



DIOCESE OF AUSTIN

SECRETARIAT FOR FORMATION AND SPIRITUALITY

MEMORANDUM

FROM: ALISON TATE, SECRETARIAT DIRECTOR

CC: MOST REV. JOE S. VÁSQUEZ, VERY REV. JAMES MISKO, GUSTAVO RODRIGUEZ

SUBJECT: FAITH FORMATION OPTIONS FOR 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR

DATE: 7/13/2020

GUIDANCE FOR DIOCESE OF AUSTIN PARISHES IN DEVELOPING PROGRAMS FOR FAITH FORMATION: 2020–2021 SCHOOL YEAR

Uncertainty in the state of the pandemic in our cities and counties this fall, and our responsibility to protect the most vulnerable persons in our communities from illness, necessitates preparing for a catechetical process that is primarily *virtual* or *remote* in nature. Unless a parish can ensure that physical distancing and sanitation requirements (as recommended and sometimes required by state and local authorities, the [Texas Education Agency](#), and the [CDC](#)) can be maintained throughout an event or session, faith formation should not be in-person. However, portions of a parish's faith formation program may be in-person, if the above guidelines are followed and the approval of the pastor is obtained.

With the variety of parishes in the Diocese of Austin, we cannot provide a single recommendation that will apply to every parish. The implementation of faith formation programs during the 2020-2021 school year will instead be distinctive from parish to parish. Religious education and youth ministry staff will need to strive for creativity and collaboration in planning a program that meets the approval of the parish pastor. Protocols and expectations for formation continue to be the same as they were prior to the pandemic.

This document aims to present ideas of different models for your consideration in the 2020-2021 school year. These models will function similarly for both English and Spanish-speaking participants. Additional support is available for Spanish-speaking programs by contacting your publisher, the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis or the Office of Youth, Young Adult and Campus Ministry.

This time of extraordinary circumstances calls us to be *flexible*, *compassionate*, and *creative* in our formation options. Each parish should consider online tools from your publishers as well as online learning, communication and presentation tools such as Zoom, YouTube, Google Classroom, FlipGrid, Loom, Prezi, Dacast, Vimeo Live, Muvi, GoToMeeting, etc. Additionally, we are now blessed with an opportunity to invest in parents, equipping them with tools to lead their family in the faith and collaborating with them in a new way.

Families within the same parish will have circumstances, concerns and needs unique to themselves. The decision to not join an in-person setting must be respected. Expectations of the level of participation required should be clearly stated for all options.

The **Office of Evangelization and Catechesis** has developed three models to guide parishes in providing catechesis in the Fall of 2020. The detailed implementation of each model will be determined by the pastor and the faith formation staff. Each parish is asked to choose the best model that fits the needs of the entire parish, customize it as needed and only offer that option, rather than two or three options. This will ensure efficiencies and organization.

The **Office of Youth, Young Adult and Campus Ministry** has developed four models for formation with young people. All four models present teachings of the Church complemented by discipleship and the practice of the faith. Due to public health guidelines (as recommended and sometimes required by state and local authorities, the TEA, and the CDC) gatherings of a parish-wide youth group might be limited at this time, however, we must continue to minister with and for youth. Each parish is asked to choose the best model that fits the needs of the entire parish, customize it as needed and only offer that option, rather than two or three options. This will ensure efficiencies and organization.

Our hope is that virtual options will allow parishes to “cast a wider net” in inviting families to participate in faith formation sessions. Reaching out to all parish families with a new zeal and methodology may attract families who may have been closed to the traditional approach to formation. Reestablishing relationships with families and inviting them into the process of formation is the first step in each of these models.

Continue to follow previously issued temporary protocols for the celebration of first Communion and confirmation. Whether to hold retreats of any kind is a local decision made by the pastor based on the protocols and guidelines provided by the diocese, local authorities, the TEA, and the CDC. Please be aware that a retreat is not required for the adolescent confirmation preparation process. (Pastoral Manual O.V.E)

Please do not hesitate to reach out to the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis or the Office of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry for assistance in choosing a model or developing options for families in your parish.

SUGGESTED FAITH FORMATION MODELS

BAPTISM PREPARATION

I. BAPTISM PREPARATION SESSIONS (FOR PARENTS & GODPARENTS REQUESTING INFANT BAPTISM)

It is recommended that an online format be chosen for baptism preparation sessions. An option such as Zoom allows presentation segments followed by small group discussion and gives the instructor or facilitator the ability to join groups as needed. There are several resources available for use in parishes:

1. *Reborn* Augustine Institute (formed.org) - English and Spanish
2. *Belonging: Baptism in the Family of God* Ascension Press - English and Spanish
3. *Agape Catholic Ministries Baptism Prep* - English and Spanish
4. *Growing Up Catholic Baptism Preparation* - English
5. *Springs of Faith* Loyola Press - English and Spanish

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

II. FAMILY CATECHESIS (PACKET DISTRIBUTION)

DESCRIPTION:

DRE/Volunteers assemble packets for distribution to families who register for RE. DRE communicates with catechists individually, in groups based on age of students, or all together via a virtual platform prior to the start of each month to go over the theme, relay the key points to cover with the parents, announce new information, and provide encouragement and affirmation. Catechists contact each family on a monthly basis to go over lessons with the parent, answer questions, assess needs, etc.

