a number of new and returning CGS catechists in both the Level 1 and 2 levels of formation. As a result of these interactions, I feel very strongly that this work is too essential to the spiritual life of children and adults to set it aside or move to something else. CGS is truly an essential component of both living and handing on the faith for so many people. Let us remain united in our commitment to offer to our families and children what provides so beautifully, in union with the sacramental life of the Church, for the nourishment of our souls. It is a gift to be united with each of you both in prayer and in conversation as we continue on this journey of following after the One who calls us by name.

In the Father's Love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carolyn Kohlhaas". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Carolyn Kohlhaas