

Religious Education & Catechesis COVID-19 Safe Protocols

Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer. – Romans 12:11-12

Introduction

The fundamental task of catechesis, the Church tells us, is the formation of disciples of Jesus Christ. While parishes will certainly have to adjust for the pandemic (some more than others), we encourage you to prayerfully discern how you can continue to form disciples of Jesus in your programs. If you will be conducting in-person ministry, these health and safety guidelines will apply and need to be adhered to at the parish, or wherever religious education takes place. Please read through them carefully and let me (Michael Hagan mhagan@vermontcatholic.org) know if you have any questions or concerns.

For information on practically planning your program and the need to focus on formation, evangelization, and parents, please see our [Guide to Planning Religious Education 2020-2021](#)

Definitions

Staff – the priests, catechetical leader, catechists, and any other volunteers associated with the parish religious education program

Families – the families involved in the parish religious education program, including the children, their parents, grandparents, and any other relatives or household members who might be attending the religious education program.

Parish or parish building – this refers to whatever building or buildings are utilized for the parish religious education program. This includes, but is not limited to the parish hall, classrooms, church, gym, hallways, etc.

General Precautions

- Staff and families will not report to, or be allowed to remain at, the parish if sick or symptomatic (with fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell).
- To the extent possible, prior to the start of each religious education session, pre-screening shall be required to verify all staff and families have no symptoms of respiratory illness (fever, cough, and/or shortness of breath). See the section below on “health screening” for details on how this can be done.
- Signs must be posted at all entrances clearly indicating that no one may enter if they have symptoms of respiratory illness, including fever.
- Parish building entrances should allow for an arrival that both maintains social distancing of those arriving and gives an opportunity to conduct health pre-screening.

- Per the “COVID-19 Work Safe Protocols for Parishes,” which was sent to all parishes earlier this summer, each parish should have a designated health and safety officer assigned to monitor activities and stop or modify activities to ensure compliance with these mandatory health and safety protocols. If you are not sure who this person is, please check with your pastor and/or parish office so that you can work with them as you plan and implement your religious education program.
- To minimize clustering and support social distancing, offering snacks/food is discouraged during religious education programs. If snacks/food are utilized during religious education, local, state, and national public health authorities’ guidelines must be followed.

Social Distancing

- All staff and families must observe strict social distancing of 6 feet while at the parish, unless noted, and should refrain from touching their faces.
- Congregation of staff or families is not allowed.
- Family members from the same household do not need to distance from one another.
- The occupancy of designated common areas, such as parish halls will maintain strict social distancing of no less than 6 feet between staff and families.
- In classrooms/CGS atria, space seating/desks to at least 3 feet apart for PreK-6th grade and 6 feet apart for all others.
- Parish catechetical leaders are encouraged to consider remote learning/community building when such opportunities would be appropriate and fruitful.
- Any exceptions to the above social distancing guidelines must be approved by the parish health and safety officer.

Face Coverings and PPE

- All staff and students (of all ages) are expected to wear facial coverings while in the building. They are also expected to wear them when outside of the building if adequate physical distancing of at least six (6) cannot be maintained.
- VTDOH, VTDOL, and CDC recommend that visitors, and the public in general, wear cloth face coverings any time they are interacting with others from outside their household.
- Any exceptions to the above facial covering guidelines must be approved by the parish health and safety officer.

Students and Group Size

To the extent feasible, the following steps to support physical distancing will be utilized in all areas of the parish as determined by the parish health and safety officer in collaboration with the staff member utilizing the instructional space:

- Students should be kept in groups, not to exceed the maximum number allowed by state guidance, including staff and families.
- Space apart students standing in line and consider tape marks on the floor to support this.
- Limit sharing of materials:
 - Develop systems and structures to minimize contact of student belongings with those of others as well as ensuring the regular sanitization of used items (at least before and after each religious education session).

- Implement procedures to minimize sharing of high touch materials and when sharing is necessary, implement strategies to disinfect materials between groups.
- Ensure adequate supplies to minimize sharing of high touch materials (art supplies, computer equipment etc. assigned to a single student) or limit use of supplies and equipment by one group of students at a time and clean and disinfect between use.

