DIOCESAN OF KALAMAZOO

GUIDELINES FOR PARISH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION DURING CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

OVERVIEW

The Diocese of Kalamazoo, designated within “Region 3” in the state of Michigan, is currently listed as adhering to “Phase 4” under Governor Gretchen Whitmer’s “Safe Start” re-opening plan. This Phase allows for the potential of in-person classes to be held. However, there are still regulations and policies that must be adhered to for all religious education programs.

In order to protect the good of the community and the health of our parishioners, volunteers, and staff, the Diocese offers the following guidelines related to the “Phase” designation. These guidelines are designed to promote risk mitigation as we deal with the current reality of the Coronavirus pandemic. While we cannot eliminate all risk, we are obligated to do everything we can to minimize the risk, and protect all those within our care.

During this time, it is understandable that some parents will not feel comfortable sending their children to any in-person classes. We must prepare for, and accommodate for, these families. Parishes must not obligate a family to attend in-person classes for their religious education, or for sacramental preparation. However, all people must be present physically to receive a sacrament. Interviews and other aspects of the evangelization and catechesis can be done over the phone or via another at-home process.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Domestic Church:

Families, the Domestic Church, are the first Church a child encounters. This Domestic Church is where God is first made present in a child’s life, it is where they encounter love, acceptance, prayer, morality, and the Christian life. As such all religious education is always a participation in this life as part of the Domestic Church. Thus, the Church has always spoken of the need [See CCC 1656, Code of Canon Law 774 P 2 & 776 Familiaris Consortio 36, 39, 40 Gravissimum Educationis 3] of Parishes to assist the parents as the primary educators of the faith. No matter how religious education looks in the Parish (in-person, at-home, hybrid) it should always support the parents and build up the Domestic Church. As support for the parents our parishes typically supply for the classroom education of every child either through a Parish school or Parish religious education system. Parish Religious Education programs must provide opportunities for evangelization and catechesis in the modern world.
Catechesis:

Our goal is to ensure that all families are engaged in the process of religious education and are coming to love, know, and serve Jesus throughout their lives, and assist them in being with Him in the next. In the Diocese of Kalamazoo our catechesis is driven by the Theology Standards used in the Catholic schools and adapted for the Parish religious education use. We must ensure that every standard is taught every year. There is typically some assessment that is made to ensure that the youth are understanding and building upon these standards. These standards are based on the Twelve Truths document created by the Diocese of Kalamazoo [see addendum]. The Twelve Truths are the basic kerygma broken into twelve statements. It is essential that every family we encounter is able to understand and articulate the basic proclamation of the faith (kerygma).

GUIDELINES

Following are the Guidelines determined by the Phase designation of Michigan’s Safe Start plan:

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PHASE 3

If our region is labeled as Phase 3 then we are not allowed to have in-person classes. In this instance an at-home option is necessary for religious education for each parish. The at-home option gives us the most direct ability to assist the parents in being the primary educators of their children.

At-Home Religious Education

- Any at-home religious education program needs to be as extensive as an in-person program, though please take into consideration the amount of time a parent needs to prepare, especially if they have multiple students.
- Must fulfill all requirements to meet the curriculum standards for Parish religious education [see addendum]
- Assistance must be given to families so that parents can prepare and teach the material to their children.
- Parents should be encouraged to lead their children in prayers and devotions at-home.
- There must be a check-in mechanism within the program that is returned to parishes.
- Within this approach, Catechists’ roles shift from teaching a group of kids to mentoring a group of families.
Catechists must connect with the families they are assigned to, and work must be returned to them. The person to person (even virtual) connection is one of the most important aspects to an at-home program being successful. These catechist mentors will be necessary to keep this connection.

It is recommended that the catechists and their families meet virtually or in person (if possible) on a regular basis.

- If there is a shift from in-person classes to at-home classes there must be continuity between what is taught in-person and what is taught at-home.

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**Phase 4**

If our region is labeled as phase 4 then we are allowed to host in-person classes. We must take into consideration the risks that are involved with having any in-person sessions. We also must be aware that it is possible that our region will be moved to Phase 3, in which case we would need to transition to an at-home program. We do not have the option to pause, or discontinue parish religious education programs. While in Phase 4 a Parish may choose to host in-person classes, host an at-home option, or create a hybrid program. Please be aware that during Phase 4 and Phase 5 every Parish will need more volunteers and more cleaning supplies on-hand to host in-person classes. **Please note that if you share a building with a Catholic School you must follow any protocols in place by the school even if those protocols are stricter than this document.**

**In-Person Religious Education Programs**

**Screening:**

- Any volunteer with the Religious Education program must fill out a form answering the following questions before each time they volunteer in person: “Do you have a temperature of 100.4 or greater?” “Have you been interacting (within six feet for longer than five minutes) with anyone who has been diagnosed with Covid-19?” If they answer yes to either of these questions they must not volunteer in person.

