



DIocese OF AUSTIN

SECRETARIAT FOR FORMATION AND SPIRITUALITY

MEMORANDUM

FROM: ALISON TATE, SECRETARIAT DIRECTOR

CC: MOST REV. JOE S. VÁSQUEZ, VERY REV. JAMES MISKO, DEKARLOS BLACKMON, GUSTAVO RODRIGUEZ, LUISA DE POO

SUBJECT: SACRAMENTAL FORMATION FOR 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR

DATE: 9/1/2020

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

Formation for the sacramental life of the Church is an essential component of the pastoral care parishes provide for the faithful. Developing sacramental formation programs adaptable to various circumstances and accessible to all requires thoughtful planning. The following guidelines provide options and resources to assist pastors and parish catechetical leaders.

With Bishop Vásquez as the principal catechist of the diocese, the catechetical ministry of each parish priest and parish staff flows directly from the him. It remains the bishop's expectation that catechesis continue in all parishes for the good of God's people, even in this pandemic. Therefore, parishes must accommodate all who seek sacramental formation: in-person, virtually and possibly using a hybrid formation program. This may be implemented in three basic ways, as best fits each particular parish:

- I. Online Gathering
 - a. The facilitator hosts sessions from their office or other locale. All participants log in to the video call from their individual locations. The facilitator distributes necessary materials via email, mail, or a pick-up process at the parish previous to the meeting time. For the session, the facilitator utilizes options such as screen sharing, rooms, chat and polling features to ensure an engaging formation experience.
- II. Hybrid

- a. This format includes an in-person small group or seminar with some attending remotely via videoconferencing.
 - b. In a similar way to how Mass is livestreamed, a laptop would be set up from the perspective of an attendee. This would be placed on an empty desk, chair, or tabletop, so that they would have a view of the facilitator and at least some of the other participants.
- III. Small Group or One-on-One Formation
- a. If distancing, mask use and sanitation as described in [COVID-19 Protocols for In-Person Ministry at Parishes](#) can be ensured, small groups of people may gather at the parish for in-person formation.

SUGGESTED FAITH FORMATION MODELS

Formation resources for each sacrament below may be found on the addendum to this memo, titled *Program Structure and Recommended Materials*.

BAPTISM PREPARATION (FOR PARENTS AND GODPARENTS REQUESTING INFANT BAPTISM)

It is recommended that an online format be temporarily chosen for baptism preparation sessions. Videoconferencing allows an instructor to utilize one of the following models:

- I. Presentation of content from an approved resource followed by reflection and discussion.
- II. Facilitate a reflection and discussion, following a synchronous video presentation and using an approved resource.
- III. Facilitate reflection and discussion following independent study using printed or online resources.

Provisions should be made for those without internet access. It is not suitable preparation to simply refer parents and sponsors to a pre-recorded video and forgo the opportunity to introduce the parish community, form relationships, emphasize key points and answer questions. Interactions may take place online or in-person.

MARRIAGE PREPARATION

One of the primary goals of marriage preparation is the identification and deepening of the couple's faith. The PREPARE or FOCCUS instrument should be administered by a trained facilitator and according to the guidelines for the instrument. An introduction to natural family planning, presented by a certified NFP educator, is required for all couples being married in the Diocese of Austin, if they are of childbearing age.

The goals of marriage preparation are:

- a. To present the essential human and Christian aspects of marriage so that the couple becomes aware of the total dimensions of the marriage covenant and contract.
- b. To introduce the couple to persons and resources available to them through their parish and diocesan community so that they might turn to the Church in times of personal need.

Models for marriage preparation:

- I. Sponsor Couples: This format includes individual couple dialogue and couple-to-couple discussion. This format may be implemented in person or utilizing technology.
- II. Seminar: A parish may offer several sessions for multiple couples preparing for marriage, either in person or utilizing technology. This format includes large group presentation and individual couple dialogue.

RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS AND RCIA ADAPTED FOR CHILDREN

RCIA is not a class, but rather, a journey or apprenticeship; a process aimed at training in the Christian life to ask the questions, *who is Jesus and how do I follow him?* Accompaniment and relationship building are key to this formation.

The RCIA begins with pre-evangelization and evangelization and moves to catechesis only when signs of conversion emerge. At this time, RCIA catechists may need assistance from parishioners in identifying those seeking initiation into the Church. Consider making a request of your parishioners to invite others into the faith in various ways. Conversion begins with an invitation from another. Catechists should remain available to seekers as usual. Small-format in-person gatherings are appropriate for RCIA, to encourage community-building among seekers, candidates, sponsors, parish leaders and catechists.

In the RCIA Adapted for Children, conversion happens in the context of the family. For this reason, an approach that meets families where they are and accompanies them on a gradual spiritual journey, beginning with the kerygma and centered on God's Word is recommended. Gatherings are led by the catechist and/or sponsor(s), either in-person following distancing/mask guidelines, or online.

Models for the RCIA:

- I. Guided Catechesis Utilizing Packet: Materials may be distributed in packets which contain the leaflets or text, a prayer book (diocesan or other), handouts and any required materials that are not readily found in homes.

DRE Responsibility: Interview candidate/family at registration; match with catechist or sponsor; provide training for sponsor and catechist on the RCIA process and how to recognize beginning signs of conversion; prepare packets; check in at regular intervals with catechist and candidate/family; arrange liturgical rites with pastor when candidate/family are ready.

