



## **Diocese of Rockford**

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# **Religious Education & Faith Formation**

## **Reopening Plan**

**July 2020**

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# Letter from the Religious Education Office

I am filled with joy and admiration as I look at the extraordinary and innovative ways that the parishes in our Diocese have responded to the incredibly difficult situation of the past few months. Parishes were seemingly robbed of everything needed to fulfill their charge to proclaim the Gospel, and yet countless parish Religious Education & Faith Formation programs rose to the challenge and did marvelous works. As we prepare to reopen, we are faced with a new set of challenges that may seem daunting at first, yet with God's grace, we will triumph once again. As St. Pope Paul VI said, the Church "exists in order to evangelize,...to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass..." ([Evangelii Nuntiandi](#)). We cannot be stopped or separated from this mission as St. Paul says in Romans, "What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?... No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us."([8:35 cf](#))

Encouraged by the love of God, we can face the required changes to our programs, knowing that despite the hardship and challenges they present, "all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." ([Romans 8:28](#)). Based upon the guidelines provided by the CDC (Center for Disease Control), the IDPH (Illinois Department of Public Health), the ISBE (Illinois State Board of Education) and in conjunction with the Diocesan Catholic Education Office, we have formulated a plan to reopen our parish religious education & faith formation programs in the fall. This plan is for parishes with program participants on-site during [Phase IV](#) of the State of Illinois Coronavirus Response. It is subject to change as new information and guidelines are released from the CDC and State. The Religious Education Office will continuously communicate with parishes as local and national health officials adjust these guidelines.

All of us at the Religious Education Office are committed to accompanying individuals and families on their faith journey while at the same time creating a safe and secure environment. We look forward to the return of in-parish formation, but also recognize that virtual formation and hybrid programs incorporating both methods may be the best option for a parish. Religious Education & Faith Formation may look very different this year, but our commitment to serving you and your parish will remain constant.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ fill you and guide you as you proclaim the Gospel and accompany the children and families of our Diocese.

*John Jelínek*  
Director of Religious Education & Formation  
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# Reopening Religious Education & Faith Formation Timeline

The COVID-19 pandemic is being carefully monitored throughout the Diocese of Rockford. The decision to reopen religious education and faith formation will be made by the Bishop.

Catechetical Leaders are faced with a host of questions and decisions to make before religious education and faith formation programs resume.

The goal of this reopening plan is to offer clear and straightforward decision-making points for all parishes to consider when gathering people in groups. While the fall will be a time for focusing on many critical issues, this reopening plan focuses on:

- Keeping children, families, and staff physically safe.
- Caring for the social, emotional and mental health needs of all in our parish communities.
- Keeping religious education and faith formation consistent by creating strategies that align with the parish, state, and national efforts to minimize the spread of COVID-19 virus in public settings.

The Diocesan plan provides each religious education and faith formation program with direction and guidance for actions to be taken in the following four areas:

1. Health & Safety
2. Physical Environment Safety
3. Snacks & Refreshments
4. Large Gatherings

The Catechetical Leader (D/CRE, D/CYM, DFF) with direction from the Religious Education Office and in collaboration with the pastor, will adopt this plan and develop a plan specifically for their programs. It is recommended that individual program plans be developed before August 1, 2020.

## Recommended Reopening Plan Timeline

### **July - the Catechetical Leader will:**

- ✓ Convene a meeting in early July with the pastor, and if possible, a reopening team.
- ✓ Develop instructions for catechists relative to what they are responsible for in the reopening plan.
- ✓ If religious education and faith formation programs are located in a school, review the Diocesan *School Reopening Plan* and be in communication with your school's administration about the needs of your programs.

### **August - the Catechetical Leader will:**

- ✓ In early August, provide an orientation for catechists and aides to review the reopening plan.

- ✓ Before resuming programming, provide instruction for catechists, parents, and families about the plan and the strategies outlined in the Diocesan guideline [Back in His Presence](#) and the *Reopening Plan for Religious Education & Faith Formation*.
- ✓ Ensure that you have adequate sanitation & cleaning supplies.

## Communications

Clear, rational, and frequent communication with all parties is extremely important. Communicate appropriate information to students, parents, catechists, aides, pastors and parish staff to prevent confusion and provide reassurance. Ensure that families know how to contact the Catechetical Leader. Also, explain what modes of communication the Catechetical Leader will use to share information (website, email, Facebook, text, flocknotes...) and how families can access them.

# Religious Education & Faith Formation Reopening Guidelines

## 1. HEALTH & SAFETY

### A. Health & Safety Instruction

- To ensure consistent hygiene standards, parishes and their Catechetical Leaders will monitor the COVID-19 guidelines.
- Everyone involved with religious education and faith formation will be instructed in the health and safety protocols outlined in this document, [Back in His Presence](#) and any subsequent statements relating to COVID-19.
- Signage will be placed in main entrance ways noting that persons may not enter the building if they have any currently known symptoms of COVID-19, such as: fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, chills, fatigue, muscle and body aches, headache, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell, congestion or runny nose, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea.

