

Saint Peter's Roman Catholic Church

Religious Education Program

134 Convent Avenue

Rutland, VT 05701

<https://stpeter.vermontcatholic.org/>

July 17, 2020

Dear Saint Peter Parish Families,

We hope this letter finds you and your families well and enjoying the nice summer weather we have been having!

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to register your children for the 2020-2021 Faith Formation and Sacramental Preparation Program at St. Peter Parish. At this time we are in the process of planning for the coming year and adjusting our programs in light of Covid-19 precautions and protocols.

The important thing to know is that St. Peter's will be having a Faith Formation/Religious Education Program this year but it will look a little different from what we are all used to.

Over the past three weeks I participated in virtual meetings with Michael Hagan, Director of Catechesis and Religious Education for the Diocese of Burlington, as well as other Parish Catechetical Leaders from around the Diocese to develop protocols and plans for what our programs can look like with the Coronavirus precautions in mind. Based on these meetings the Diocese has published *A Guide to Planning Religious Education 2020-2021*. We will be planning our Faith Formation Program based on the recommendations included in this document.

As we plan and run our program this year we will be attentive to current local health and safety guidelines, especially from the Vermont Department of Health and the Office of Catholic Schools. The diocese will continue to keep us updated as these guidelines develop and I will communicate them to families as soon as I receive them.

In the course of my meetings with the Diocese we decided to encourage each parish to be as creative and flexible in planning the upcoming year as possible. We recommended that each parish has a plan A, B, and C for the coming year. That might sound like a lot, but it gives us the flexibility to meet the needs of all our families and respond to any changing directives from the Diocese and the Vermont Department of Health. Listed below are each of our plans for the

coming year at St. Peter's, with the hope of being able to run our program as close to normal as possible given the current circumstances and recommendations.

Plan A:

Plan A will serve as our best-case-scenario this year and as the basis for any adjustments. Current protocol makes it look like many religious education programs, with the proper adjustments, will be able to meet this fall. Plan A would keep our bi-weekly schedule of in person instruction prior to the 11:00 a.m. Sunday Mass at the Friary/Chapel/Church/MSJ with all proper safety protocols in place for in person meetings and social distancing. Our smaller class sizes make our program more easily adaptable to our current situation. Plan A will include materials that can be sent home as well as virtual instruction if the need arises or if families are uncomfortable with in person instruction at any point. It is vitally important that we have an accurate enrollment number as soon as possible for the program so that we can work to ensure we are in compliance with all health and safety requirements.

Some ways we are considering adjusting for this coming year are:

- Holding some religious education outside if the weather is good.
- Having some Sunday classes be "family formation" where families attend together and do group lessons. Families can sit together without distancing, and it may lead to a more communal atmosphere.
- Offering virtual parent sessions through Google Hangouts or Zoom to check-in and support them as catechists of their children.
- Providing parents with easy to use virtual resources to help equip them to extend the class lessons and to lead their children to Christ.

Plan B:

Plan B will serve as the back-up plan. Part of our discussion at the Diocesan level recommended that families should know about plan B before the year begins and be prepared for it on their end as well. As a parish we should be prepared for a scenario where we are not able, or it becomes impractical, to meet in person again. Unlike this previous Spring, we have lots of time to plan ahead! Plan B will allow our program to continue if we need to quarantine. Having this plan in place should help us transition from A to B without missing a beat! Plan B will involve students being sent at home materials and activities, both in hard copy, and virtually. The parish will work to empower and assist parents in helping their children complete their lessons at home. We will make sure that all families are assisted in the same way, even if internet access is not available. Since I work in the Catholic School system, I will be notified in advance of any transition from in person instruction to remote instruction from the Diocesan level, and will make sure we are able to transition seamlessly into Plan B to minimize disruption to the learning process for our students and families.

Plan C:

Plan C is what we will use on a case-by-case basis with families who, for health and safety concerns, etc., are unable to take part in the parish program but still want to be involved. Some families may not be comfortable attending in-person. Other families may not have access to the internet. Our goal is to reach those families and support those parents in their role as primary catechists and educators of their children in the faith. Our hope is that Plan C will be a last resort scenario but we are here to support all families in the parish as best we can with the religious formation of their children. We hope to keep all families connected with the parish and remind them that they have a community that loves and misses them if they are unable to attend in person due to health or safety concerns.

Religious Education Overview for 2020-2021

The mission of the Religious Education Program of St. Peter's Parish is to assist parents in the religious, moral, and spiritual formation of their children. Through the cooperative effort of parents, catechists, and students, our children will grow in their love for God and knowledge of their Catholic faith, through sacramental preparation and general faith formation.

Our parish program will help our students develop their God-given gifts and talents and live as proud and contributing members of St. Peter's Parish and the wider Catholic community. All children of the Parish, whether home-schooling, attending Catholic School, or Public School, are invited and encouraged to attend our Religious Education Program to prepare for the reception of First Reconciliation, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation at St. Peter's Church.

