



Fall 2020 Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston Faith Formation Guidelines

Purpose of this document:

The following document is meant to guide parishes in planning upcoming faith formation programming within the uncertainty of the current global pandemic. It will call attention to state and archdiocesan requirements, recommended archdiocesan guidelines, and suggested best practices. ***These are the requirements and guidelines as of the time of their publication - they are subject to change, and are in fact likely to change, in the weeks and months ahead.***

Context:

Archdiocesan staff and clergy working in faith formation, child advocacy, healthcare, risk management, and more were consulted in the creation of this document. The regional Episcopal Vicars were also asked to review a draft of this document.

Goals of parish faith formation programming:

Parents are the primary educators of the faith for their children and our faith formation efforts in parishes are designed to support and enhance those efforts. To learn more about this understanding of faith formation please visit <https://www.bostoncatholic.org/digital-faith-formation>. See also canons [226](#) and [773-780](#) in the Code of Canon Law, which speak of the interwoven obligations of pastors and parents when providing catechetical instruction to young people. In particular, [canon 773](#) commends us all (see [canons 756-761](#)), and especially pastors of souls, "to take care of the catechesis of the Christian people so that the living faith of the faithful becomes manifest and active through doctrinal instruction and the experience of Christian life."

Current and future public and personal health considerations:

Parishes should consider cold and flu season and the possibility of future increases in COVID cases, which may lead to increased restrictions on gatherings or greater hesitancy among families to gather in groups. Many families, catechists, and volunteers are involved in providing ongoing care for members of at-risk populations and must limit their own risk as a result. Many catechists and volunteers may be members of at-risk populations themselves.

Best Practice: Develop plans that are flexible enough to account for future changes in restrictions on gathering and personal health concerns.

Parish vs. at-home involvement:

Focusing on parents as the primary educators is not intended to eliminate parish involvement in faith formation or all parish faith formation gatherings.

The [state guidance for elementary and secondary instruction](#) is focused on the benefits of returning as many children and young people as possible to classroom instruction in order to provide educational and other benefits to students *in ways that many families are not equipped to provide at home*.

The benefits driving the state's focus on classroom instruction do not apply in the same way to the context of parish faith formation. This archdiocesan guidance is focused on the benefits of shared family faith *which the Church tells us should first be provided at home*, with the parish as a larger community of faith and support. We realize some parishes will want to continue to offer some form of in-person faith formation, hence the following requirements, guidelines, and best practices.

Requirement: There is no requirement for in-person instruction for parish faith formation programming, including for sacramental preparation. It is permitted to *offer* in-person instruction, while following all applicable state and archdiocesan guidelines, including those in this document.

Recommended Guideline: Given the requirements for wearing masks and social distancing families must follow in other areas of their life, for parishes that are offering in-person instruction, we strongly suggest offering in-person gatherings for faith formation less frequently than weekly - perhaps bi-weekly or monthly.

Suggested Best Practice: Consider a rotating/alternating schedule of instruction, or a hybrid remote/in-person model of instruction. For example, establish a number of cohorts which attend programming at particular times, such that you may be offering gatherings multiple times each week or month in which families only participate every few weeks.

In-person gatherings:

Requirements:

- Masks/face coverings
 - Children age 5 and above are required to wear a mask or face covering that covers their nose and mouth. Children ages 2-5 should wear a mask or face covering at the discretion of their parents. Face shields and transparent masks are also an option.
 - All adults are required to wear masks or face coverings.
 - Exceptions to mask and face covering requirements must be made for those for whom it is not possible due to medical conditions or other health and safety factors.
- Physical distancing
 - Maintain a minimum physical distance of three feet between individual people.

- Food
 - No food is permitted at parish faith formation programming or events at this time.
- Screening
 - Staff, volunteers, and families may not participate in parish faith formation programming if they exhibit COVID-19 symptoms.
 - Temperature checks are required in every parish of the Archdiocese of Boston for every staff member and volunteer (priest, deacon, faith formation leader, grade level coordinator, RCIA coordinator, administrative assistant, catechist, hall monitor, technology help, etc.) before entering a parish building to assist with faith formation programming, using the non-touch infrared thermometers with which parishes have been supplied. If the person's temperature exceeds 100 degrees Fahrenheit they may not come into the building.
- Hand hygiene
 - Staff, volunteers, and families are required to exercise hand hygiene - handwashing when possible and hand sanitizing at other times - upon arrival and when putting on or taking off masks.
- Cleaning
 - All facilities/rooms/bathrooms used during faith formation programming must be thoroughly cleaned between each use.
 - Please see <https://rcabrisk.org/cleaning-and-disinfecting/> for more information regarding cleaning and disinfecting parish spaces.
- Group Size/Capacity
 - Evaluate capacity of each space on a case-by-case basis, based on the maximum capacity consistent with the other requirements and guidelines of this document (3-foot spacing, etc), and any other state and archdiocesan guidance.

