



DIOCESE OF ROCKFORD Catholic Education Office

555 Colman Center Dr.
P.O. Box 7044 , Rockford, Il 61125
Tel. (815)-399-4300 Fax (815)-399-6278
jjelinek@rockforddiocese.org

April 17, 2020

Dear Catechetical Leaders,

Thank you to those who have shared your ideas, questions, and concerns about sacramental preparation this Spring with the Regional Directors of Religious Education or myself. We would like to respond to these questions, both in this letter, and by referring you to the [New Catholic Education Resource Webpage](#). The webpage will continue to be updated with the most current information and resources for providing effective formation for your religious education programs.

From numerous conversations and emails with Catechetical Leaders, the following five areas of concern have emerged:

1. **Rescheduling Sacramental Dates:** Once the Bishop has given parishes permission to resume the public celebration of the sacraments, the following can occur:
 - a. First Reconciliation and First Communion: Pastors will reschedule the dates for reception of First Reconciliation and Holy Communion. Pastors are encouraged to not postpone these events longer than necessary.
 - b. Confirmation: Pastors will work in conjunction with the Bishop's office to reschedule postponed Confirmations.
 - c. These celebrations will need to follow any post-shelter-in-place Covid-19 guidelines from the Bishop.

2. **Required Preparation for the Sacraments:** While many parishes request that participants attend retreats, complete service hours and meet attendance guidelines, these are not required for the reception of the sacraments. Therefore, it is important that the Communicants and Confirmandi not be denied the sacraments due to incomplete programming expectations. In his March 13, 2020 letter, when speaking about the cancellation of sacramental preparation retreats due to Covid-19, Bishop Malloy said, "Those preparing for sacraments should be allowed to advance to the sacraments given this extraordinary situation."
 - The requirements for both Communion and Confirmation can be found in the Diocesan document [SACRAMENTAL INSTRUCTION EXPLANATION OF REQUIREMENTS](#). This document states, "It is Bishop Malloy's desire that artificial impediments not be created in our programs for Confirmation. While they are a part of preparing a student for Confirmation, hours of service, retreat days or days of recollection, and letters to the bishop are not required."

3. **The Role of the Parents in Preparation for the Sacraments:** The Church repeatedly states that parents are the primary educators of their children. The National Directory of Catechesis says, “parents or guardians are catechists for their children precisely because they are parents or guardians, not because they have developed any specialized skills...” (pg #234). It can be challenging for us professional catechetical leaders and our skilled catechists to entrust others with such a great task. However, we must trust God’s plan for the family to be the domestic Church. This is an opportunity for us to empower parents to be effective catechists.

4. **Practical Tools for Preparation at Home:** If parents are to complete their child’s sacramental preparation, then our role must be one of supporting and empowering them in their role as primary educators. We can do this by partnering with them in the following ways:
 - Ensure that parents know what is expected of them and their children. This can be done through a letter, emails, online meetings, or a phone call. Remember to make reasonable requests, as the goal is not to reproduce our parish programs at home, but to focus on the required components for receiving the sacrament.
 - When possible, provide the learning materials to the parents and have them work through the resources at home. Check with the publisher of your sacramental materials; many publishers offer online and bilingual parent portals.
 - There are numerous online Catholic resources that allow parents and children to watch formative videos. Simple lessons can be based around the content presented in a video, followed by discussion questions. For example, here are videos on [Reconciliation](#) and [Confirmation](#).

5. **Inviting Families to Pray:** In God’s great plan of salvation, the family is the center of faith formation. The Church has in its tradition many wonderful devotions and prayers to draw upon. Prayer is an effective tool for catechesis and deepening one’s relationship with Christ. Prayer also fosters hope during times of struggle such as this. This is the perfect time to educate and encourage our families to adopt a deeper prayer life by exploring different prayer styles.

The role of the Catholic Education Office is to support you in your ministry. As you move forward, do not hesitate to contact [myself](#) or your Regional Director of Religious Education ([Cindy Vincent](#), [Mario Delgado](#) & [Mike Dowling](#)). We are interested in both your successes and struggles. May God Bless you, your family, and the ministry you serve abundantly.

“I can do all things in him who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13

God Bless,
John Jelinek
Director of Religious Education & Formation
Catholic Education Office