- Volunteers should self-monitor for any symptoms of Covid-19 and if they exhibit any, they should not volunteer in person.

- Parents should be asked to monitor their children, and if their children exhibit any signs of Covid-19 or have a fever greater than 100.4 they should not bring their children to class.

**Social Distancing:**

- Desks, or seats, for students must be at least 6 feet apart.

- All students must face the same direction in the classroom.

- Class sizes are limited to space available to meet the distance requirements.
• Students must be kept in the same classroom and are not to intermix with students from other classes. There must not be any activities that allow students from different classes to come together, including but not limited to: meals, joint movie watching, joint activities, etc.

• Catechists and/or aids should remain at least six feet from students at all times.

• No parents or outside adults are allowed in the classroom with the students.

• Students are not allowed to share, touch, or borrow other students’ supplies. Any supplies in a desk left at a shared classroom must not be handled by religious education students. Students must bring their own supplies and take them with them, including any books or materials for class.

• Students may go to the bathroom following all protocol already established on Parish Religious Education and Youth Ministry Guidelines for the diocese of Kalamazoo. They must wear a mask and stay social distanced while going to and from the bathroom and they must be reminded to wash their hands.

• A drop off and pick up procedure must be established that keeps all families 6 feet apart.

PPE use:

• All catechists and adult volunteers must wear a mask or face shield at all times.

• Students in grades 6 and up must wear a mask or face shield at all times.

• All on campus should wear a mask or face shield in hallways, lines, or at any time they cannot maintain 6 feet distance.

• Students ages 5 to 5th grade are encouraged to wear a mask during classes.

• It is encouraged for catechists to wear masks that are see through for students who may have a hard time hearing so they may try to read lips.

Hygiene:

• Catechists and adult volunteers must wash their hands thoroughly or use hand sanitizer (of at least 60% alcohol) before classes begin.

• Parishes should provide portable hand washing and/or hand sanitizing stations in every class space.

Sanitation/Cleaning:

• Frequently touched surfaces including light switches, doors, bathrooms, etc. must undergo a cleaning before and after any religious education classes are held. If there is a retreat or an extended session these must be cleaned every four hours.
• Desks and tables must be wiped down either with an EPA-approved disinfectant or diluted bleach after each class period.

• Staff must wear masks and gloves while cleaning.

• All cleaning supplies must be stored during class sessions and kept out of the reach of children.

Catechist Safety:

• Many catechists in our Diocese are in what is considered the vulnerable category. Keep this in mind while asking, recruiting and training your catechists. No one that feels uncomfortable being in a social setting should be forced to teach or volunteer.

• Most studies are showing that adults are more vulnerable than children at this time. Catechists should have little to no personal interaction with other adults during parish religious education time, they should stay in their classroom and not have to move around with the students.

Symptoms During Class:

• If a volunteer starts having Covid-19 symptoms during class, they are to remove themselves from the classroom. A substitute needs to be ready and available weekly to step in during these situations. The volunteer must go home immediately and be tested if needed. They may not volunteer in person until they have been cleared by a medical doctor or they have gone 14 days without symptoms.

• If a student shows Covid-19 symptoms during class they must be sent to a designated volunteer who will call their parent. They must be sent home with their parent(s) or guardian(s) and are not to return to in-person classes until they are cleared by a medical doctor or have gone 14 days without symptoms.

Engaging Parents:

• As always it is important to engage the parents in what is happening during religious education. During this time, it is even more important to communicate regularly. Keep parents updated weekly with any information or changes as to how religious education is being conducted.

• Parishes should communicate weekly material being covered and opportunities for faith discussions at-home while having in-person classes.

At-Home Religious Education Program

A plan must be in place for continuing the religious education year at-home in the event our region is moved to Phase 3.

Please see regulations for at-home options under Phase 3.
Hybrid Religious Education Program

A hybrid option combines at-home learning and in-person classes. Most common would likely be meeting once a month together and then doing the rest of the month’s lessons at-home. While having in-person classes all regulations for in-person classes must be followed.

