



Archdiocese of Winnipeg

Office of the Archbishop

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MEMORANDUM

To: All Parishes

From: Archbishop Richard Gagnon + R. S.

Date: September 10, 2020

Re.: The Opening of the Catechism Year: Some considerations

September traditionally marks the beginning of the school year. This year the COVID-19 pandemic means that our young people are returning to school under unusual circumstances including the use of masks, social distancing procedures, cohorts and altered schedules. We wish all of our young people well during the school year ahead. In addition, we think of the teachers, administrators and support staff who are navigating new protocols to ensure the safety of our school communities.

In most of our parishes the beginning of the school year marks the return to catechetical programs. Our catechetical programs include regular sessions along with special sacramental preparation for Reconciliation, First Eucharist and Confirmation. Parish catechism programs rely on the cooperation of pastors/administrators, catechists, parish leadership, parents and indeed all parishioners. It is obvious that this year's catechism program will be like none other than we have known. **That being said, all parishes should provide plans for catechesis regardless of the size of the catechism class.** Many of the same protocols used by schools will need to be replicated in our catechism classes to ensure the safety of the young people and their catechists. In this extraordinary time, we need to find creative ways to approach our catechetical year. These ways will vary according to the resources available in each parish. But certain plans will be common to all parishes. With this in mind I would like to outline some best practices for the year ahead. These have been prepared with the cooperation of the offices of Catechetics and Manitoba Catholic Schools. They take into account policies which comply with the Government of Manitoba's COVID-19 response and our *Safe Environments Program*.

Catechetical Programs in the Parish

During this time of the pandemic it seems that there will be four major ways of providing catechesis at the parish level:

1. **Remote Instruction & Distance Learning:** some parishes may elect to use Videoconferencing to reach out to children and their families. This will involve catechists, using the recommended catechetical programs of the Archdiocese, to help pass on the faith;

2. **Home-based catechesis:** as our Synod reminded us the *domestic church* is where faith is lived and passed on to the next generation. Parents who wish to provide catechesis at home should make this known to their pastors and faith formation coordinators so that they can receive the necessary support and resources
3. **Blended learning catechesis:** some parishes may opt to have a blended catechesis this year. This could mean offering and delivering instruction via electronic and online media, along with some face-to-face teaching in a parish setting;
4. **In person catechesis:** this has been the traditional way of catechizing in most of our parishes. If parishes chose to continue with this method, they will need to follow all of the health regulations for the province of Manitoba. These regulations are the same as those which apply to Manitoba schools (they are outlined in the next section).

In Person Parish Catechetical Programs including where Catholic Schools are available

In person programs are required to follow all the health regulations of the Province of Manitoba including, maintaining the two (2) metre distancing and the **COVID – 19 – K-12 School Settings Practice Guidance and Protocols** (Last updated August 24, 2020)
<https://manitoba.ca/covid19/restoring/rss-practice-guidance.html>
https://manitoba.ca/asset_library/en/covid/k-12-reopeningplan-guidance.pdf

These guidelines and protocols contain many items for a parish to consider when operating an in-person program. Masks are required for all catechists and participants (Grade 4 and up). Screening (the COVID – 19 questionnaire) should take place before each class and proper cleaning and disinfecting should take place in all facilities before and after use.

At this time, because the need for cohorts and sanitizing practices makes it very difficult, parochial school classrooms cannot be used for parish catechetical programs.

Rooms such as school gyms, multipurpose rooms, and parish halls may be used by several groups if proper procedures are in place to ensure social distancing, along with cleaning and disinfecting between uses. To facilitate numbers, parishes may choose to hold catechism on more than one day during the week.

This is clearly a very unusual time for all of us. The cooperation and understanding of pastors/administrators, parish catechists, parents and all parishioners will ensure that our young people are kept as safe as possible during this catechetical year. If you require any clarification of these considerations, please contact either the Director of Catechetics or the Superintendent of Catholic Schools.