PACKET CONTENTS:

Original student text (do not photocopy unless instructed to do so by the publisher), Diocesan (or other) Prayer Book, supplies for projects not typically found in homes, Parent Manual (see below for details), Ziplock bag with name label if any work needs to be returned to the parish. Alternatives to turning in paperwork include photos of finished work sent via email or text, an activity log completed by the parent with the date of each lesson and a check-off of objectives met, or a phone discussion with the parent. Packet pick-ups may be scheduled at monthly intervals or one per semester. Please read and follow the procedures for packet distributions from the TEA.

PARENT MANUAL:

Contact information for DRE, package pick-up dates for year, explanation of expectations for parent, Step by step instructions for each lesson to be taught during the month. Utilize the catechist manual for vocabulary if the publisher does not provide parent-led lessons. Include videos that can be accessed on a mobile device. Explain how students will be accountable for their learning.

IMPLEMENTATION:

Encourage families to set a regular time each week to complete the lessons. Most weeks the parent will be facilitating a learning session. Consider reserving one week each month for a family project – a service opportunity, creating a saint book, constructing a home altar, etc. Families should discuss following the activity.

This model serves all students regardless of internet availability and technological devices but does require organizing a packet pick-up process. For families with multiple children parishes should choose curriculum that allows the parent to present one theme; children will use resources for their grade level or resources suitable for multi-age learning.

III. FAMILY CATECHESIS (BLENDED LEARNING APPROACH)

DESCRIPTION:

The monthly topic is presented to families by the pastor, parochial vicar, deacon, experienced catechist, or DRE via Zoom or other technology. Parents would then extend the learning throughout the month with directed activities. This may require a separate coaching session for parents that is recorded by the DRE or offered in-person if

preventative measures required by the TEA and CDC can be enforced. Assignments are given with options to use a physical or digital textbook.

DRE RESPONSIBILITY:

Assign a presenter for each monthly topic. Record the presentation in case you need to offer it multiple times. Assemble a team of catechists to assist with extending the lesson. Ideally teams would create assignments for various age groups within families. The team and DRE will call each family monthly to check on progress with the home learning.

IMPLEMENTATION:

Virtual meetings are preferred for public health and sanitation reasons. Depending on the number of families, several presentations may be scheduled, and the families placed in groups based on the ages of the children. In some parishes, gathering families in a large space may be possible. However, if physical distancing, sanitation protocols and group size restrictions cannot be followed, family sessions should not be done in-person.

IV. FAMILY CATECHESIS (DIGITAL LEARNING APPROACH)

DESCRIPTION:

Lessons for each of the monthly themes will be available either as eBooks or through online links. Most of the major publishers have been working to put their physical books online as eBooks, made available for purchase in this format or included with the purchase of a book.

DRE RESPONSIBILITY:

Identify resources that can be made available online. Utilize an online platform such as Flipgrid, Moodle, or Google Classroom to post assignments in the eBook, supplemented by videos or reflection questions to which students can post responses. Be sure to have a way to track accountability if this is not a feature included in the platform.

This model allows the catechist or DRE to record introductory videos to the lessons that deliver content and asks the parent to serve as facilitator of discussion that follows. DREs should choose a platform that is mobile device friendly so that parents without computers can use their smartphones.

IMPLEMENTATION:

Considering at the monthly theme and the curriculum you have chosen for your parish, choose the appropriate lessons and post them on the online platform. Record a video introducing the theme and giving the objectives for the lesson of the week (this may be one of your catechists or you may have catechists do this for their own class or grade level). There should be a short introductory video for each lesson.

Ideally, allow one week for a service project or a creativity project. Record an introduction that gives at least two options – one service and one creativity (collage, poster, video, play, booklet). Have families post what they did on the online platform.

YOUTH MINISTRY

I. HYBRID ONLINE YOUTH GROUP + PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

DESCRIPTION:

If your parish has been utilizing a youth group gathering in the past, this is a simple switch that continues the formation of the young people in your parish using the same format that will now meet online rather than in person. The personal relationship piece is essential so that the youth are accompanied in the practice of their faith. Break into small groups for conversation that applies the teachings to personal life. Small group leaders should endeavor to accompany the youth in their small groups in various ways, supporting the practice of their faith.

YOUTH MINISTRY COORDINATOR'S RESPONSIBILITY:

Plan large group presentations as you would in a normal year, only these will happen via an online gathering. Train and empower youth ministry volunteers to assist in these presentations and lead small groups. Assist small group leaders with additional support to youth as needed.

