



WORKING WITH OUR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS DURING COVID-19

Over the years, our schools and parishes have worked hard to foster relationships to support and work with our parents in passing on the Catholic faith. In the introduction of [*Pastoral Care of Our Catholic Schools*](#) it notes:

Every so often, we come to a place where we understand, “that we cannot do things the way we have always done them!” Throughout the history of the Church, many of our faith leaders saw this as an opportunity to examine its practices, to recognize and celebrate the gifts of the members of the community, and to discern a way forward.

The COVID-19 crisis offers us that opportunity to examine the ways we do things and to respond in a “missionary key” – reexamining and rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods in their respective communities (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 33). The New Evangelization calls us to employ new ardour, new methods and new expression. With the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are coming to realize that we must start with ardent love and we cannot do what we have always done. We will need new methods and new expression.

Back to School Protocols

Over the summer, school board administrators working under the direction and guidance of the local health units and the provincial government have been drawing up back to school protocols to ensure the safety of all. The protocols have been written and re-written and will be updated and altered as the need arises. For the latest version of a specific school board’s protocols, please visit their website.

School Board	Website
Windsor Essex Catholic District	https://www.wecdsb.on.ca/
St. Clair Catholic District	https://www.st-clair.net/home-1.aspx (September Ready)
Conseil Scolaire Catholique Providence	https://cscprovidence.ca/
Huron Perth Catholic District	http://huronperthcatholic.ca/
Brant-Haldimand-Norfolk Catholic District	http://www.bhncdsb.ca/
London District Catholic	https://www.ldcsb.ca/

School Visits

While the boards are preparing for the day that visitors will be able to enter the school, at this time, schools are not prepared for visitors. Presently, school access will be restricted to school and board employees and students. They value the partnership schools have with the home and the parish; however, they have asked us to be patient as they continue to develop protocols and put them into practice.

**Until further notice do not visit your local schools.
We must adhere to the protocols of the local school board and the local school.**

Virtual Visits

Classes may be open to virtual visits. These virtual visits need to be pre-arranged with the classroom teacher. These visits can also be viewed by those students who are studying from home.

Who: Members of the parish team who have the charism and experience of working with youth

How: Practical things to keep in mind:

- Be prepared:
 - Short virtual presentations are encouraged.
 - Consider pre-recording your message.
 - If there are handouts, you will have to send them electronically.
 - Know your audience. Work with the teacher to know the needs and interests of the students.
 - Know why you are going in!
 - Be in tune with the curriculum expectations of each Grade (the classroom teacher could help with this).
 - Answer questions in an age/developmentally appropriate way.

What: The parish team should consider the following:

- Incorporate rich prayerful experiences into the visits – e.g.: *lectio divina*, Christian Meditation, the Examen of Consciousness.
- Make direct connection with Religious Education and/or Family Life curriculum.
- Offer a ministry of virtual presence and, when appropriate, pastoral care to the staff.
- When a chaplaincy leader is present in the school, please work with and under the direction of the chaplaincy leader.
- No new programs should be brought into the school. The Religion and Family Life programs of the schools have been approved by the ACBO. Parish programs should be offered through the parish.

Please refer to *Pastoral Care of Catholic Schools*, page 14-15 for more practical suggestions about visits.

Liturgies

Until further notice all assemblies, large gatherings in person, and class (or school) trips will not be permitted. Students and staff will not be able to visit the parish church and there cannot be any school-wide liturgies. When school visits resume, there may be opportunities to celebrate classroom liturgies.

Working with classes (or school community), parishes may offer livestreamed or recorded Liturgies of the Word or prayer services that could be viewed in the class(es) and at home.

Please Note:

Parishes are not to offer livestreamed/recorded Mass for the classes/schools.

The elementary Religious Education programs include opportunities for prayer throughout each unit and unit ending liturgies.

Consider how you might:

- Promote and prepare all for prayerful celebrations (Liturgies of the Word, Prayer Services, Scripture Reflections).
- Assist the staff and students to prepare for the livestreamed/recorded Liturgy of the Word.
- Address the age and developmental needs of the students.
- Support the school, provide resources and empower the classroom teacher to lead a Prayer Service and/or Liturgy of the Word.
- Follow all Diocesan guidelines and protocols for liturgical celebrations.