Recommended Guidelines:

- Masks/face coverings
 - If families are at church for Mass or other events as well as attending faith formation, consider mask breaks outside or with the windows open between different events or activities.
- Physical distancing
 - Maintain a physical distance of six feet between individual people whenever possible.
 - Avoid activities which may involve sharing resources or touching physical items (such as glue sticks, scissors, crayons, etc) among multiple participants.

Best Practices:

- Physical distancing

- Consider all possible spaces and rooms available in your parish, beyond those you have used in the past, including space available outside, to identify additional available spaces or larger available spaces if needed.

Virtual gatherings:

Please see the [Guidelines for the Use of Social Media for the Archdiocese of Boston](#). The following virtual gathering requirements and guidelines are adapted from those guidelines. Contact Vivian Soper at VSoper@rcab.org or 617-746-5995 for more information on these requirements and guidelines.

Requirements:

- All leaders are required to have completed a CORI screening and Protecting God's Children (PGC, aka Virtus) training.
- No on-line meetings are permitted with less than 2 adult leaders present and actively engaged at all times.
- On-line meetings including minors must take place using parish or school accounts. Personal accounts may not be used.
- Invitations to participate must be sent to parents of minors. Parent can opt to have you **also** send the invitations directly to a minor's e-mail address or phone number.
- All on-line meetings with minors must be by invitation only. Public access is not allowed.
- The leaders must monitor and control who is participating in the on-line meeting. The leader should maintain the ability to immediately remove any participant who is acting inappropriately.
- The leader must maintain control over what appears on the screen.
- While parents may participate with their children, they must be logged on from the same account as their children. The only adults allowed to log in to on-line meetings are CORI-screened and PGC-trained leaders.

Recommended Guidelines:

- Parents of minors should be informed of what adults will be participating in meetings with those minors.
- On-line meetings designed for parents and minors must be identified as such and must be by invitation only. Parents participating in these meetings as parents do not need to have completed CORI screening or PGC training.
- Contact Vivian Soper at VSoper@rcab.org or 617-746-5995 for information on completing Protecting God's Children training on-line.

Suggested Best Practices:

- Please see <https://rcabrisk.org/videoconferencing-options/> for more information on videoconferencing options.

Sacramental preparation:

Requirements: Follow all above requirements for sacramental preparation programs. Parents are permitted to prepare their children for the sacraments at home. Parishes have an obligation to assist parents in the formation of their children, especially for sacramental preparation.

Recommended Guidelines: Consider a hybrid model that combines home/virtual and in-person instruction. Provide parents with resources to prepare and practice with their children at home. Provide catechesis and progress check-ins via virtual instruction. Follow all above guidelines during in-person preparation and practice meetings. See <https://www.bostoncatholic.org/digital-faith-formation> for some recommended resources.

Suggested Best Practices: Consider smaller groups and more ceremonies to allow for the capacity restrictions of available spaces and any limits on the group sizes for gatherings.

Safe environment:

The Committee For Children, the authors of the Child Protection Unit/Second Step, has made much of their material available for free for online learning at this link: <https://www.secondstep.org/covid19support>. These resources will be available through December of 2020.

The Office of Child Advocacy is working on developing further resources for online safe environment education for youth and will have material available for use in parishes by late August in time for use in the Fall.

Ministry with Persons with Disabilities:

The Secretariat for Evangelization & Discipleship is exploring practical methods that will permit the safe and successful reintegration of people with disabilities into parish faith formation.

Recommended Guidelines: Considering the various challenges that social distancing protocols and personal protective equipment present to persons with disabilities, we recommend that students continue their faith formation at home with their parents/guardians for the time being.

Suggested Best Practices: Please see the [Ministries with Persons with Disabilities](#) section of BostonCatholic.org for additional resources and helpful information.