Please note: The Vermont Agency of Education and Department of Health state that it is now believed to be safe for students to share electronic devices, toys, books, musical instruments, games or learning aids. These items should be wiped down in between use by each student. Minimize mixing between children that do not normally interact in school (students from differing schools and/or school districts, for example).

- Minimize mixing between families and/or age groups.
- Space seating/desks to at least 3 feet apart for PreK-6th grade and 6 feet apart for all others.
- Turn desks to face in the same direction (rather than facing each other), or have students sit on only one side of tables, spaced apart.
- Hold virtual meetings with families and staff unless specific needs warrant otherwise.
- Move classes outdoors weather permitting.
- Minimize students traveling to different buildings
- Only allow supervisors and staff who are required for instruction/student support/child safety to be in the classrooms.
- Plan activities that do not require close physical contact between multiple students.
- Rearrange furniture to avoid clustering in common areas.
- Large group activities must conform to the maximum number allowed by current state guidance.
- Group activities with the potential to generate increased respiratory droplets and aerosols, such as singing, should be avoided unless proper spacing/sanitization can be maintained.

Cleanliness and Disinfecting

- Staff and families will have easy and frequent access to soap/water or hand sanitizer during the religious education program. Staff are required to wash their hands after entering the building.
- All common areas and equipment, frequently touched surfaces and doors, tools and equipment, and company vehicles must be cleaned and disinfected before and after the religious education program and prior to the transfer from one person to another.
- The parish's health and safety officer will collaborate to establish the guidelines for cleaning/disinfecting including:
 - Who is responsible
 - Where supplies will be stored to ensure safety
 - How to document cleaning has taken place
 - Procedures to follow to ensure proper sanitization
 - Process to request additional supplies
- If the parish building is utilized outside of religious education hours by groups other than staff and families, these areas should also be cleaned at the beginning of the following day before students arrive.

Voluntary Quarantine

- Any staff member that comes in contact with a person who is diagnosed with COVID-19 is asked to notify their immediate supervisor and Human Resources and are required to quarantine for 14 days.

Religious Education Participant Health Screening

- Protocols:
 - Conducted at the point of first contact at every religious education session for every staff member and family individual.
 - Notify families and staff that the health screening will be taking place and share the details of what the screening involves.
 - For Students: require the adult dropping the student off at the parish to remain until the health screening is completed so that he/she can take the student home if the health screening is not passed. **Please note that adults doing drop-off and pick-up should wear facial coverings.**
 - For Staff: send any staff member home who does not pass the screening and develop contingency plans for covering the staff member's duties.
- Components to Assess Presence of Symptoms:
 - Ask the following questions:
 - Have you been in close contact with a person who has COVID-19?
 - Exposure is defined as: close contact with a person who has COVID-19 within the last 14 days. Based on our current knowledge, a close contact is someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes starting from 48 hours before illness onset until the time the patient is isolated.
 - Do you feel unwell with any symptoms consistent with COVID-19?
For example, have they had a cough, temperature, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell?
 - **In the past 24 hours, have you traveled outside the state of Vermont for non-essential reasons to a county not eligible for quarantine-free travel?**
- Visually assess if there is evidence of the following and if there is, send the student home:
 - A significant new rash, particularly when other symptoms are present.
 - Large amounts of nasal discharge in the absence of allergy diagnosis.
- Conduct temperature screening, using the guidelines below.
- Guidance for younger students: Parishes will need to work with parents/caregivers to answer these questions when students are too young or otherwise unable to answer.
- Students/Staff who answer either of the above questions affirmatively, have visual signs of a new rash or large amounts of nasal discharge not associated with an allergy, or have a temperature greater or equal to 100.4°F must be sent home as soon as possible.
- Each parish should determine a plan for when a student/staff member appears unwell or becomes ill at parish.
- Temperature Check Guidelines
 - Should occur upon entrance and near sink/hand sanitizer station.
 - A non-contact thermometer is strongly recommended.
 - Wear a facial covering, eye protection and a single pair of disposable gloves.
 - Check each child's temperature
 - If performing a temperature check on multiple students, ensure that a clean pair of gloves is used for each child and that the thermometer has been thoroughly cleaned in between each check.

