



DIOCESE OF METUCHEN

OFFICE OF DISCIPLESHIP FORMATION
CAROL MASCOLA, DIRECTOR
732 529-7930 PHONE
CMASCOLA@DIOMETUCHEN.ORG

To: PCLs
From: Carol Mascola
Director, Discipleship Formation for Children
Date: March 13, 2020
Re: Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Dear Parish Catechetical Leaders,

As you are already aware, there is a serious and growing concern regarding the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Among the many concerns arising is the safety and well-being of children, especially as it relates to their gathering in large group settings and how this could affect the spread of the virus. Therefore, those in positions of responsibility are called to prayerfully consider their particular situation and what steps should be taken in order to mitigate the potential spread of contagion. We are regularly monitoring the progression of the spread of the coronavirus and are asking that all catechetical programs follow the practice of their local school districts and follow the guidance of their local public health officials and civil authorities.

I know this situation can be disheartening, but following Bishop Checchio's leadership and guidance, I encourage you to use this as a time of opportunity and a time of witness, to show the children that our faith is life-giving in times of crisis and "the importance of faith and that it is not bound between the walls in our churches, but is to be lived every day and everywhere."

While we are hoping that the situation will improve, we must have plans in place to continue catechesis for our children. This is a rapidly evolving situation and you can expect to receive further communication as necessary.

Following are some things to consider in this situation:

Communication with Local Authorities and School Districts

You should be in regular communication with local health and emergency management authorities as well as your local school district / Catholic school. We are asking that all catechetical programs follow the practice of their local school districts and follow the guidance of their local public health officials and civil authorities.

Planning for Temporary Program Closures / Programming Suspensions

Should it become necessary to suspend catechetical classes for an extended period, or if some students need to remain at home for an extended period, you should plan to assist families in their catechesis at home. You may wish to consider using a virtual meeting space, such as Zoom (<https://zoom.us/>), so that children can receive catechesis remotely. Materials should be provided for students to take home along with a guide or schedule and catechists may be asked to prepare

at-home lessons for their classes. Publishers also often have online resources on their websites that may be used for at-home study or may be able to provide additional support. I have attached a list of these resources to this email.

Communication with Parents

We encourage you to proactively communicate with parents in order to advise that you are taking all the proper precautions, to encourage them to keep their child home if they are sick, to ensure they are aware of the attendance policy, and to assure them that you will provide the opportunity for home study should that option become necessary. Please also be mindful of the need to protect the individual privacy of health information.

Attendance Policies

Although your program may be running, sickness requiring isolation may impact the children and families in your program, and can also have specific impacts on those children preparing for First Holy Communion or Confirmation. In this case, flexibility in the application of attendance policies ought to be exercised. No one should be penalized for the inability to participate in any aspects of the preparation process because of illness. Keep in mind that parents also have the right to keep children home if they feel attending gatherings may place them at risk, especially in cases where there are family members who may be vulnerable or may have pre-existing health conditions.

Communication with the Diocesan Office of Discipleship Formation for Children

Please be sure to advise the Office of Discipleship Formation for Children should there be any particular development in your parish with regard to the coronavirus outbreak and any necessary actions you may take. As this situation develops, we will address the plans going forward and provide you with necessary updates from the Office of Discipleship Formation for Children.

Cleanliness and Disinfection of Facilities

If your program is running as normal, please plan to meet with your colleagues, your pastor, the Catholic school principal, if your program uses space in a Catholic school building, or with other responsible persons if there are entities which rent the school building on your property that your program shares. You should be discussing the proper procedures for regularly disinfecting and sanitizing classrooms and other spaces that are used. **If you are using facilities that are leased by another entity, we ask that you communicate these plans to the Office of Discipleship Formation for Children.**

Thank you for your attention to this most serious situation.

Sincerely in Christ,

Carol Mascola
Director