Implementation: The RCIA process ideally extends through a complete liturgical year to allow sufficient time for instruction in the truths of the faith and Christian life. Accompaniment and relationship building are important, as is integration into parish life.

- II. Guided Digital Catechesis: *The Gospel Weeklies* and *Young Apprentices* have digital options. If gatherings are online, families can use digital materials. DRE responsibilities and implementation as above (minus packet preparation).

CONFIRMATION

ADOLESCENT CONFIRMATION

A minimum of two years of formal religious education in a parish or Catholic school program precedes preparation for the celebration of the sacrament of confirmation. The sacramental preparation process is supplemental to regular participation in the parish or school religious education programs. The following models pertain to the sacramental preparation study which takes place within a period not to exceed nine to twelve weeks and include the following:

- a. The elements of the rite of confirmation
- b. The meaning of the baptismal promises
- c. The Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah and Galatians)
- d. The meaning of “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit”
- e. The action of the laying on of hands and anointing with the Sacred Chrism
- f. The Lord’s Prayer: “because it is the Spirit who prays in us and in the Spirit the Christian says, ‘Abba Father.’”
- g. The rights, responsibilities, duties, and obligations of full initiation in the Catholic community: Word, worship, community, and service focused catechesis on the sacrament of 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 confirmation preparation process. (Pastoral Manual O.V.E.)

Models for confirmation:

- I. Sponsor or Parent Facilitated: This model uses virtual gatherings to reflect and go deeper into material reviewed by sponsors, parents and candidates prior to the virtual session. This is also referred to as a flipped classroom model. Meetings are facilitated by a catechist and conducted in small groups. Materials are provided digitally or using packets. Content is first studied by all participants and discussed with parents or sponsor utilizing reflection prompts. Content review, sharing and life application is then posed by the catechist during the virtual small group gathering.

DRE Responsibility: Provide materials to participants, parents and catechists, covenant forms to sponsors, pertinent information regarding confirmation to parents, organize small groups and schedule virtual gatherings.

Implementation: A meeting with parents, sponsors and catechists is held prior to start of virtual sessions with the purpose of explaining the format and schedule.

- II. Scripture and Lives of the Saints: The study of the lives of saints gives students an awareness of living the Catholic Faith. This model can be presented in large group/small group format virtually. After an initial presentation on the life of one or more of the saints, participants go into small group sessions with leaders who then weave scripture and the various topics to be covered into the discussion.

DRE Responsibility: Create a schedule linking the life of a saint with a scripture and a confirmation teaching. Assign small groups. Provide materials to presenters.

Implementation: This model lends itself to any size group and emphasizes living out the teachings of the faith, the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit and the power of witness.

ADULT CONFIRMATION

Adults who were baptized Catholic but did not receive the sacrament(s) of confirmation and/or Eucharist as children or teens should be prepared to receive these sacraments at a parish or diocesan confirmation Mass. Please refer to section 9.18 of the *Evangelization and Catechesis DRE Manual* for guidelines and a sample course outline.

FIRST EUCHARIST AND FIRST RECONCILIATION

Models for first Eucharist and first reconciliation:

- I. Family Based Sacramental Formation: In this packet distribution model, parents are empowered to facilitate sacramental formation at home in the family setting.

DRE Responsibility: Create and distribute packets, organized monthly, to families. The DRE must communicate with catechists 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. The DRE will empower the catechist to contact each family monthly to go over lessons with the parent, offer support, answer questions, assess needs, etc. Parents share the packet material and activities with their children in their home.

Packet Contents: Packets may include the sacramental formation student text (do not photocopy unless instructed to do so by the publisher), a prayer book (diocesan or other), supplies for projects not typically found in homes, parent manual, resealable plastic 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 electronically, 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.

Parent Manual: A parent manual may include contact information for the DRE, dates for packet pick-up or planned in-person family gatherings, expectations for the parent, step-by-step instructions for each lesson to be taught during the month. Utilize the catechist manual 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. Consider reserving one week each month for a family project. These could be a service opportunity, creating a saint book, constructing a home altar, etc. Family discussion should conclude 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 facilitate to the whole family at the same time.

- II. Family Catechesis: In this blended learning approach, lessons for sacramental formation are presented to families by the pastor, parochial vicar, deacon, catechist, or DRE via videoconferencing. Parents would then extend the learning throughout the month with in-home activities.

DRE Responsibility: The DRE will assign a presenter for each topic based on chapter or lesson. Record the presentation in case so that you may offer it multiple times. Use the provided recorded resources from the publisher that introduce the lessons and follow-up with directions for instruction. Assemble a team of catechists to help with extending the lesson and coaching parents on in-home follow-up activities. The catechist or DRE will call each family monthly to check on progress with the home learning.

Implementation: Depending on the number of families or schedule needs, families may be placed in smaller groupings to allow for community building. In some parishes, gathering families in a large or outdoor space may be possible. These smaller groups of families would meet via videoconferencing to view the presentation and discuss. Each family should have a copy of the student text and a parent/family resource. Utilize the catechist manual if the publisher does not provide parent-led lessons. Consider providing coaching sessions for parents recorded by the DRE or an experienced catechist. If possible, an optional in-person family gathering may take place once a month to review content and offer general instruction, prayer or other family activities.

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Attached: Program Structure and Recommended Materials