Our program is not intended to be only a sacramental preparation program, but a collaborative and community based learning experience where children, adolescents, and adults work together to deepen their faith and understanding of what it means to be a Catholic Christian.

Registration Fee

There is **NO** registration fee to enroll your children in the parish religious education program for 2020-2021. We believe that the faith formation of our young people is a vital ministry of the parish community, and we wish to make it available to every interested family, free of charge. However, we will be asking registered families to help with donations of needed classroom supplies, and to help take part in fundraising activities during the year to help support the program's purchase of books, supplies, etc.

Sacramental Preparation

First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion

Children in grades 1 - 2 and higher may register for our First Reconciliation and First Communion Sacramental Preparation programs. The preparation classes will educate students enrolled in Homeschool, Public School, and build on the curriculum taught in Catholic School. ***Families wishing to have their children receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and First Holy Communion at St. Peter Parish are asked to register as St. Peter Parishioners, and also registered with the parish Religious Education program, even if they attend Catholic School.*** This registration helps us keep in contact with each family and to ensure all sacramental preparation requirements and documentation have been fulfilled.

The Sacrament of Confirmation

The celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Diocese of Burlington is currently being lowered to Grade 6. For the academic year 2020-2021, our parish preparation program for Confirmation will enroll students in grades 7-10, which are the ages that will be Confirmed in the spring of 2021. Confirmation is a one year preparation program that consists of required class instruction, community service, liturgical participation, and a retreat experience. The preparation classes for Confirmation will educate students enrolled in Homeschool, Public School, and build upon the curriculum of Catholic Schools. ***Families wishing to have their children receive the Sacrament of Confirmation at St. Peter Parish are asked to register as St. Peter Parishioners, and also register with the parish Religious Education program, even if they attend Catholic School.*** This registration is to ensure all parish sacramental preparation requirements and documentation have been fulfilled. Parents of children who were not baptized in St. Peter Parish must provide their child's Baptismal Certificate when registering their children for Religious Education in order for their child to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.

General Catholic Faith Formation

Students not in a specific sacramental preparation program are enrolled in general Catholic faith formation. The objective of this program is to promote knowledge of our Catholic faith, introduce and reinforce basic Church teachings, introduce to students facts about Jesus, Scripture, and Liturgy, promote Christian moral formation, encourage prayer and worship by emphasizing the importance of the Mass and the Sacraments, and above all to invite students to have a deeper relationship with Jesus.

We believe that formation in Catholic Christianity employs a partnership between parents and the parish. While the parish can provide formal formation in faith, we encourage, and provide support for parents to take an active role in their children's ongoing faith development. ***Families wishing to have their children receive general faith formation at St. Peter Parish are asked to register as St. Peter Parishioners, and also register with the parish Religious Education program, even if they attend Catholic School.*** This registration is to help with communication and class and liturgy planning.

General Faith Formation is open to students in Kindergarten, Grades 3-6, and post Confirmation for the coming academic year. Due to the challenges of the Covid-19 situation we will not be running a Pre-K program for the 2020-2021 academic year.

Young Adult and Adult Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA)

Are you a young adult (older than grade 10), or an adult who has not been Baptized, or received your First Reconciliation, First Holy Communion, or Confirmation in the Catholic Church? If so, St. Peter's can offer a program of Christian Initiation (RCIA) specifically for teens and adults who have missed traditional sacramental preparation or simply want to learn more about the Catholic faith. The program is based on the sacramental program which has been used by the Catholic Church formally since 1972, but is based on rites of the church that date back to the first century.

With the support of parents, families, and sponsors, RCIA provides an opportunity for spiritual growth, conversion, and preparation for full initiation into the Catholic Church through the sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist. It empowers individuals to live their faith every day through service, charity, and justice as witnesses of Jesus Christ.

Sessions are geared towards making the Catholic faith and a relationship with God real and present for both young adults and adults. In addition to formal sessions, RCIA participants are expected to attend weekend Masses and special liturgies throughout the year.

Individuals and Families wishing to enroll in RCIA at St. Peter Parish are asked to register as St. Peter Parishioners, and also register with the parish Religious Education program, even if they are a teen who attends Catholic School. This registration is to ensure all parish and diocesan sacramental preparation requirements and documentation have been fulfilled.

For information or to inquire about registration for RCIA [which is separate from the regular Religious Education Program], please contact Michael Audette, Director of Religious Education, at maudette@msjvermont.org

More detailed information concerning the yearly schedule, as well as the health and safety protocols that will be in place will be communicated to families as we get closer to the start of the academic year. As I mentioned before, it is critical that we know the numbers of students so that we can properly plan for the coming year. Your help in registering your child as soon as possible is greatly appreciated!

If you have any further questions please feel free to contact me via email or my cell phone. If I am unavailable I will get back to you as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Michael Audette

Director of Religious Education

St. Peter Parish

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