### B. Health & Safety Behavior

- All Religious Education & Faith Formation activities must follow the gathering limits of [Phase IV](#) of the Restore Illinois Plan.
- Restrict sharing and borrowing any items.
- Drinking fountains are used for filling up water bottles only. Individuals will not be permitted to drink directly from the water fountains. Place signs on drinking fountains stating this.
- Catechists, volunteers or hall monitors will help participants follow physical distancing directed by floor markings and signage.
- Social distancing will be maintained. Parishes should develop procedures to ensure a 6-foot minimum between individuals whenever possible.
- All individuals (including students, catechists, and parents) in the program's building are required to wear face coverings, unless they are younger than 2 years of age; they are having

trouble breathing; or are unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the cover without assistance.

- Per State and federal guidance, those who are sick should not return to the building until they have met the criteria to return.
- Any individual within the building's environment who shows symptoms should be immediately separated from the rest of the program's population, held in a designated quarantined area and picked up as soon as possible. All quarantined areas will be cleaned and disinfected after each use per the health department guidelines.
- Parishes are encouraged to hold parent programs such as orientations virtually.
- At this time, field trips are to be discontinued until state and local health officials determine that it is safe to resume them.

## **2. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT SAFETY**

### **A. Physical Environment**

- Hand sanitizer will be available in all classrooms and offices in the program's building.
- In the classroom, desks or chairs will be spaced as far apart as possible and facing one direction. If tables are used in the classrooms, students will be separated as much as possible.
- Ventilation and airflow have been checked and where possible increased throughout the building.
- All groups/organizations that wish to use the building where religious education and faith formation programs are held, need to follow all health and safety procedures.
- Parishes utilizing an operating school building need to do the following:
  - Be familiar with the Diocesan *School Reopening Plan* and work with pastors and principals to ensure compliance with all applicable regulations.
  - Maintain clear and timely communications about procedural and health policy updates.
  - Retain the classroom seating arrangement deemed appropriate by the school administration.
  - Coordinate cleaning and sanitation expectations and efforts with the school.

### **B. Cleaning and Sanitation**

- Disinfecting spray and wipes will be available and used in all areas of the building.
- Touchpoints throughout the building will be regularly sanitized, including restrooms.
- Program spaces and classrooms will be cleaned regularly before each use.

### **C. Physical Distancing**

- To ensure physical distancing in corridors, bathrooms, stairways, and office space, COVID-19 safety signage and traffic plans will be posted throughout the building.
- Traffic *patterns* will be different and changes will be made to the building.
- When possible, students, staff, and visitors will be required to enter the program building from one entrance and exit through another.
- Signs will be posted throughout the building directing the flow of foot traffic entering and leaving the program building.
- If possible, Plexiglas will be installed in offices where staff and the public interact as a protective barrier.

### 3. SNACKS & REFRESHMENTS

- Despite the communal element food brings to our programs, it also exposes the community to a source of contamination. Per the Bishop's *Letter to the Priests*, dated June 29, 2020, the "sharing of food and drinks" is "strictly forbidden."

### 4. LARGE GATHERINGS

- Many of our programs gather in large groups and for family sessions. These groups will follow all [Phase IV](#) and safety protocols relating to COVID-19. These include, but are not limited to, the use of face masks, recommended social distancing, sanitization and cleaning procedures, and maximum capacity regulations (50 or fewer for inside gatherings and 100 or fewer for outside).

#### Summary

Our goal is to assist you in providing your parishioners with the best possible religious education and faith formation program in a safe environment. Every parish's program, building, needs, and resources are different. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, and careful planning is required at the parish level to develop a strategy that best serves your parish. We understand that you may have many questions as you prepare to reopen your program. Be assured that our office is here to accompany you as you proceed, and it is our joy to assist you. We will continue to update these guidelines as necessary. We will also keep you abreast of any changes. The most current version of this document can be found on the [Religious Education & Faith Formation Reopening Page](https://www.ceorockford.org/religious-education-and-faith-formation-reopening/) <https://www.ceorockford.org/religious-education-and-faith-formation-reopening/>. Additional resources are also available on the [Online Catechist Resource Page](#).

If you have any questions, please contact your local Regional Director of Religious Education or the Religious Education Office.

The Religious Education Office  
Rockford Diocese July 9, 2020

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**CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ROCKFORD PASTOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

**Religious Education & Faith Formation Reopening Plan**

**June 2020**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, in my capacity as Pastor of \_\_\_\_\_,  
(Pastor's Name) (Name of Parish)

acknowledge that I have received the Catholic Diocese of Rockford, Religious Education & Faith Formation Reopening Plan, and agree that I have read and will abide by and implement the provisions of this plan.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Pastor's Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Pastor's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Entity City

[Click here to sign and submit the \*\*Pastor Acknowledgement\*\* form online:](https://www.ceorockford.org/diocese-of-rockford-religious-education-faith-formation-reopening-plan-pastoral-acknowledgement/)

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