PHASE 5

If our region is labeled as Phase 5 then we are allowed to host in-person classes. If we are in this phase, we are at lower risk for spread and contamination. We still must take into consideration the risks that are involved with having any in-person sessions. We also must be prepared in the event our regions is moved to Phase 4, or even back to Phase 3, in which case we would need to transition to an at-home program. **We do not have the option to pause, or discontinue parish religious education programs.** While in Phase 5 a Parish may choose to host in-person classes, host an at-home option, or create a hybrid program.

In-Person Religious Education Program

**Screening:**

- Volunteers should self-monitor for any symptoms of Covid-19 and if they exhibit any or have a fever greater than 100.4, they should not volunteer in person.
- Parents should be asked to monitor their children, and if their children exhibit any signs of Covid-19 or have a fever greater than 100.4 they should not bring their children to class.

**Social Distancing:**

- Desks, or seats for students must be at least 3 feet apart, but are highly encouraged to be 6 feet apart.
- All students should face the same direction in the classroom.
- Class sizes are limited to space available to meet the distance requirements.
- Students should be kept in the same classroom and are not to intermix with students from other classes. There can be limited activities that allow students from different classes to come together, including but not limited to: meals, joint movie watching, joint activities etc.
- Catechists and/or aids should remain at least six feet from students at all times.
- Parents or outside visitors must be screened for any Covid-19 symptoms or a fever and should be limited.
- Students are not allowed to share, touch, borrow other students supplies. Any supplies in a desk left at a shared classroom must not be handled by religious education
students. Some books or materials may be kept at the parish if they can be cleaned before the next use.

- Students may go to the bathroom following all protocol already established on Parish Religious Education and Youth Ministry Guidelines for the Diocese of Kalamazoo. They must wear a mask and stay social distanced while going to and from the bathroom and they must be reminded to wash their hands.

- A drop off and pick up procedure must be established that keeps all families 6 feet apart.

**PPE use:**

- All catechists and adult volunteers should wear a mask or face shield at all times.
- Students in grades 6 and up should wear a mask or face shield at all times.
- All on campus should wear a mask or face shield in hallways, lines, or at any time they cannot maintain 6 feet distance.
- Students ages 5 to 5th grade are encouraged to wear a mask during classes.
- It is encouraged for catechists to wear masks that are see through for students who may have a hard time hearing may try to read lips.

**Hygiene:**

- Catechists and adult volunteers must wash their hands thoroughly or use hand sanitizer (of at least 60% alcohol) before classes begin.
- Parishes should provide portable hand washing and/or hand sanitizing stations in every class space.

**Sanitation/Cleaning:**

- Frequently touched surfaces including light switches, doors, bathrooms, etc. should undergo a cleaning before and after any religious education classes are held. If there is a retreat or an extended session these should be cleaned every four hours.
- Desks and tables must be wiped down either with an EPA-approved disinfectant or diluted bleach after each class period.
- Staff should wear masks and gloves while cleaning.
- All cleaning supplies must be stored during class sessions and kept out of the reach of children.

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- If a student shows Covid-19 symptoms during class they must be sent to a designated volunteer who will call their parent. They must be sent home with their parent(s) or guardian(s) and are not to return to in-person classes until they are cleared by a medical doctor or have gone 14 days without symptoms.

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- As always it is important to engage the parents in what is happening during religious education. During this time, it is even more important to communicate regularly. Keep parents up to date weekly with any information or changes to how religious education is taking place.

- Parishes should communicate weekly material being covered and opportunities for faith discussions at-home while having in-person classes.

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You must have a plan in place for continuing the religious education year at-home if we move to Phase 3.

Please see regulations for at-home options under Phase 3.

**Hybrid Religious Education Program**

A hybrid option combines at-home learning and in-person classes. Most common would likely be meeting once a month together and then doing the rest of the month’s lessons at-home. While having in-person classes all regulations for in-person classes must be followed.

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**PHASE 6**

If we are placed in phase 6 we may return to few to no restrictions for meeting in-person.
ADDENDUM:

MI Start Safe Plan:

Diocese of Kalamazoo Religious Education Theology Standards

Twelve Truths by the Diocese of Kalamazoo

CONTACT: Jamin Herold, Executive Director for Parish Life and Lay Leadership;
jherold@diokzoo.org