- If disposable or non-contact thermometers are used and the screener did not have physical contact with a child, gloves do not need to be changed before the next check.
 - If non-contact thermometers are used, they must be cleaned routinely.
 - Follow instructions provided by the manufacturer for any device used.
- Remove and discard gloves in between students or at the end of each check if using non-contact thermometer.

Diagnosed Case within the Parish Program

If there is a diagnosed case of the current public health crisis, the Parish Catechetical Leader and/or Parish Health and Safety Officer will initiate the school's response plan of action. This plan is expected to include the following:

- Notification to the Pastor and to the Diocesan Manager of Religious Education & Catechesis.
- Notification to the Vermont Department of Health (VDH)
- Working with the VDH and the Superintendent of Schools, the Parish Catechetical Leader and/or Parish Health and Safety Officer will:
 - determine if any dismissal is warranted
 - support any contact tracing determined necessary by the VDH
 - utilize the letter templates provided by the VDH to prepare communication pieces for the community
 - maintain open lines of communication with members of the community to address concerns
 - work with parish staff to ensure proper cleaning/disinfecting of potentially infected areas

Contacting Tracing

Please note that while the Strong and Healthy Schools guidance issued jointly by the Vermont Agency of Education and Department of Health allows younger students to be spaced 3 feet apart, contact tracing questions are different. During contact tracing by the Health Department, the goal is to identify and exclude individuals from school if there is any risk that they might develop COVID-19, which, out of an abundance of caution, includes staff and students who have been within 6 feet of the person with COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period. Public health leaders work closely with educational leaders to align principles of science, public health and child development.

Detailed information on contact tracing can be found at the Vermont Department of Health website.

Isolation room

Prior to the start of school, the School Administrator and/or Public Health Crisis Coordinator will establish an isolation room to be utilized if a student becomes ill while at school and is waiting for an adult to pick him/her up. This should be a room with proper ventilation and a door. When a student is in the isolation room, he/she must be properly supervised and this can be done through the use of a plastic barrier, baby monitor, etc. The symptomatic student(s) should wear a surgical mask unless there is a medical or behavioral indication not to do so. If the supervising adult is inside the Isolation room, they should be wearing a minimum of a surgical mask and face shield as PPE.

The Isolation room should be cleaned and disinfected following each use. This should happen as soon as practical—there is no need for delay.

Out-of-State Travel

Students who arrive from out-of-state must follow the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development and Health Department guidance around quarantine before returning to religious education, which includes travel out-of-state at any point during the school year. More information is available on the Vermont Department of Health's COVID-19 travel site and the ACCD website.

Staff, particularly the parish catechetical leader, is encouraged to remind families and staff of these travel requirements periodically to ensure they are taking the appropriate steps when planning for travel or receiving guests from out of state. Information about travel that is considered essential (which does not require quarantine) and daily border travel to and from neighboring states can also be found on these sites.

Please note: Daily commuting to school/work from counties outside of Vermont is considered essential travel; quarantine rules do not apply. However, staff and students who engage in such essential travel should take all other COVID-19 precautions. Staff and students who live in border communities should note that not all of the cross-border travel they would typically engage in is considered essential travel. Please consult the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) website for more information.

More Information

- Diocese of Burlington
 - [Guide to Planning Religious Education 2020-2021](#)
 - [Catholic Schools Guidelines for In-Person Instruction](#)
 - Also see your local Catholic school's guidelines for further and more detailed guidance
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
 - [Considerations for Schools](#)
- American Academy of Pediatrics: COVID-19 Planning Considerations:
 - [Guidance for School Re-entry](#)
- Vermont Agency of Education and Department of Health:
 - [A Strong and Healthy Start: Safety and Health Guidance for Reopening Schools, Fall 2020](#)
- Office of Governor Phil Scott
 - (Vermont Mask Mandate) [Addendum 2 to Amended and Restated Executive Order NO. 01-20](#)