Celebrating the Sacraments (from 2019-2020 school year)

The Diocese of London's [Directions and Recommendations for the First Stage of Reopening Churches](#) (12 June 2020) notes:

The scheduling of First Communion and Confirmation... should be postponed until the fall. These celebrations should be scheduled in conjunction with the local parochial schools (cf. "Message Regarding Reopening our Churches, Celebrating Postponed Sacraments and General Absolution", 27 May 2020).

Some of our parishes celebrated these sacraments during the summer. Others have rescheduled these celebrations for the fall. As directed: No child should be denied the sacraments due to the cessation of these preparation meetings (Diocese of London COVID-19 Update for 17 March 2020 (Update #4)).

It has been brought to our attention that some families are still awaiting communication regarding rescheduling of the celebration of Sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation. We have been trying to work with the priests and pastoral teams when these concerns arise.

Consider:

- Reaching out to those who have received sacraments of initiation (and their parents) during the last 12 months. (What mystagogical experiences might the parish pastoral team facilitate?)
- Contacting the parents of those who are still waiting to celebrate the sacraments and inviting them to choose a date for the celebration.

Sacramental Preparation (for 2020-2021 school year)

Catholic schools are an integral part of the initial and ongoing religious education of children and provide valuable assistance in the foundational preparation (initial formation) for the sacraments following Baptism. Through the approved Religious Education program (*Growing in Faith, Growing in Christ*) young people receive the foundational catechesis in preparation for the sacraments. While some families will be studying at home, many of them will be linked to the school and completing the same curriculum. We will need to find ways of connecting with families whose children attend the coterminous schools and wish to prepare for and receive the sacraments of initiation.

The parish and the parish team take primary responsibility for the immediate preparation of candidates for the sacraments. Working with parents, the primary educators of their children in the ways of the faith, you might employ a blended learning experience which would include utilizing online platforms, sending materials to the family by email, and/or purchasing and distributing resources that can be completed at home. Empowering the parents to accompany their child's preparation for the sacraments starts with choosing age and developmental appropriate resources/learning experiences.

Preparation for the sacraments acknowledges and flows from the grace conferred in the sacrament of Baptism (Criteria for the Administration of the Sacraments of Initiation, First Penance and Marriage, Page 9).

Planning ahead:

- Follow the best policy outlined in [*Called, Gifted and Sent*](#)
- Check out [*Opportunities for Evangelization, Catechesis, Sacramental Preparation and Faith Formation*](#) for possible resources.
- Consider how you might support the parents as they work with their child to prepare for the sacraments.
- When calling parents, collect emails for parish records and ongoing communication.

Growing in Faith, Growing in Christ

Growing in Faith, Growing in Christ, the approved Catholic Schools Religious Education Program, is used in all grade 1 to grade 7 classrooms. The primary grades program offers catechetical material which provides initial and ongoing formation for both First Reconciliation and First Communion. The grade 7 program contains catechetical material which will help provide formation for those preparing for confirmation.

Many of our school boards have invested in the digital resources attached to the program which allows parishes to browse and use online resources. During the COVID-19 crisis (March to June) Pearson Publishing generously made *Growing in Faith, Growing in Christ* available online to all students, parents, teachers and parishes. If this practice continues during this school year, we will notify all parishes.

The French First Language Schools use a Religious Education program that is provided by the *Office Provincial de l'Éducation de la foi Catholique de l'Ontario (OPÉCO)* and approved by the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario. This program offers initial and ongoing formation for the sacraments of initiation and First Reconciliation. As digital resources become available, we will let you know.

Supporting School Staff, Parents and Students

Physical distancing means we have not seen the staff, parents and students of our local schools, in some cases, since last spring. Parishes are already finding ways to reach out, connect and support the home-school-parish partnership. Best practices include, but are not limited to, ensuring a link for the school on the parish website and for the parish on the school website, and schools including parish information in their (electronic) newsletters and parishes doing the same for the schools. Some pastors have already reached out to the principal and staff to let them know that they will be praying for them and for a safe return to school.

Dated: 14 September 2020