IMPLEMENTATION AND RESOURCES:

Consider how you might utilize the same elements you have been using for your youth group meetings in the past, such as icebreakers, music, small groups, prayer, community building, moments for parental involvement, etc. These are all things you can do via an online platform. Continue to support and train your adult volunteers to share their faith and meaningfully disciple with the youth. Resources for this type of program are available from our Catholic publishers. Catechetical content may be found in the resources of [The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth](#) (St. Mary's Press) or [Catholic Essentials](#) (Ave Maria Press).

II. EQUIP PARENTS TO ACCOMPANY YOUTH IN THE KERYGMA (PACKETS)

DESCRIPTION:

Provide parents with resources to celebrate the salvation in Jesus Christ in a family setting where they are studying, reflecting and praying alongside their teens. Modeling by parents is an essential element in supporting the practice of the faith in young people. This includes praying as a family, grace before meals, attending Mass and parish community involvement.

YOUTH MINISTRY COORDINATOR'S RESPONSIBILITY:

Online gathering and training for parents to kick off the program. Include resources and conversation for supporting the parenting of teens. What are their concerns? Assemble and distribute a packet for each family. This should include catechist guides for weekly lessons as well as family activity suggestions (prayer, local pilgrimages, celebrating rites of passage, service, interviewing other generations, scouting religious awards, helping neighbors, outdoor activities, etc.) Support parents with check-ins and follow-up gatherings throughout the year. As parents become comfortable in this teaching role, consider providing additional reading materials and online gatherings to build a sense of community among parents of teens and fully support their guidance of their family in the faith.

IMPLEMENTATION AND RESOURCES:

Equip parents in kerygma utilizing: The Catholic Faith Handbook (St. Mary's Press) Part A: The Creed or Catholic Essentials (Ave Maria Press) Chapter 1, Lessons 1-4; Chapter 2, Lessons 1-4; Chapter 3, Lessons 1-5.

III. UTILIZE SCRIPTURE OR THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

DESCRIPTION:

The teachings of the church may be presented through the lens of scripture or the lives of the saints. This model pairs saint or scripture study with curriculum presented in catechetical textbooks. Like model I above, it utilizes digital meetings to present material, reflect in small groups and pray.

YOUTH MINISTRY COORDINATOR'S RESPONSIBILITY:

Plan large group lessons, utilizing adult volunteers to assist with content and presentation. Schedule and promote the online gatherings. Recruit and train youth ministry volunteers to lead small groups. Provide adult volunteers with content, reflection questions and guidance for preparation before each large group meeting. Assist small group leaders with additional support to youth as needed.

IMPLEMENTATION AND RESOURCES:

Curriculum, The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth (St. Mary's Press) and Catholic Essentials (Ave Maria Press) can be correlated with scripture or the lives of saints. Scripture can be presented through a comprehensive study or utilizing the liturgical calendar. Possible scripture study resources include: Teaching the Saints; Saints of our Lives; Sunday Connection; Six Weeks with the Bible for Teens; The Journey Begins; Gospel Connections for Teens; Youth Engaging Scripture; T3 Teen Timeline.

IV. MENTORSHIP MODEL (FLIPPED CLASSROOM OR INDEPENDENT STUDY)

DESCRIPTION:

Mentorship in the faith is an essential element of the formation of young people. In the mentorship model, adults walk and grow spiritually with young people. Meetings focus on content provided to both the teens and mentors, which is studied by all parties before each meeting. Mentorship also fosters leadership and personal spiritual growth of youth, as one can examine and understand his or her personal life experience in light of the Gospel message.

YOUTH MINISTRY COORDINATOR'S RESPONSIBILITY:

Prepare the lessons or content to be delivered to the teens via packets, textbook, or digitally, along with a schedule of when the materials should be reviewed and when they will be discussed. It is important to keep in mind that in a mentorship model, the adults who are facilitating should have the skills to accompany young people. Identify and invite adults who can mentor young people. The youth minister should then provide ongoing training and formation for adult mentors, as well as provide resources and support. The materials and clearly communicated instructions should be provided to student and each mentor. This should include any material for the meeting sessions as well as questions to reflect upon. As the year progresses, the youth minister should invite ongoing feedback

from youth ministry mentors throughout the time in which the mentorship meetings are taking place. This feedback should include any positive feedback about how the youth are progressing, as well as any concerns regarding the resources or members of the group.

Keep in mind that a mentorship model has a large ratio of adults to youth. A mentorship model would have two adults for every two-to-four youth. This ratio allows for greater opportunity to foster personal relationships and accompany young people.

IMPLEMENTATION AND RESOURCES:

Materials for this model may include any of the previously mentioned resources or additional materials that support the formation goals for the process. Catechetical materials may be the same ones your parish program has been using in the recent past. A mentorship model should be discussion-based whereupon youth and adults discuss material and relate it to their personal life experience and living-out of the Gospel message.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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